Perspective on School Development in the Barents Region of Northern Europe

Lisbeth Lindström[1] & Kjell Johansson[2]

Abstract

This article is about school development, based on empirical data taken from Sweden's northernmost county, Norrbotten, situated in the Barents region of northern Europe. The survey includes all of the county's 13 municipalities. The aim of this article is to illustrate school leaders' views of school development in the organisation and municipality where they work. We chose a quantitative study as the method for obtaining answers to our questions. A questionnaire relating to leadership and school development was sent to 170 addressees. The statements in the questionnaire were put to respondents on the basis of previous research results that showed the importance of collective learning, leadership and the organisation of educational activities. The results from the survey show overwhelmingly positive answers from the respondents; they usually agree completely or partially with the statements. The result shows, for example, that there is a developed vision, there is consensus within the organisation, lessons learned in activities are documented, and teachers/educationists are encouraged to talk to each other about the structure of their teaching. The result is a picture of awareness on the part of the respondents of the importance of school leadership for children and young people's development into citizens. The mainly positive answers that the respondents have submitted, however, mean that there is a gap between what is actually implemented in activities and the respondents' own views. In order to verify the results, the study needs to be continued in more detail through interviews with a number of the respondents and take into account teachers' opinions regarding school development and leadership.

Introduction

This article is about school development, based on empirical data taken from Sweden's northernmost county, Norrbotten, situated in the Barents region of northern Europe. The survey includes all of the county's 13 municipalities.

The school is one the most important institutions in society. It should contribute to the next generation being able to learn to manage and develop our society in the best possible way. The core of the Swedish school is the view of learning and development as a process that takes place between people in dialogue through reflection and discussion. This view of human beings and knowledge is also described in the governing documents of the school. This applies to the remit of the educational system, the goals for children's, young people's and adults' learning and the expected organisation of work at school and pre-school.

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[1] Dr in Education/Social Sciences, Department of Culture, Communication and Learning, Luleå University of Technology, SE-971 87 Luleå, Sweden. E-mail: Lisbeth.Lindstrom@ltu.se
[2] Lecturer in Education, Department of Culture, Communication and Learning, Luleå University of Technology, SE-971 87 Luleå, Sweden. E-mail: Kjell.Johansson@ltu.se

The Swedish school has undergone a series of changes since the end of the 1980s. The focus of the reform was municipalisation, i.e. the responsibility for schools was transferred to municipalities. Other distinctive features are increased freedom of choice, management by objectives and the freedom to establish independent schools. Management by objectives had its impact in the beginning of the 1990s and resulted in a shift in the educational system away from a rule-based system for resource-allocation to a system governed by objectives and results.

Independent schools, with other authorities than the municipality, were to be a complement to municipal schools. The government hoped that the reform would encourage greater cost-effectiveness when schools were allowed to have their own profiles and implement new, more efficient working methods. One of the guiding principles was freedom of choice, through which pupils would make choices on a market and less attractive players were expected to be forced out, which in turn was expected to promote quality in the Swedish school system. In order to survive on the market, schools would have to offer a range of subjects which could attract prospective pupils, and market orientation in schools became a fact.

In 2010 and the following years, work for change in the Swedish education system continued and can be described as the most far-reaching changes in Swedish schools for decades. These reforms that the Swedish school system have undergone in the last few decades can be traced back to neo-liberal tendencies (Scherp, 2013). On 1 July 2011 a new school law came into force: the Education Act (2010:800).

A number of new curricula were adopted: the curriculum for pre-school education, (Lpfö98) revised (2010), the Swedish National Agency for Education (2010), the Curriculum for compulsory school, preschool classes and after-school recreation centres, (LP11), the Swedish National Agency for Education (2011a) and the Curriculum, examination goals and shared subjects for upper secondary schools (Gy11), the Swedish National Agency for Education (2011b). A new school ordinance was also adopted, Swedish statutes (SFS 2011:185) and a new grade scheme was introduced for compulsory school, Swedish National Agency for Education Statutes (SKOLFS 2011:157) and for upper secondary school, Swedish National Agency for Education Statutes (SKOLFS 2011:145). At the same time as these reforms, it was also decided that it would be obligatory for newly recruited school leaders to undergo the so-called headmasters programme (Swedish statute book, SFS 2009:1 521). This means that municipalities, county councils and heads of independent schools must ensure that all headmasters employed after mid-March 2010 participate in the headmaster programme or equivalent training.

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate, a Swedish administrative authority, was set up in 2008 under the Ministry of Education. The Schools Inspectorate is a supervisory authority for the whole range of schools, from preschool to adult education. The Schools Inspectorate works with different types of inspections, such as regular supervision, quality inspections, targeted supervision and establishment control. The regular supervision and targeted supervision are aimed at ensuring that schools/activities work in accordance with laws and regulations. Inspections are made to help development by highlighting important areas in need of improvement. The school's role as an agent of change can hardly be underestimated. School can be seen either as a function of society or as an instrument to change society (Richardson, 2010). Granström and Ekholm (2011) believe that inspections have a controlling effect on schools' activities. Criticism has been raised on whether school inspections contribute to school development or not. Sandahl and Bringle (2006) believe that follow-up inspections by the School Inspectorate can operate as self-disciplinary since schools and teachers adapt their work to what will be reviewed. Ekholm and Lindvall (2008) claim that the work of the School Inspectorate can be considered as counter-productive, and that the School Inspectorate has been ineffectual in relation to the results trend. School development can be initiated by school politicians, school managers, headmasters or authorities.

School development can also be initiated by teachers, pupils or parents. Individual schools can also encourage their own development through collegial cooperation within their own organisation.

Development may also take place through cooperation with researchers who follow and study activities, often called action research. There are a variety of definitions of the concept of school development. Thornberg and Thelin (2011) believe that to be able to discuss school development, it should be firmly anchored in the school and it should also have a bearing on all of the school's activities and everyday work. By this, they feel that school development should not be limited to a single aspect of the school's daily work. School development is both about overall national efforts and local work at individual schools to bring about changes which result in more pupils achieving the national objectives (Swedish Agency for School Improvement, 2008).

Thelin (2013) argues that the concept of school development may have different meanings, depending on what prepositions are linked to the concept. With this approach it is possible to talk about development in the school and mean something else than if we are talking about development of the school. She believes that school development is a complex field of knowledge which can accommodate several different types of issues about what employees do at different levels in schools and preschools. Berg (2003) and Scherp (2003) discuss school development in a sense that by extension can be seen as a problem-solving process. The word problem referred to here is not synonymous with difficulty or something that is perceived as a concern, but more like an area which there is reason to examine more closely. The Swedish National Agency for School Improvement (2008) draws parallels to medical science, which uses diseases as a source of knowledge for development, and say that such a perspective focus studies on less successful schools in such a way as to inspire school development.

Scherp (2013) states that school development is not just a question of creating new lessons about learning and teaching or realising already learned lessons in everyday situations at school. He believes that school development can also act to eliminate barriers in the work organisation to realise the lessons that we have learned in order to help young people's development and learning. In a similar way, Larsson and Löwstedt (2010) claim that school development requires the capacity for organisational learning through collective learning processes.

Furthermore, they believe that school development assumes developed organisational concepts and that one prerequisite is that teachers' work is made visible and that the work is carried out in teams.

In this article, attention is directed mainly at school leaders' view of the work that takes place in the school as an organisation and thus directly and indirectly affects pupils' conditions and opportunities for learning and developing. In our final discussion we broaden our perspective and put our study into a societal context. We will take Habermas' (1984) theory of society as an aid. In concrete terms, our purpose with this article is to illustrate school leaders' conception of school development in the activities and the municipality where they are working.

Outline

Research on school development is presented under the heading School development. Then follows a presentation of the Swedish school system's instruments of control, followed by a chapter on earlier general research in the area of school development. The article's point of departure is presented under the heading The article's theoretical framework. Then follows a methodological section. Results are presented under the heading Results, followed by the chapter Discussion which ends with a brief conclusion.

School Development

Government control of the school is carried out through ideological positions, economic priorities, laws, ordinances and regulations, and through checks and inspections.

School development is partly about creating new knowledge regarding teaching and pupils' learning. School development may also be about creating a new organisation to implement lessons learned about how different schools can work with young people's learning and development (Larsson & Löwstedt, 2010).

A number of research traditions can be discerned within the area of school development. Scherp (2013) talks about research that highlights effective or successful schools, school development research and research on school improvement (See also Thelin, 2013; Hattie, 2009).

According to researchers, school development requires the ability to develop and support collective learning processes within the organisation, but also conceptions of the school (Hansson, 2013; Hattie, 2009).

This article takes school development research in general as its starting point. The article is based empirically on an attitude survey carried out in northern Sweden. Our starting point is school leaders' views on school development and we later put the survey into a societal perspective.

According to the Swedish Education Act, all school activities must be based on scientific grounds and proven experience (Education Act, 2010:800). In Scherp (2013) this is interpreted as meaning that educators and school leaders themselves should collaborate in the systematic creation of knowledge related to learning, education and development.

The School's Governing Instruments

As previously mentioned, the new Education Act prescribes that school activities shall be based on scientific grounds and proven experience (Chapter 1, Section 5) and that systematic quality work should be carried out within school activities. This means an increased demand on staff in schools being aware of the scientific creation of knowledge and relating this to what they do in their daily activities in the school. Employees in an organisation will thus collaborate in systematic knowledge creation about learning and teaching where proven experience shows that something has been successfully tested over a sufficient time period (Blossing, 2011).

School leaders' attitudes and actions are considered in general to constitute one of the key factors in successful work with school development, both in the classroom and at the level of the school (Berg, 2011b; Höög Johansson, 2011; Hansson, 2013). The Curriculum for preschool education, (Lpfö98), the Curriculum for compulsory school, preschool class and after-school recreation centre, (LP11), and the Curriculum, examination goals and shared subjects for upper secondary schools (Gy11) clearly state the responsibilities of headmasters and heads of preschool. Reference is made in the text to the Education Act. "As an educational leader and manager for teachers and other staff in the school, headmasters have overall responsibility for activities as a whole being directed toward the national targets.

The headmaster is responsible for ensuring that the school's results are followed up and evaluated in relation to the national targets and knowledge requirements" (LP11, p. 18; Gy11, p. 15). The preschool curriculum formulates the responsibility of the head in the following way: "As an educational leader and manager of preschool teachers, child minders and other staff in preschool education, the head of a preschool has overall responsibility for ensuring that activities are carried out in accordance with the objectives in the curriculum and the remit in its entirety." (Lpfö98, p. 16).

Earlier Research

On the basis of quality reviews carried out, the Agency for School Development (2008) stated that critical success factors identified for school development included a clear focus on objectives and results, participation and influence, and a long-term perspective and perseverance.

The Agency also believes school development includes overall national efforts as well as local work at individual schools to bring about changes that lead to more pupils achieving the national objectives.

The best prerequisites for school development according to the Agency are when the need and the interest in change comes from within the organisation.

In a comprehensive study in conjunction with meetings with educationists and school leaders presented in Scherp and Scherp (2007), three high-priority lessons emerged on how best to help children/young people's learning and development based on the school's remit. These lessons were: meet children/young people where they are, build up a trusting relationship and provide feedback on everyday work (Scherp, 2013; Scherp & Scherp, 2007).

The Swedish School Inspectorate also points out a number of important areas for which headmasters and school managers should take the main responsibility and develop in order to achieve success in school. These include headmasters' responsibility for the quality of education, gathering knowledge about teachers' tuition and monitoring results. The headmaster should also show confidence in the teacher, be involved in a dialogue with teachers about teaching and educational content and quality, and provide clear objectives and common visions.

The Schools Inspectorate also sees as a crucial factor for success that the headmaster is active and leads educational discussions that result in consensus among the staff (Schools Inspectorate, 2012). A headmaster, according to Lundahl (2011), needs to be a specialist in balancing the assessment of learning and for learning.

In a quality review of a random selection of compulsory schools, the Schools Inspectorate identified three areas that required development. These areas for improvement coincide with the Schools Inspectorate's previously identified success factors for school improvement. Firstly, the headmaster's educational leadership needs to be linked to practice and teaching resources need to be reinforced. Secondly, roles, responsibilities, structures and processes need to be clarified; thirdly, systematic quality measures need to be strengthened through monitoring and analysing pupils' knowledge acquisition (Schools Inspectorate, 2012a; Svedberg, 2011).

The real importance of school leaders for the development of each individual school has been demonstrated by many researchers (Ekholm, Blossing, Kåräng, Lindvall & Scherp, 2000; Kruse & Seashore Louise, 2009; Scherp & Scherp, 2007; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2009; Swedish National Agency for School Development, 2008; Ekholm & Scherp, 2014; Robinson, 2007; Scherp, 2011a). As a common feature, research shows that a school leader's working day is often fragmented and characterised by many short meetings and constant interruptions (Thomson, 2009), which many school leaders find are obstacles to pursuing school improvement (Hultman, 2012). Schools that succeeded in developing their educational activities to a higher degree are judged to have school leaders who are good at transforming social problems that initially appear impossible to change into educational challenges (Scherp, 2005). The documentation of lessons learned in educational activities is also considered to be important. The new Education Act demands that every school must implement systematic quality measures and that these must be documented (Ekholm & Scherp, 2014). School leaders themselves, however, believe that there are major shortcomings in documentation routines in general and that people are particularly bad at documenting schools' shared lessons learned (Scherp & Scherp, 2007).

There is a large consensus within the scientific community concerning the importance of teachers and school leaders learning on the basis of their own everyday activities (Schools Inspectorate, 2012; Schools Inspectorate, 2010).

Concepts such as the learning organisation, professional learning and learning networks have become increasingly commonplace in the last 20 years of school improvement.

Lessons learned in which the individual has been creatively involved are implemented to a higher degree than knowledge that is acquired by listening to others' conclusions, in the opinion of Ekholm and Scherp (2014).

Timperley (2013) believes, in a similar way, that it is not enough to focus on traditional professional development of employees for learning in an organisation to increase and thus for attitudes to change. He claims that it is necessary to have a greater scope for learning and interaction in everyday work. Measures based on tips and solutions or expertise less often result in lasting improvements to pupils' results. The conclusion drawn is that school leaders need to lead school development work by creating good conditions for teachers' learning in everyday life (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung (2007).

Hattie (2009) states that what the teacher knows, can do and does are the strongest factors that influence learning. In practical terms, this means that teachers express their teaching strategies in words and take into account theories of learning, the school's physical environment and, at the same time, find ways of engaging and motivating pupils. Hattie (2009) believes that school leaders and teachers need to create schools, staff rooms and classroom environments where mistakes are welcomed as an opportunity for learning.

Scherp, Scherp and Thelin (2013) found in a survey that approximately 80% of teachers said that the organisation was a barrier for them in realising their most important knowledge acquired about teaching and learning. Scherp (2013) distinguishes between the organisation of work and the organisation of development, where the latter is an approach in which disruptions and problems are viewed as a driving force in quality assurance work at the school. In schools where an organisation of development dominates, employees at the school are relied on to make their own wise assessments of how to handle various problematic situations. The two forms of organisation may be prerequisites for each other and an interaction between the two organisational forms may mean that the work organisation takes advantage of lessons learned in the organisation of development and creates good organisational conditions which make it possible for these lessons to be implemented into everyday life (Scherp, 2011; Scherp, 2013).

Timperley et al (2007) and also Robinson (2007) argue that schools that became better at helping pupils' learning and development had school leaders who had created organisational conditions for the teachers' learning processes by developing a learning culture at the school.

Working with feedback is an active process with the aim of changing the relationship between actual results and expected results. In a number of international meta studies, the conclusions are that feedback is generally positive for learning and for feedback to operate most effectively for learning it needs to be directed at the task to be performed and must contain information on how the task can be carried out more effectively. Feedback is most effective when it provides information about how an objective can be attained (Lundahl 2011a; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Lundahl, Roman & Riis, 2010). Feedback can be seen as a part of pupils' development of knowledge. Traditionally, formative assessment has been considered as an assessment of processes, while summative assessment evaluates products and final results (Lundahl, 2014).

The Article's Theoretical Framework

Larsson and Löwstedt (2010) found that schools which appear to be successful in their development work have a leader who integrates educational and administrative leadership (Hansson, 2013). They believe that there is an explanation to why planned initiatives for school improvement do not achieve expected results. Firstly, they believe that schools are loosely composed organisations, which means that staff involved may outwardly appear to affirm changes without these having the intended impact on everyday work. Secondly, Larsson and Löwstedt (2010) claim that schools are arenas for ongoing organisation.

They interpret this as meaning that local ideas and traditions guide how initiatives for change are interpreted and perceived by staff members in school. Finally, they believe that teachers, through their interpretations either individually or collectively, shape the organisation of the school.

Larsson and Löwstedt (2010) talk about six prerequisites for school improvement. These conditions are: capacity for organisational learning, developed organisational conceptions, teachers' work is highlighted, work teams are teacher teams, collective discipline and that leadership is organisational. These six prerequisites for school development are an integral part of our theoretical framework.

Research on school development in Sweden has been dominated by a small group of Swedish researchers. In this article we will proceed from some of these researchers' theoretical models. They are Granström (2003 ; 2000), Grosin (2003). Blossing (2003; 2011), Berg (2003; 2011; 2011b) and Scherp (2003; 2005; 2013). Granström (2003) starts with the assumption that people create roles in relation to each other in all situations where they meet. School development is described as a process where roles and work relationships change. All members of the organisation have a role; the role represents a contribution to the organisation's activities. Powers and obligations follow from the role, which manifest themselves in action. School development for Grosin (2004) involves changes to the educational and social climate towards prioritising learning objectives, establishing clear social rules, giving priority to pupil-focused working methods and exercising active educational leadership. Grosin (2004) believes that the headmaster's actions are of crucial importance for the development of a good educational and social climate. This means a clear, democratic, powerful leadership focused on the school's learning objectives to achieve success. Dialogue is key, as well as the headmaster remaining constant to the formulated vision. Furthermore he argues that the headmaster must have high expectations of pupils' results and encourage and reward good work by teachers. Through creating clear rules to be consistently followed, order will be created in the school. In Blossing's (2003) research, school development is about school improvement. School development, according to Blossing (2003), means increased cooperation in educational activities. Planning, implementation, discussions about conditions, methodology and didactics should be shared concerns with the aim of all pupils being given equal opportunities. Blossing (2003) uses the concept of culture to describe school reality. He believes that a school's culture is affected by and in turn affects many dimensions of its activities. In order to create a change in school culture, certain roles should be added within the organisation. Blossing says that different abilities are needed in different phases of school development.

Scherp (2003) starts from the problems that arise in everyday work in school and believes that school development involves problem-solving. His point of departure is not in the everyday sense, but is linked to the school's governing instruments. "Understanding of the task is crucial both for how we understand and define the problem and for the solutions that we choose to apply" (Scherp, 2003, s 36).

In his studies, Scherp (2003) examined what affects teachers' ways of shaping their practical work, and came to the conclusion that it is experience from their teaching that governs the design of professional practice. He also believes that creating knowledge is about discovering patterns, giving them meaning and trying to explain why they look the way they do. That is also the way teachers' learning works, he says. Scherp (2003) talks about work oriented around pupils' understanding, where teachers create variation in their work methods and evaluate, reflect and search for patterns in their experience. The governing of the school should be designed so that experience-learning is stimulated, he says. This means, according to Scherp, that we need to create an organisation with a readiness for and an ability to carry out conscious and systematic learning as the basis for handling everyday problems. The knowledge created is then documented in a collective memory. Scherp (1998) believes that school leaders should create an internal necessity of change among the staff by helping them to identify patterns and deviations of current ideas.

Necessary changes can be achieved by the school leader drawing attention to changes in society which lead to the school being in a new contextual situation.

In his theory of society, Habermas (1984; 1995) talks about different patterns of behaviour when people interact. He designates these as communicative and goal-rational learning respectively.

When applied to school development and pupils' learning processes, communicative behaviour is characterised by a dialogue in which people try to understand each other's perception of a phenomenon. It can be said to relate to a common creation of knowledge in which those concerned are creators, in this case the teacher and pupil. Goal-rational behaviour, on the other hand, is characterised by one person or more defining what perception will be valid, and what they want to achieve. The curriculum, subject plans and course plans determine what students should achieve in Swedish schools. These are the governing documents that are decided by the Swedish parliament and government. Habermas argues that the modern form of society has come to be dominated by goal-rational behaviour to the detriment of communicative behaviour.

Habermas (1984; 1996) talks about the concepts of systems and life-worlds and their rationalities, i.e. the motive or driving force for behaviour that may exist, such as to achieve a greater efficiency or understanding. Habermas states that the system world tends to colonialise the life-world, which is linked to other principles such as establishing consensus through values, norms and linguistic activities. Furthermore, he believes that the life-world and communicative behaviour - dialogue - need to be strengthened and form the basis for the system world and goal-rational behaviour (Habermas, 1984; 1996; Andersen, 2007). In this article the Schools Inspectorate and the governing instruments of the school such as the Education Act and curricula are considered as being part of the system world, while school leaders, teachers and pupils are seen as a part of the life-world.

Method

In this chapter we describe our design of investigation and analytical method.

We have chosen a quantitative study to obtain answers to the purpose of our study. Our approach is deductive and we start from our theoretical approach as the basis for the empirical study (Bryman, 2011). The investigation was carried out in Sweden's northernmost county, Norrbotten. The reason for this was that there are few - if any - investigations that look into school development in this part of the country. All of the county's 13 municipalities are included in the investigation. The questionnaire, together with a covering letter, was sent out to 170 addressees. They were sent to all headmasters/preschool heads/development leaders within the selection group. On two occasions, a reminder was sent out to addressees to answer the survey.

The survey consists of six parts: refer to the appendix. The first part covers general questions such as gender, education and training, the number of years in the organisation, the number of years as a manager/leader, which municipality the respondent works in and finally a question about what form the activities take. The questionnaire is organised into six sub-areas, each with a number of statements to respond to. These areas are: 2. Your area of responsibility, 3. Your leadership, 4. School development within your area, 5. Grading, and 6. Educational assessment. A five-point Likert scale is used where statements are graded from 1 "Do not agree at all" to 5 "Completely agree".

The results are presented in a histogram where the number of respondents is shown by n and where the relative frequency of respondents, the mean and the standard deviation are presented.

The histogram has the following structure:
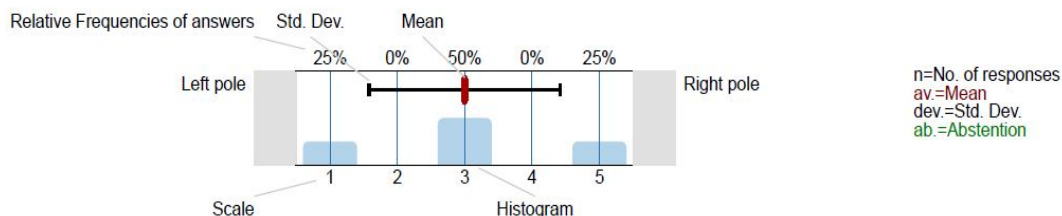
Figure 1: Structure of the Histogram

The above figure shows the structure of the histograms that are reported under the heading Results. Results from the survey are from parts 1-4, i.e. the general part, and questions about respondent's areas of responsibility, leadership and questions about school development activities carried out in the area.

Results

In this section we present the results of the survey. Some general facts about the respondents are initially presented.

The questionnaire was sent to 180 addressees. Of 116 respondents, 75% were women and 25% were men. However, it is important to point out that the questionnaire was sent to a majority of women, because these had been identified as holding jobs as headmaster/preschool head/activity developer to a greater extent than men.

One of the questions that we initially asked in the survey was what education respondents had. From the responses it was found that 29.7% of the respondents were preschool teachers, 39.8% compulsory school teachers, 19.5% upper secondary school teachers and 22% of the respondents had other education. Among these responses there was a large variation and breadth; among other areas were special educationists, graduate social workers, system scientists, recreation instructors, headmasters and other related qualifications.

We also asked the question how long respondents had worked within their area of qualification.

The results show that the majority, 56.6%, had been active for more than 25 years, and over 35% of respondents had been employed in their area for 10-25 years.

We asked how long respondents had worked as manager/leader.

The results show that many of the respondents had very long experience of leadership: 62.0%, had worked up to10 years as a manager/leader, 16.4 % between 11 to 15 years and 11.2 % more than 26 years as a manager/leader.

We were also interested in studying the response distribution between the municipalities in the selection group, i.e. Norrbotten county. The survey shows that responses were obtained from all 13 municipalities in the county. However, we have not calculated the percentage response rate for each municipality because it was outside the aim of the study.

To be able to put the study into a more holistic context, we were interested in knowing in which form activities were run. The survey shows that in 92.1% of the cases the municipality was the principal and managed activities, while a much smaller part - approximately 8.0% - was run by other means.

On the basis of our theoretical framework, we now present a selection of the responses that we received in the survey.

The first part is about issues concerning the respondent's area of responsibility, and the following parts relate to the respondent's view of his/her own leadership and school development in progress in their area of competence. Under the heading "Other" in the questionnaire there was space for respondents to provide any other information that they considered to be important for school development in the local municipality. A number of respondents used this option and a selection of their comments are presented with the results.

Activities within the area of Responsibility
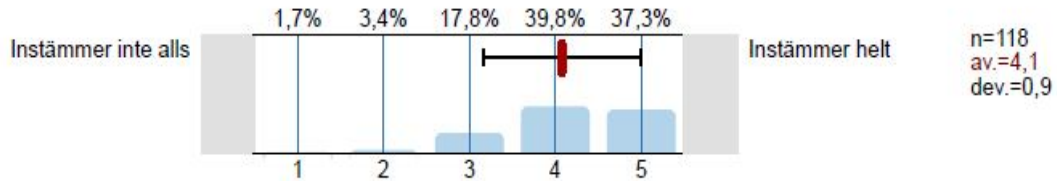
Figure 1: In my area of Responsibility, we have a vision that I am Satisfied with

Comment: The figure shows that the vast majority of respondents agree completely or partially with the statement that they have a vision they are satisfied with.
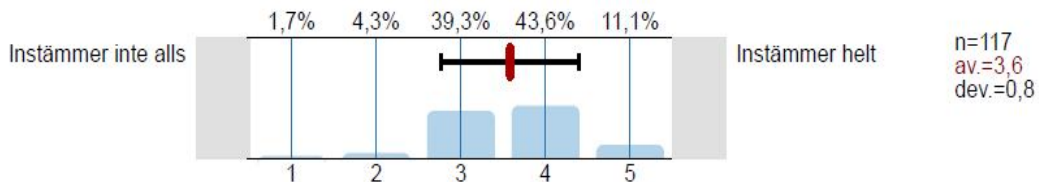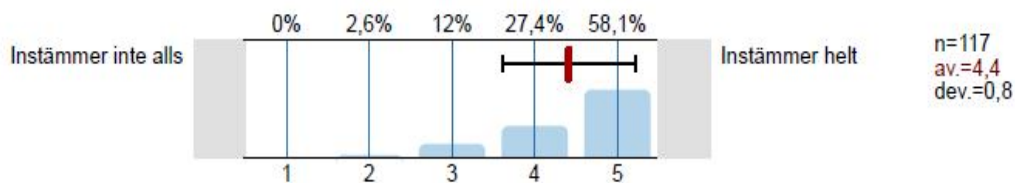

Figure 2: In my area of Responsibility there is Consensus on how we should Teach

Comment: The figure above shows that there are only a few (about 6%) of respondents who do not believe that there is a certain degree of consensus within their area of responsibility.
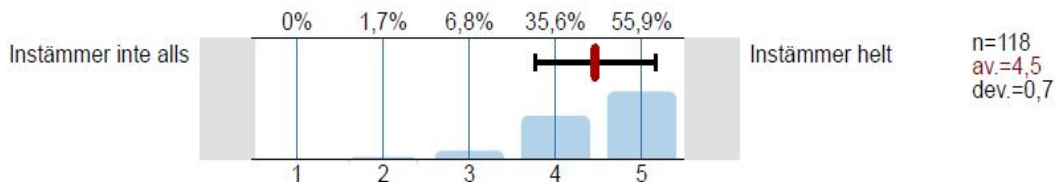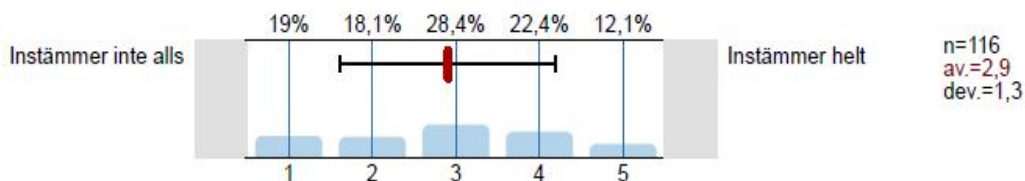

Figure 3: In my area of Responsibility Teachers/Educationists are Encouraged to Discuss their Teaching Approach with each other

Comment: The vast majority of respondents, 35.6% and 55.9%, agree completely or partially with the statement that teachers/educationists are encouraged to discuss their teaching approaches with each other.

Figure 4: In my area of Responsibility, Collective Learning is a Significant part of a Teacher's Remit

Comment: Of all respondents, 58.1% agree with the statement that collective learning is a significant part of a teacher's remit

Figure 5: In my area of Responsibility there are Summaries of peer Monitoring that are Available for all Teachers/Educationists
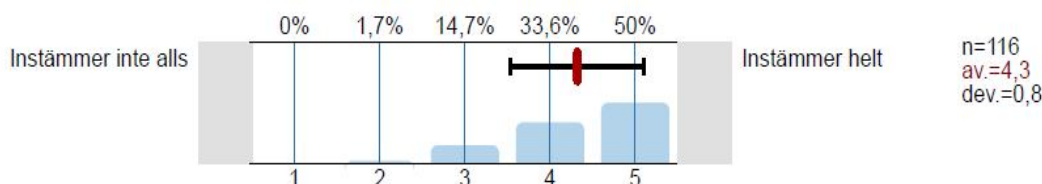
Comment: The figure shows that 19% of respondents think that there are no summaries of peer monitoring available for all teachers/educationists.

Leadership
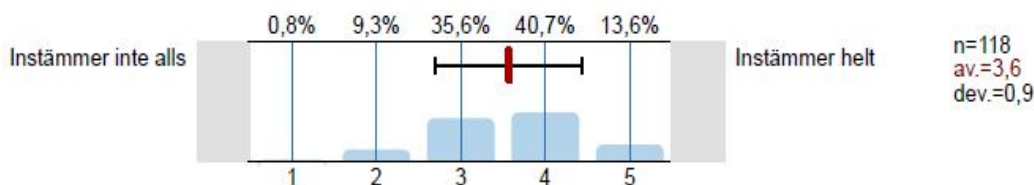
Figure 6: You Ensure that Teachers' Experience from day-to-day work is Retained and Documented

Comment: As many as 40.7% partly agree that they are responsible for teachers' experience from day-to-day work being retained and documented.

**Figure 7: You Often take up the School's Governing Instruments when you get the Opportunity**

Comment: The following figure shows that the vast majority, 33.6% and 50%, of the respondents agree completely or partially with the statement that they often take up the school's governing instruments when they get the opportunity.
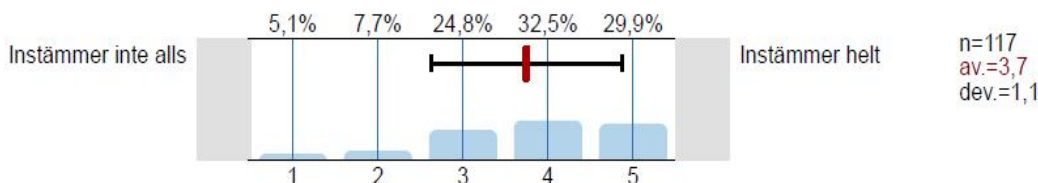
Figure 8: You Ensure that Local Work Plans are Drawn up to Achieve Consistency in Your Area of Work

Comment: 12.8 % of the respondents do not agree at all or only partially with the statement that local work plans are drawn up to achieve consistency in their area of work.

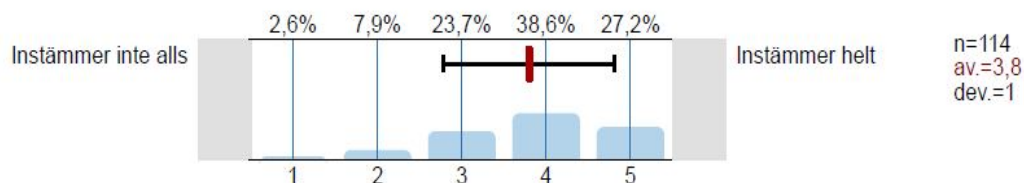**School Development within my area of Responsibility**
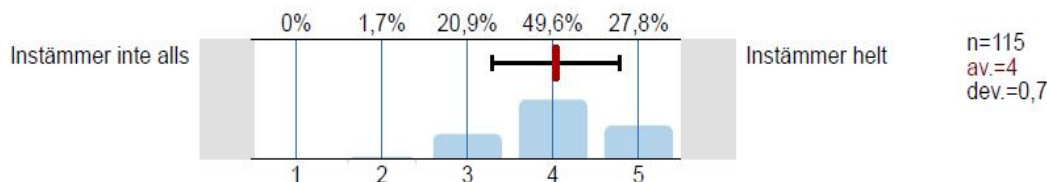
Figure 9: I think that school Development in my area of work will be best if I Encourage Teachers and teams to Further Develop the Teaching Methods that they Mainly Apply

Comment: The majority of respondents agree completely or partially with the statement.
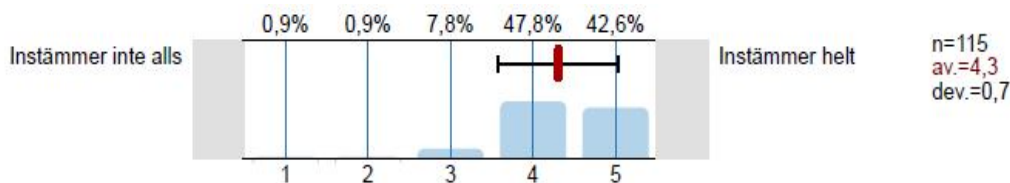
Figure 10: I believe that school Development in my area of work will be best if I put Forward Arguments in Educational Matters, even if they are of a Critically Questioning Nature

Comment: More than 90% of the respondents agree completely or partially with the statement.

Figure 11: I think School Development in my area will be best served if I make clear poor goal Achievement Regarding Activities and Assessments Carried out

Comment: Most respondents completely, 27.2%, or partially, 38.6%, agree with the statement that school development will be best served if poor achievement regarding activities and assessments carried out is made clear.

The Respondents' Written Comments

There follow below some examples of the information submitted by respondents under the heading "Other" in the questionnaire. We have chosen to quote six of these comments. The selection principle we used was that these comments contain a clear message.

One of the respondents expresses himself in the following manner with regard to the possibility of succeeding in school development.

In order to achieve school development I believe it is important that all schools strive to create a learning organization where their own experience results in documented performance indicators so that less desirable results can be minimised. This, I think, is best created on the basis of a local agreement between management and employees, the creation of consensus packaged in a functioning system. This should then be consolidated at management level so that the same systematic approach and learning can take place at an overall level (NN1).

Another of the respondents sees school development from an organisational perspective and states "School development is difficult when you change activities often" (NN2).

A couple of the respondents commented on their workload; one of them thought that "Headmaster's work includes a lot of very time-consuming tasks like administration, which interfere with working as an educational leader" (NN3). This respondent describes a similar situation: "I have too many units to supervise for the situation to be satisfactory. Carrying out development work often involves challenging, holding things together, clarifying tasks and, most important of all, giving feedback and following things up" (NN4).

One of the respondents mentions the importance of cooperation between different units within the area of activity in order to succeed with school development. "Cooperation and communication between units in order to strengthen each other and help each other to develop is a guiding principle within our area of activity" (NN5).

In one of the comments the respondent takes up the importance of working teams for school development. "Mostly, working teams take up their own shortcomings in achievement when they make their evaluations. My role as a leader in such cases is to strengthen the working team's possibilities for greater efficiency, which could be in terms of skills, materials, measures in the preschool environment, etc." (NN6).

In the next section we will discuss the results on the basis of Larsson and Löwstedt's (2010) six conditions for school development: the capacity for organisational learning, developed visions of the organisation, teachers' work made visible, working teams being teacher teams, collective discipline and leadership being organisational. These six prerequisites for school development are an integral part of our theoretical framework. We put the prerequisites presented by Larsson and Löwstedt (2010) together with the theoretical models presented by Granström (2003; 2000), Grosin (2003), Blossing (2003; 2011), Berg (2003; 2011b) and Scherp (2003; 2005; 2013). In the final discussion we put the article in a societal perspective, with a starting point from Habermas' theory of society (1984; 1995).

Discussion

The headmaster's or school leader's role has changed over a long period of time. We have moved away from regulation-driven schools with the government as principal to results-driven schools with municipalities or independent schools as principals/owners. Teachers/school leaders are now municipal or private officials. The headmaster's/school leader's responsibilities were expanded and clarified in the Education Act that entered into force in 2011.

The new Education Act prescribes that school activities must be based on scientific knowledge and proven experience (chapter 1, section 5) and that systematic quality work must be carried out within the organisation. Employees in such an organisation are thus involved in creating systematic knowledge about learning and teaching. The headmaster/school leader will lead this work, which as often as not includes interaction between individuals in different value systems. A headmaster/school leader must obey the law, be loyal to managers as well as their own colleagues, and show understanding in dialogue with young people and their parents/legal guardians.

In his theory of society, Habermas (1984; 1995) talks about different patterns of behaviour in the interaction between people. He talks about the concepts of system world and life world and believes that the system world tends to colonialise the life-world, which is linked to entirely different principles such as establishing consensus through values, norms and linguistic activities. The results of this study show that headmasters/school leaders put considerable merits on goal-rational behaviour, i.e. following the school's governing documents, while communicative behaviour in which employees can be involved tends to remain as a vision.

Figure 7 in the investigation also shows that the vast majority, 33.6% and 50%, of the respondents completely or partially agree with the statement that they often emphasise the school's governing documents when the opportunity arises, and more than 75% of the respondents also ensure that local work plans are drawn up to achieve uniformity in their working area. Most the respondents also agree completely or partially with the statement that school development is best served if poor achievement is pointed out regarding school activities and evaluations carried out. In one of the comments in the questionnaire, a respondent said that the school leader's role is to strengthen the work team's potential for better achievement (NN6). Goal-rational behaviour seems to be frequent, possibly even self-evident.

A critical issue with respect to the results is whether it is possible to realise the educational mission and at the same time comply with the school's governing system.

School development is about organising work in such a way that lessons learned can contribute in the best possible way to young people's learning and development. One of the respondents thought that engaging in school development was about challenging, holding all the threads together, clarifying the mission as well as giving feedback and monitoring (NN4). Larsson and Löwstedt (2010) found that schools which appear to be successful in their development work have a leader who integrates educational and administrative leadership (Hansson, 2013).

The school leader has an important task in leading school development work through creating good conditions for educationists to learn in their everyday lives. The headmaster/school leader's leadership is politically controlled by governmental directives, which means that they have a different role as leaders than in other organisations. The headmaster/school leader also has responsibility for staff, environment and financial issues. There is a built-in paradox here. Processes are emphasised in the headmaster/school leader's mission in which the teachers are active creators and in which internal processes and driving forces are highlighted. Swedish schools today are characterised by external demands on a balanced budget and a system of quality inspections. Headmasters/school leaders have a mission as educational leaders, but often feel that other tasks compete for time. Their main task is often handling and solving problems in everyday situations. An important part of the educational work of headmasters/school leaders is making visits to classrooms, which may have to be postponed for other priorities. This study, like previous studies such as Hultman (2012), shows that the working day is perceived as fragmented by headmasters/school leaders, which may jeopardise systematic educational leadership. Two of the respondents in this study also commented on the workload; one of them said that headmasters' work included a lot of very time-consuming tasks (NN3).

Our study shows that a large majority of the respondents, more than 75%, have a developed educational vision in their area of activity which they are satisfied with. One result which is in agreement with previous research is that a clear vision and overall concept in an organisation is important to obtain consistently high quality in activities.

Good educational achievements by pupils are linked to the staffs having a common understanding of the objectives, vision and values which apply at the school in question (Scherp, 2013; Thornberg & Thelin, 2011). How this vision is actually followed in practice, however, is not shown by this investigation.

The survey shows that headmasters/school leaders largely consider that there is a consensus on teaching issues. Most of the respondents also think that school development in their area of work benefits best if they encourage teachers and teams to further develop the teaching methods that they normally apply. Whether this could possibly come into conflict with other values, such as reflection and critical thinking in the organisation and opportunities to think in new ways and evolve, is not shown in this study.

Larsson and Löwstedt (2010) claim that school development assumes the capacity of organisational learning through collective learning processes. The lessons learned in an organisation are documented to some extent in a kind of collective memory, according to Scherp (2003).

Hattie (2009) and Timperley et al (2007) found that pupils' results are improved at schools where teachers reflect on and learn from their own daily activities. The results of this study show that a majority of the respondents believe experience is documented, that summaries of collective monitoring are made, and that collective learning is seen as important.

The results of the investigation can thus be said to indicate that learning takes place in organisation as a result of day-to-day work. The investigation suggests that headmasters/school leaders are aware of and realise the importance of collective learning. Through this process, teachers' individual learning is spread to shared learning in daily work which then leads to organisational learning. Whether this statement would have elicited a different response if it had been put to teachers is not addressed by this investigation, but the possibility cannot be ruled out. School culture is strong in Swedish schools; for example, Scherp and Scherp (2007) found in contrast to this study that school leaders believed that there were major shortcomings in the practice of documentation in general and that schools were particularly bad at documenting shared lessons learned.

That there is an awareness of the importance of work teams really working as teams and that teachers' work is made visible are clearly shown in the results of this study, in which the vast majority of respondents - 35.6% and 55.9% - agree completely or partially with the statement that within their area of responsibility teachers/teachers are encouraged to talk with each other about their teaching approach. Of all respondents, 58.1% agree with the statement that collective learning is a significant part of a teacher's remit. One of the respondents also said that cooperation and communication between units to strengthen and help each other in their development was a guiding principle (NN5).

Final Conclusion

Researchers in school development, such as Hattie (2009) and Timperly et. al (2007), are in agreement about the importance of teachers and school leaders learning lessons from their own learning in everyday life, i.e. that they are all creators in the process. School leaders who succeed in providing active support to teachers' learning and who are seen to be involved in teaching activities influence pupils' learning positively. People working in schools need to be up-dated on what research has to say about the area of school development. The questions in this survey were put to respondents on the basis of previous research results that showed the importance of collective learning, the organisation of educational activities and leadership. The overwhelmingly positive responses given by the respondents show an awareness of the importance of these factors. To ensure that there is no gap between theory and practice in school activities, the study needs to be continued in more depth by interviewing a number of the respondents, as well as taking teachers' views into account.

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