# Distributed Leadership in Local School Organisations

Working for School Improvement?

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Abstract

This thesis takes its point of departure from the recent increased interest in leadership, and especially distributed leadership. Educational research states that if schools are to meet future demands, leadership must rest on trust within the organisation and distributed leadership must be understood, in the frame of professional collaboration and social learning. However, distributed leadership has also been presented as a normative prescription and an officially sanctioned model for how to arrange school leadership in order to meet the increased demand for school leaders.

The aim of the thesis is to generate knowledge about the construction of distributed leadership in local schools within the Swedish context and thereby contribute to the wider discussion of leadership within the educational field.

The study draws on data from a qualitative case study of three schools conducted during the years 2011 and 2012, with follow-up in 2014. In the three schools observations of formal meetings and semi-structured interviews with school leaders and teachers were conducted and further analysed. The theoretical framework is based on institutional perspectives on organisations and distributed perspectives on leadership. Furthermore, capacity building in school organisations is used as a framework for identifying different areas of relevance for school improvement.

Paper I, *Distributing leadership to establish developing and learning school organisations in the Swedish context*, examines the influence of distributed leadership and the structural and cultural prerequisites when creating a developing and learning school organisation. Paper II, *Teacher leadership modes and practices in a Swedish context – A case study*, elaborates on the significance of how leadership is framed in the organisation and the contribution it makes to school improvement. Paper III, *Att skapa mening i lärares samarbete och gemensamma lärande. Tre skolors försök*, examines how principals' and teachers' sensemaking about improvement initiatives influence the outcome of these initiatives and the possibility of developing teacher collaboration and common learning in the schools. Paper IV, *School leaders as coupling agents – Mediating between external demands and internal values*, explores how school leaders in their role as coupling agents respond to pressure from the institutional environment and how this relates to the direction of improvement in the local schools.

The main findings of the thesis show that the organisation of distributed leadership at local school level is embedded in the institutional context and in the local history of each school. Of particular importance are locally embedded norms and values that set the conditions for which structures are made possible, for how leadership is understood and for how teachers and school leaders make

sense of and shape their roles in distributed leadership practices. The findings also show that the relation between distributed leadership and capacity building is based on the conditions at local level. This means that it is the conditions at local level that provide the basis for the quality of the distributed leadership. Looking at the construction of distributed leadership in the three schools in relation to the transformation of the Swedish educational system, it becomes clear that the construction of distributed leadership at local level is strongly connected to a democratic vision of leadership and trust in the competence of professionals. At local school level few connections between the ideas of distributed leadership and the neoliberal policy movements were detected.

Finally the findings show that formal school leaders have an important role in the construction of distributed leadership at local level if capacity building and school improvement are to take place. School leaders contribute to this by creating favourable structural conditions but most of all by influencing locally embedded norms and values so that a democratic and reflective understanding of leadership that implies 'power-with' rather than 'power-over' (Møller, 2002), as well as a high degree of openness to collaboration, shared sensemaking and trust between different actors can be created.

The most important responsibility of every educator is to provide the conditions under which people's learning curves go off the chart. Whether one is called a principal, a teacher, a professor, a foundation official, or a parent, our most vital work is promoting human learning … and above all our own learning (Barth, 1996, p. 56).

Till Jonathan & Jakob

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Paper I
Liljenberg, M. (2015). Distributing leadership to establish developing and learning school organisations in the Swedish context. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 43*(1), 152-170.

Paper II
Liljenberg, M. (resubmitted). Teacher leadership modes and practices in a Swedish context – A case study. Unpublished manuscript.

Paper III
Liljenberg, M. (2013). Att skapa mening i lärares samarbete och gemensamma lärande. Tre skolors försök. *Pedagogisk forskning i Sverige, 18*(3-4), 238-257.

Paper IV
Liljenberg, M. (forthcoming). School leaders as coupling agents – Mediating between external demands and internal values. *Education Inquiry.* Accepted for publication 2015-04-28.

Figures and tables

Förord

Önskan att lära mig mer, pröva nya saker och möta nya utmaningar har tagit mig vidare. Efter de första intensiva åren som ny lärare sökte jag nya influenser och började läsa pedagogik med inriktning mot utbildningsledarskap. Studierna gav mersmak och kort efter att jag var klar med min uppsats skrev jag till min handledare att jag funderade på att söka till forskarutbildningen. Rolf, du bjöd in mig att lyssna och lära och öppnade därmed den första dörren för mig. Tack för att du gav mig denna möjlighet och för det stöd som du gett mig under de år som följde. För forskarutbildning blev det!

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1

Introduction

This thesis about distributed leadership practices in local school organisations is written at a time when the focus on leadership and improvement in schools is intense. School leadership and school improvement are emphasised by researchers, practitioners and policy representatives as highly important if schools are to meet future demands and fulfil their mission of giving all students the opportunity to develop and reach their educational goals (Carlgren & Hörnqvist, 1999; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006; Lärarförbundet, 2010; OECD, 2013; Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008; Skolinspektionen, 2010). Leadership and in particular distributed leadership has become a mantra for successful organisations in general and school organisations in particular, strongly informed by scientific results in different fields. In this thesis I intend to contribute to the discussion by examining how distributed leadership is constructed and relates to capacity building and school improvement at local school level in the Swedish context.

The use of the term 'distributed leadership' is rather new within the Swedish setting. However, on the basis of the description of conditions for distributed leadership given by Harris (2014), I consider it important to stress that the ideas behind the term are not new in the Swedish context.

> Essentially, if formal leaders create the time, space and opportunity for colleagues to meet, plan and reflect, it is far more likely that distributed leadership will be viewed as genuine and will be sustainable. By offering the staff the opportunity to lead, by inviting their participation in decision making, and by providing the time for dialogues and discussion, greater distributed leadership will be created. (p. 42)

The Swedish school system has on the contrary a long history of framing leadership as distributed, based on democratic values in the local organisation (Moos, 2013). Participatory democratic thinking, social justice, equity, equal opportunities and inclusion in line with the cornerstones of the welfare state have been the guiding words of the Swedish school system since the 1960s. For schools to

live up to this, leadership has also been framed by democratic values. Democratic leadership has been the guiding principle for Swedish school leaders (Blossing, Imsen & Moos, 2014; Moos, 2013). Further, trust in teachers' work has been part of a long tradition and a collegial relationship between teachers and school leaders[1] (Berg, 2011; Ekholm, Blossing, Kåräng, Lindvall & Scherp, 2000). The SIA report (Prop 1975/76:39; SOU 1974:53), a report on the work environment in Swedish schools, stated that pedagogical problems could not be solved by central regulation and suggested decentralisation of responsibility to teachers and school leaders in local schools. According to the report, teachers and school leaders needed to have room for manoeuver in order to be able to take the local conditions into account. A climate conducive to local school improvement was to be nurtured and local school practice was to be improved through collaborative structures, shared responsibility and collaborative learning (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980; SOU 1974:53). This was to be done by organising the teachers in teams and by implementing forms of decision-making in which both teachers and principals participated in order to strengthen democracy and foster a democratic culture (Höög, Johansson & Olofsson, 2005). Additionally, there has been consistent progress towards collaborative working organisations in local schools and a local responsibility for improvement. Teacher teams can now be seen as an 'institutionalised practice' in Swedish schools and leadership has, in the Swedish school setting, come to be associated with a democratic leadership supporting a democratic and equitable school setting (Harris, 2012; Moos, Møller & Johansson, 2004).

However, due to the strong influences of neoliberalism, starting in the late 1980s, spreading through western societies, and intensifying in the 2000s (Ball, 2003), critics claim that the democratic ideology characterising the Swedish school system is on the retreat (Blossing et al., 2014). The intensified focus on leadership and improvement can within this context be understood as being closely connected to the wider trend of accountability and rationalisation.

In Sweden, the influences of neoliberalism have resulted in a transformation of a strongly centralised educational system into a decentralised system characterised by freedom of choice, deregulation, evaluation and management by objectives and results (Lundahl, 2002a, 2005). This transformation implies devolution of state governance to the local level, to municipalities, organisers of independent schools and schools, with increased expectations for school leaders and teachers to be accountable decision-makers and take responsibility for developing education in line with the goals formulated in the national curriculum but also for overarching issues that can be linked to the school as an organisation. As a result of this, teachers' responsibilities have changed, meaning that

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[1] Throughout this thesis, the terms 'school leader' and 'principal' are used interchangeably.

teachers are responsible for more than their own teaching and their own students (Lilja, 2014). Similarly, school leaders' responsibilities have changed from monitoring in the regulatory system to managing in the goal-oriented system. School leadership has also extended to include responsibility for the work environment and personnel issues, as well as responsibility for economy, marketing, monitoring the quality of the work and taking action accordingly (Nihlfors & Johansson, 2013). In addition the principal is responsible for practising pedagogical leadership and leading the pedagogical work in the school (SFS 2010:800).

Schools and school leaders have always been held responsible for their practices. It is nevertheless clear that with the influences of neoliberalism there has been a change from more of an ethical and professional accountability based on trust to a dominance of managerial accountability characterised by a focus on planning, control, standards and top-down management (Moos, Skedsmo, Höög, Olofsson & Johnson, 2011; Møller, 2009a). On the surface the handing over of the process to the school and the teachers themselves can be seen as beneficial, as it allows highly educated teachers and school leaders to make decisions at local level. Nevertheless, critics argue this perception is illusory. The more responsibility for performance that is pushed down the organisation, with the schools being held accountable for their achievements, having to perform more standardised testing and having to take into account the demands of the users, the less room there is for professionalism. Ball (2003), for instance, argues that teachers are caught up in a milieu of 'performativity' and 'managerialism' that restricts their professionalism. The same applies to school leaders whose greater responsibility for general management and accountability to clients and authorities have increased their workload, giving them less room for pedagogical leadership (Moos et al., 2004; Møller, 2002, 2009b; Uljens, Møller, Ärlestig & Fredriksen, 2013).

In parallel with the intensification of the neoliberal influences on education at the end of the twentieth century, dissatisfaction with the traditional understanding of leadership as involving a strong leader, with a focus on leader attributes and behaviour, became palpable within research. Various forms of shared leadership started to take root in research - some would even say that they started to dominate (Bolden, 2011; Crawford, 2012) - and the focus of leadership shifted from 'super-leaders' to an understanding of leadership as a collective interaction among leaders and followers taking place in practice (Spillane, 2006). Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004) argued:

> Leadership is not simply a function of what a school principal, or indeed any other individual or group of leaders, knows or does. Rather, it is the activities engaged in by leaders, in interaction with others in particular contexts around specific tasks. (p. 5)

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS

A distributed perspective on educational leadership, taking into account both leaders and followers as well as the situation, became the leadership idea of the moment (Harris, 2008; Leithwood, Mascall & Strauss, 2009; Spillane, 2006; Timperley, 2005).

With the increasing complexity of challenges for school leaders in the twenty-first century and the disappointment with the results of the strong directive leadership from a single school leader at the top of the school organisation, a search for new leadership solutions started (Hallinger, 2003; Rapp, 2012). Distributed leadership seemed to be a good solution. However, as policy representatives, such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), became interested in the ideas of distributed leadership, it shifted from being a theoretical concept to being a normative prescription for how to arrange school leadership in order to meet the increased demands for school leaders, put focus on instructional leadership and increase student outcomes. Distributing leadership more widely in the school organisation became officially sanctioned as good leadership practice (OECD, 2013; Pont et al., 2008). Distributed leadership turned out to be 'a buzz word' (Watson & Scribner, 2007), 'in vogue' (Harris, 2008) as well as 'a dominant discourse' (Hall, Gunter & Bragg, 2011) and can consequently also be understood as part of the wider regime of neoliberalism.

Distributed leadership is a well-known concept in the educational field; however, it primarily belongs to the Anglo-Saxon context. Distributed leadership as a concept has also entered the educational discourse in Sweden (Skolinspektionen, 2010, 2012). The Swedish Schools Inspectorate advocates a distributed leadership and interprets it as involving an increased responsibility for everybody within the school and an environment in which many are given the opportunity to have an influence, take initiative, and become motivated to take on leadership, as well as involving an understanding on the part of the principals that everybody has the potential to lead. Moreover, new leadership positions at local school level with a focus on development and learning in line with distributed leadership practices can also be identified. Many different terms are used to describe these positions, for example, development leaders, process leaders, change agents, teacher team leaders and learning leaders. Despite different labels and different duties, the essence of the positions appears to be to support the principals in their pedagogical leadership but also to facilitate collaborative, long-term and quality-assured improvement work. A move in the same direction can also be noted in the current Educational Act (SFS 2010:800), which stresses that the principal is the pedagogical leader and responsible for the local school organisation and particularly for educational improvement in line with the goals in the national curriculum. Further, principals are given the opportunity to dele-

gate leadership tasks and decisions to employees in the organisation. An emphasis on distributed leadership and school improvement can also be seen in the National School Leadership Training Program (Skolverket, 2010), which states that after the training, principals are expected to 'initiate and lead local improvement processes in a strategic way so that the school staff are strengthened in their desire for learning and development' (p. 9, [my translation]).

Thus, it can be concluded that the emphasis on distributed leadership in the Swedish school context can be interpreted in different ways. From the perspective of neoliberalism, it can be understood as a normative prescription for how to organise school leadership at local level. Distributed leadership can, however, also be understood as a perspective on school leadership connected to a democratic vision in line with a Deweyan perspective and the 'power-with' tradition (Møller, 2002) that has been characteristic of school leadership during the welfare state era. Harris (2014) advocates the latter interpretation as she argues that distributed leadership can be understood as a way to counteract neoliberal influences by giving professionals power to build trust and capacity to develop the knowledge and skills they define as necessary in order to take collective responsibility for the learning of all students.

With the development in the educational field and the possibilities for different interpretations of distributed leadership, I see it as important to explore how distributed leadership is interpreted and expressed in local leadership practices within the Swedish context and how this can be related to the wider educational context.

Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the thesis is to generate knowledge about the construction of distributed leadership in local schools within the Swedish context and thereby contribute to the wider discussion of distributed leadership within the educational field. In doing so, the following research questions guided the work:

- How can the organisation of distributed leadership at local school level be understood?
- How does distributed leadership relate to capacity building and school improvement at local school level?
- What influence does neoliberal education policy have on distributed leadership at local school level?

The thesis builds on four separate papers (I-IV) with their own research questions but with the common goal of providing answers to the overall aim and research questions of the study. The four papers are complemented by this

introductory part that ties them all together. The first and second papers focus on how organisational factors like structure and culture relate to the construction of distributed leadership at local level. In the third paper, school leaders' and teachers' understandings of leadership and collaboration, and their sensemaking of improvement initiatives are in focus. The third and the fourth papers focus on institutional pressure and expectations as well as internal norms and values of the local organisation in relation to distributed leadership. Finally, the role of the formal school leader is addressed in all four papers. In addition, the purpose of all the papers is also to explore and explain how the specific focus in each article can contribute to understandings about how distributed leadership is constructed in local school organisations. In this way, the results from this thesis provide knowledge that contributes to the research field of leadership and improvement in schools. It also contributes knowledge that can be considered relevant to practitioners as well as to actors at policy level.

Relevance of the Study

The Swedish school has a long history of collaborative structures and joint decision-making at local level. Distributed leadership, as a concept, has on the other hand rather recently been introduced in Swedish research as well as in practice. I therefore consider the Swedish setting to be an interesting point of departure when studying distributed leadership at local school level. The ideas of distributed leadership are in the Swedish context, in comparison to the Anglo-Saxon context, not in the introductory phase. However, despite collaborative structures and a democratic approach to leadership, close collaborative working relations and professional development among teachers have not been prevalent to the extent that might be expected (Blossing & Ekholm, 2008). This, I consider, raises questions about how distributed leadership is interpreted and thus its relation to capacity building and school improvement.

As previously stated, there are many different names for the positions in which teachers can take specific responsibility in their local schools. The conditions for these positions are also very diverse. Some positions are introduced by principals at local level, others by policymakers at municipal level or by independent school actors. Since 2011 a new position for teachers has been introduced as a result of a governmental initiative to increase teachers' career options. This position is the *first teacher*. Although this initiative is intended to increase the status of the teaching profession, it also aims to increase the quality of the school by letting first teachers coach their colleagues and lead the improvement of the instructional work in their schools (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2012, p. 28). I believe that the findings of this thesis are particularly relevant to the attempt to learn more about under what conditions leadership positions for

teachers can contribute to improvement in local organisations and what the barriers might be that can prevent the same.

Research about the influences of the neoliberal educational policy shows that this trend increasingly affects the internal work and life in Swedish schools (Dovemark, 2014; Holm & Lundström, 2011). With the Swedish history of a *School for All* (Blossing & Söderström, 2014) and the strong tradition of a democratic school leadership (Moos, 2013), I find it highly relevant to explore what values are in play and influence the idea of distributed leadership at local school level.

Taking a national perspective, Swedish research on school leadership has primarily been concentrated on the principal (see e.g. Ekholm et al., 2000; Johansson, 2011). Studies of middle-level leadership have been given little attention (see e.g. Ahlstrand, Granström & Olsson, 1988; Blossing, 2013; Nestor, 1991; Rönnerman & Olin, 2013). Research that studies leadership with a perspective focusing on leadership practice and interaction between leaders and followers is also rare although some exists (see e.g. Ludvigsson, 2009; Tillberg, 2003; Rönnerman & Olin, 2013). Hence, I stress the need for deeper knowledge within the field at national level. Taking an international perspective, the number of publications on distributed leadership has on the other hand increased rapidly (Bolden, 2011). However, as noted by Stoll and Louis (2007), most of the international research has been limited to the Anglo-Saxon context. Therefore, research conducted in a different structural as well as cultural context could well make an important contribution to the field. With a nuanced picture of how distributed leadership can be organised and expressed in addition to a critical investigation of how distributed leadership has been picked up at local school level, this thesis will hopefully expand the understanding of the field as well as contribute to its development.

Outlining the Thesis

The initial section has served to give a brief introduction of the overall theme of the thesis. It has also served to introduce the discourse on leadership and the current context in which this thesis is positioned. The aim and research questions have been presented, accompanied by an outline showing how the aim and research questions relate to the four papers. In the second section the point of departure of this thesis is presented: an institutional perspective on organisations and change, a distributed perspective on leadership, and capacity building as a basis for improvement. This is followed by a third section in which I give a brief overview of national and international research relevant to this study with a focus on distributed leadership as an internal capacity for school improvement at local level, the organisation of teachers in teams, principals' pedagogical lead-

ership and finally research that highlights teachers' and principals' increased responsibility for improvement at local level. After that, in section four, I describe and discuss the research method that I have used in the study: case study method, case schools, interviews, observations, coding processes as well as ethical considerations. In the fifth section I give a summary of each of the four papers. The main findings and an overall discussion are presented in section six. Finally, in section seven I put forward a conclusion in relation to the aim and research questions, together with directions for further research and an epilogue. Thereafter follows a Swedish summary of the thesis.

2
Points of Departure

In this section I present the three theoretical building blocks guiding the analysis of this thesis: an institutional perspective on organisations and change, a distributed perspective on leadership and the idea of capacity building as the basis for school improvement.

An Institutional Perspective

Institutions and Organisations

Schools can be thought about in many ways, for examples as institutions, as cultures or as communities. Schools can also be thought about as organisations defined as meso-level collections of roles, groups and persons set up to accomplish some set of tasks (Miles & Ekholm, 1985). In this thesis distributed leadership at local school level is the object of analysis. In this way, local schools are analysed as organisations with specific structural arrangements, organisational members and defined goals.

Within organisational theory, different perspectives on organisations have dominated. Scott (1992) highlights three relatively distinct, but partly overlapping, system perspectives on organisations: the rational-systems, the natural-systems and the open-systems perspectives. The rational-systems perspective emphasises formal structures and organisational goals. In this perspective organisations are understood as rational tools to achieve goals. In the natural-systems perspective, in contrast to the rational, structures and formal goals are of less importance; instead behaviour in organisations is regulated by informal structures. It is people rather than structure, and human needs rather than organisational goals, that are emphasised (Scott, 1992). Finally, the open-system perspective emphasises the environment and the uniqueness of the organisation that results from the environment in which it operates. Up till the 1960s, the rational perspective dominated in organisational analysis, after which an understanding of organisations as natural and open systems dominated. In 1977, with the pub-

lication of a seminar paper by Meyer and Rowan, both the open-system perspective and the rational-system perspective were shaken, and a new institutional perspective with influences from both open and natural system models was argued for (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin & Suddaby, 2008).

New institutional theory emphasises that organisations are strongly influenced by their environments but stresses in particular the constraints in the environment of organisations that limit their ability to change. In opposition to rational theories, which stress effectiveness as being the underlying principle of organisational structures, Meyer and Rowan (1977) emphasise the importance of the institutional field and the 'logic of appropriateness' shaping organisational structures and constraining the development of organisations. Institutionalised practices within organisations are followed because they are seen as natural, correct, expected and legitimate (March & Olsen, 2005; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Socially constructed beliefs and rule systems are thus prominent as control systems within organisations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; March & Olsen, 1984; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). As a result, institutional practices make it easier for individuals within the organisation to know what is expected of them and thereby to make sense of the situation. The expected way to act becomes the natural way and is therefore not questioned, which is supported by the fact that institutions tend to be relatively stable in nature. Scott (2001) defines the characteristics of institutional structures as being formed by regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements, referred to as the three pillars of institutions. These three pillars guide the ways in which individual actors interpret and respond to changes in organisations.

In contrast to rational theories that emphasis organisational effectiveness, Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 340) underline the importance of organisational legitimacy in order for organisations to survive. To gain legitimacy, organisations are forced to adhere to the rationalised myths of a given society, leading to organisational transformation in line with what is deemed appropriate in the specific institutional environment, a process referred to as isomorphism. Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that complex organisations, such as schools, whose activities are difficult to evaluate are particularly dependent on 'the confidence and stability achieved by isomorphism with institutional rules' (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 354). Formal and informal expectations, regulations, norms, myths, values, laws, and so forth, thus give rise to similar structuration within the organisational field of schools, which strengthens the schools' connectedness and legitimacy. Structuration and connectedness thereby enhance internal stability and contribute to the institutionalisation of practices. Consequently, being part of an organisational field places limitations on the change processes within

organisations. As a result change in organisations becomes a rather slow process.

Institutionalism and Professionalism

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) stress professionalisation as another factor that contributes to isomorphism in organisations within institutional fields. Two aspects of professionalisation are considered to be of particular importance in this context: formal education that rests in a cognitive base produced by university specialists and professional networks that span organisations. Within introductory education as well as in professional training, professionals develop norms with regard to organisational and professional behaviour that create similarity in orientation and strong convictions about appropriateness of actions.

Scott (2008) also emphasises professionals as a significant aspect in the creation of isomorphism in institutional fields. Professionals are considered by Scott to be the most influential crafters of institutions (p. 223), and as 'social agents', professionals define, interpret and apply institutional elements based on the cultural-cognitive, normative and/or regulative frameworks that 'govern one or another social sphere' (p. 233). Belonging to institutional fields thus enables the maintenance of professional authority through the support from professional schools, research institutes, professional associations and a broader base of colleges. However, Scott claims that like all institutional forms, the model of what a profession is, the occupations that we code as professions, as well as what distinguishes a certain profession, vary from time to time and place to place. This has become particularly evident in relation to welfare professions, as neoliberal governing strategies are being introduced and practiced in the public sector.

Organisational Change within Institutional Fields

From the perspective of new institutionalism, isomorphism and professionalism work as stabilisers of organisations. Even a demanding leader or a significant change in the environment is not necessarily enough for organisational change to occur. Rather, for change to take place, the values embedded in the organisational field and the local organisation need to change as well as the cognitive beliefs of organisational members. As a result of this, institutionalist literature tends to stress the difficulties of bringing about rapid or significant change through the application of new organisational arrangements (Peters, 1992). Thus for institutional change to be reflected, both the ideas behind the new way of organising and the actual action patterns have to be altered. If it is only the formal structures or the regulative rules that change and not the lived organisation, encompassing norms and cognitive elements, the core and the periphery of

the organisation are considered as loosely coupled (Weick, 1976, p. 3) or decoupled (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 356). To achieve the isomorphic status required for social legitimacy, organisations such as schools can act by decoupling, separating the formal structures of the organisation from the daily activities, and in doing this organisations can live up to expectations of change although no major changes occur. Decoupling thereby becomes a strategy for preserving organisational legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 352). Examples of this are when new forms of leadership or new procedures for decision-making are introduced in organisations, although decision-making processes go on as usual, or when reform initiatives fail to produce profound changes.

Decoupling is an analytical concept that has been used to explain similarities between structures in local schools, the failure of reform initiatives and the inconsistency between formal structure and internal practice in schools since the end of the 1970s. However, in recent years it has been stressed that a more nuanced version of the early understanding of loose coupling and decoupling is needed, as a result of the impact of the neoliberal accountability movements that have penetrated the educational sector (Coburn, 2004; Rowan, 2006; Spillane & Burch, 2006). The changed patterns of governance in education with an increase in managerial accountability have provided evidence that the institutional environment has also come to influence the core work of schooling - teaching and learning (e.g. Coburn, 2004; Spillane & Callahan, 2000), which emphasises the need to revaluate the decoupling proposition. Coburn (2004), who studied changing ideas about reading instruction, stresses that teachers respond to pressure from the institutional environment by using a variety of coupling strategies that go far beyond decoupling, ranging from rejection to accommodation. Further, she stresses that the response is framed by the teachers' pre-existing beliefs and practices. Coburn argues that what determines the appropriate way to act and what makes sense to teachers is a balance between embedded beliefs about teaching and learning and broader movements in the environment (Coburn, 2004, p. 234).

Hanson proposes that an organisation's capacity to change is dependent on the feedback process between organisational memory and organisational learning. A smart organisation uses its memory to update rules and routines so as to reflect current experiences and requirements, after which a process of double-loop learning at the collective level begins. Based on organisational memory and organisational learning, smart organisations, as Hanson (2001, p. 659) stresses, 'make efforts to understand and shape the change process' in any of the directions (homogenisation, evolution or reform) proposed by the institutional perspective. Thus, both Hanson (2001) and Coburn (2004) provide understandings of organisational change within institutional fields.

To conclude it can be noted that institutional theory has to greater extent focused on the forces that prevent organisations from changing. However, some research has also been done on energising forces that can bring about change. Institutional theory holds that the degree of organisational stability is dependent on the fit between the different layers of organisations: the environment, the organisation, formal and informal groups within the organisation and the individual employees (Hanson, 2001). However, there are always some degrees of freedom at each level. Differences of opinions between the different layers within an organisation may lead to the development of routines that allow for change initiatives.

Studies of organisations with a new institutional perspective have primarily been done on the level of organisational fields. Powell and Colyvas (2008) argue that conditions at local level have often been overlooked. Greenwood and Hinings (1996) argue that the strength of new institutional theory is not to understand change in single organisations but to understand what happens between organisations. However, I will argue that the new institutional perspective and sensemaking therein is a useful perspective when examining the construction of distributed leadership at local school level (micro-level) and linking the organisational arrangements to discussions and interpretations of distributed leadership at institutional level (macro-level).

Sensemaking

In schools with loosely coupled organisations, influences from the environment tend to be perceived in various ways (Weick, 1976). There is thus an increased need for shared understandings and an expanded leadership in order to keep the organisation together, especially when changes are to be implemented. As Binder (2007, p. 547) states, 'organisations are not merely the instantiation of environment, institutional logics "out there" … but are places where people and groups make sense of, and interpret, institutional vocabularies of motive'. Weick (1995) and Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) define sensemaking as a retrospective process by which people in organisations try to coordinate actions and enact order in order to understand themselves and their actions. Sensemaking tends to arise when changes in the environment or in the organisation challenge the way people usually act. To find out how to act in relation to the new situation, actors in organisations place new information into their pre-existing frameworks and construct understandings of them through the lens of their pre-existing practices. By using pre-existing frameworks, actors reduce complexity, which, according to Weick et al. (2005), is a way to prevent challenges to their own identity and thus hold on to earlier understandings. However, sensemaking processes can also lead to a greater acceptance of changes and further innovations. Weick (2001) claims that when sensemaking is shared, it can strengthen

people's ability to face new situations. Sensemaking is therefore not only an individual affair but is rather rooted in social interaction and negotiations. People make sense of situations through conversations and interactions with their colleagues. In these processes, shared understandings of organisational culture, beliefs and routines are constructed. Sensemaking is also social in the sense that it is situated in practice. It is the norms and routines of the organisation that provide the lens through which sense can be made of new information and that shape the range of appropriate responses, and also shape the conditions for sensemaking by influencing the patterns of social interaction.

Connecting leadership to sensemaking, Weick (1982) argues that leadership in schools is different from leadership in more coupled organisations. In loosely coupled organisations, people are more in need of finding a shared sense of direction for their work, something that is more usual in coupled organisations. If they are to provide a shared sense of direction, governing objectives need to be articulated by the people in the organisation. People can also need help with translating the objectives in order to understand their goals. Hence, leadership, like sensemaking, must be a social and relational process situated in practice. Therefore, an important theoretical point of departure in this thesis is the premise that leadership is constructed in the relation between leaders, followers and the situation.

Leadership as Process and Practice

The terms 'leader' and 'leadership' are much used, but, as Hosking (1988) stresses, poorly understood. There is little agreement on their meaning and several different definitions exist (Yukl, 1989). Definitions of leadership extend from its being considered to be an organisational quality to its being associated with personal characteristics (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Yukl, 1989).

In earlier leadership research, the focus on the leader as a person has been salient. The individual leader's skills, traits and behaviour have been the object of study. This demonstrates a hierarchical view of leadership, separating leaders from followers, and focussing on roles, tasks and actions that allow strong leaders to attain goals (Yukl, 2006). Alvesson and Sveningsson (2007) assert that this is a misleading way of understating leadership, which they emphasise by saying:

> Participants are co-producers of the leadership relations that evolve. The people involved are intertwined and define each other mutually and relationally. Leadership does not proceed from an a priori "leader", but rather a person becomes a leader due to the fact that one or more people attach great weight to what he or she says, and let themselves be influenced by this. (p. 325, [my translation])

In line with the doubts expressed by Alvesson and Sveningsson about concentrating leadership research on the leaders, a displacement in leadership research can be identified. In post-heroic perspectives on leadership, the focus is shifted from a focus on the person to a focus on processes and relations. This does not overlook the role of the leader but emphasises that it is necessary to also look at the followers, and the relation between the leader and the followers, in order to understand leadership and its practitioners (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2010). Kelley (1988) emphasises that studying leaders as well as followers acknowledges that leadership is a process in which both parts are active and create leadership mutually.

Dachler and Hosking (1995) consider leadership to be created socially, in relation to other individuals, to groups and to structures. Seeing leadership as being socially influenced, and focusing on the dynamic in the relations, enables us to see leadership as a socially constructed process (Giddens, 1984). Leadership is therefore more than the actions of formal leaders, and the formal leader is considered to be just an actor among others. Uhl-Bien (2006) argues that this enables us to visualise a leadership without hierarchies. Seeing leadership as a process implies that it is not enough to understand what leaders do in order to understand leadership. Because of this, it is not the attributes or behaviours of individual leaders but instead the communication processes by which interaction takes place and relationships are created that are in focus in research with a process perspective (Crevani, Lindgren & Packendorff, 2010; Hosking, Dachler & Gergen, 1995). As Dachler and Hosking (1995, p. 13) underline: '[it] invites questions about the social processes by which certain understandings come about and represent the social reality with reference to which certain behaviours make sense and not others'. In studying leadership, questions about 'what' and 'how' need to be asked, which also implies that leadership is inseparable from context, making leadership a social reality (Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Hosking, 1988).

Ogawa and Bossert (1995) conceptualise leadership as an organisational quality that flows through the networks of roles in an organisation. They view leadership as being of a systemic character, arguing that leadership contributes to the creation of organisational structures, and also produces patterns of interaction and meaning among participants in the organisation. Ogawa and Bossert relate this to the relational perspective by saying that leadership is embedded in the relations that exists between role holders and not in the particular roles. They thereby argue that all members of an organisation can come to influence others by using the resources provided in their role and in so doing giving all members of an organisation the opportunity to lead.

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS

Power as an aspect of leadership is rarely discussed within post-heroic perspectives on leadership. Fletcher (2004) argues that by not paying attention to power in these perspectives, leadership become incorrectly associated with powerlessness. However, thinking about leadership as a relational process and as practice does not ignore the fact that some sort of influence is involved, in other words that power is exercised. Sørhaug (1996) illustrates this in his definition of leadership.

> Leadership is of course first and foremost a relation. It is based on a mandate, but the mandate is a living social process of power and trust that the leaders both are given and must take. It is a vertical relationship that is open at both ends. Leaders get and take power and trust both from above and below. This continuous exchange process makes leadership into a perpetual motion (Sørhaug, 1996, p. 45, [my translation]).

This draws attention to the fact that power is a complex concept that can be understood in many different ways, sometimes divided into four different dimensions: power as resource, power as influence, power as ideology and power as self-control (Alvesson, 2013). Leaders have, through their position, the option to use rewards and sanctions to make others do what they want. This can be referred to as an active use of power (power as resource). They can however also use power more subtly, as influence, by controlling the issues that are put on the agenda and by that, for example, prevent decisions and counteract development initiatives. The third dimension of power, power as ideology, is the active influence over other people's beliefs and perceptions of how things are supposed to be and be done and of what is right or wrong (Lukes, 2008). In organisations, this dimension of power is expressed through norms and values that form the basis for the prevailing culture and its traditions. Finally, power as self-control, elaborated by Foucault (2000, 2002), is the disciplinary power that guides us to control ourselves in order to live up to the prevailing norm. Making progress in one's career, becoming a leader, striving for improvement and development, being cooperative and performing well are all aspirational norms in today's society that are relevant to the topic in this thesis.

When thinking about power in relation to the construction of distributed leadership in local schools, it becomes important to explore not only how leadership is constructed in practice but also what it is possible to focus on or bring to the agenda for the teachers that take on leadership positions and for the teachers in the teacher teams. It also becomes important to examine how the formal leaders, in their position, use their power and thus try to influence the orientation of leadership.

Understanding leadership as a process constructed in the relation between leaders and followers represents a wide description of leadership. It includes all

kind of processes perceived as influencing relations. To narrow it down I have chosen a more pragmatic definition given by Spillane (2006, p. 11) to use in this thesis:

> Leadership refers to activities tied to the core work of the organization that are designed by organizational members to influence the motivation, knowledge, affect, and practices of other organizational members or that are understood by organizational members as intended to influence their motivation, knowledge, affect and practices. (p. 11)

This definition assumes that leadership does not necessarily involve a positive or negative outcome of processes. Nor does it restrict leadership to something that has been accomplished, which would require evidence that somebody has been influenced by someone else to denote leadership.

Thinking about leadership as a relational process implies that leadership is situated in practice. A practice perspective on leadership gives focus to the actual "doing" of leadership, its performance and practical activities (Endrissat & von Arx, 2013; Raelin, 2011; Spillane & Orlina, 2005). The idea of considering leadership practice as the core unit of analysis originates from sociocultural theories that take note of the intersection between the material world and human consciousness (Nicolini, 2012). Practice is only understood within the situation in which it takes place (Spillane & Sherer, 2004). It is embedded in time and can therefore not be fully understood if it is separated from time and place (Bourdieu, 1990). A key to understanding leadership practice is therefore 'to understand how it arises out of people's ongoing attempts to negotiate their relationship with their situation' (Spillane & Orlina, 2005, p. 160). In order to study leadership as process and practice in school contexts, Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004) developed a theoretical perspective taking into account that leadership processes can be vertical and lateral, including both leaders and followers. Gronn (2000, 2002) also proposes a process perspective on leadership that counteracts the leader-follower dualism, in which leaders are superior to followers and followers are dependent on leaders. Independently of each other, these researchers propose a distributed perspective on leadership and it is from this perspective that I take my theoretical point of departure in this thesis.

A Distributed Perspective on Leadership Practice

In the educational field, the conceptualisation of leadership as distributed in practice has received wide interest (Bolden, 2011). With this rising interest, it is easy for distributed leadership to be perceived as a new term. However, distributed leadership was initially used in 1954 (Gibb, 1954). From the beginning of the 21st century the theoretical field of distributed leadership has been oriented around the work of Spillane (2006), Spillane et al. (2004) and Gronn (2000, 2002). Although their theoretical bases differ, with Spillane's perspective being

grounded in distributed cognition and the role of social context, and Groon's perspective being grounded in activity theory, they both consider the distributed leadership perspective to be a framework for thinking about leadership in order to better understand leadership practice. This is also the way I use the framework in this thesis.

The distributed leadership perspective developed by Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001, 2004) is an integrated framework that includes both leaders' thinking and behaviour and the situation in which leadership take place. Spillane et al. (2004) consider the *what* of leadership to be essential but not sufficient for an understanding of leadership practice. Understandings about *how* leaders go about their work and *why* they act and think as they do are also essential. Suggesting that leaders' practice is distributed across the *situation of leadership* and emerges through interactions with other people and the environment, the distributed leadership framework explores the interaction between leaders' thinking, their behaviour and the situation. To justify the distributed perspective, Spillane and Orlina (2005) argue that a skills-and-behaviours approach decontextualizes school leadership and is insufficient for an understanding of leadership practice as it hides critical interdependencies among people and aspects of their situation. Moreover, by taking leadership practice as the unit of analysis, rather than an individual leader, the analytical framework also makes clear that leadership practice is distributed among both positional and informal leaders. It is also considered to be stretched or distributed not only over individuals but also over various facets of the situation: designed artefacts (such as tools and symbols), language and organisational structure. Rather than understanding material artefacts, tools and organisational structures as frames for leaders' practice, Spillane et al. (2001) see them as defining components of practice. Spillane et al. assert that the sociocultural context is both 'constitutive *of* and constituted *in* leadership activity' (2004, p. 21), meaning that the material situation is a fundamental part of the constitution of leadership practice but is also created and recreated by leaders in leadership practice. Therefore to study leadership with a distributed perspective, leadership activities and interactions must be identified, as well as social and material contexts, artefacts, tools and language used in the practice.

Spillane's (2006) distributed perspective on leadership involves two aspects: the leader-plus aspect and the practice aspect. The leader-plus aspect acknowledges that leadership work involves multiple individuals, the leader plus other individuals, and is not restricted to those at the top of the organisational hierarchy. Formal leaders take responsibility for leadership routines and functions but other formal and informal leaders, teachers and students also take responsibility for a broad range of functions. The leader-plus aspect on its own is insufficient

in analysing leadership practice and needs to be complemented with the practice aspect, which moves from looking at the actions of individual leaders to looking at the interaction between leaders, followers and their situations.

Similarly, Gronn (2002) distinguishes between numerical or additive leadership, and holistic notions of concertive actions. By this he means that leadership in an organisation is distributed among multiple members and not restricted to particular individuals or categories of individuals. Further, he argues that leadership in its numerical sense is the sum of its parts but leadership is also, in a holistic way, concertive actions of people working together in interpersonal relationships. Leadership within a distributed perspective is in this sense something more than the sum of the individual actions.

In a distributed approach, the interaction between leaders and followers becomes critical for understanding practice. From a distributed perspective 'followers are an essential constituting element of leadership activity' (Spillane et al., 2004). Rather than seeing followers as a variable outside of leadership activity that influences leaders, followers are to be understood as an integrated element of leadership activity. Followers influence both leaders and leadership strategies by drawing on personal characteristics, access to information, special knowledge and expertise but also by finding subtle ways to resist administrative controls. Members in practices create social norms and act as though these norms existed. This implies that it is not just individual actions but the interrelating and interacting between the individuals that constitute practice. Understanding leadership as stretched over leaders and followers and not just a sum of individual contributions visualises this relationship between the participants in practice and the practice.

In addition, the situation in which it occurs is critical to leadership practice, as with all sorts of practices. If one takes the position that leadership is situated, it follows that leadership practice cannot be extracted from its sociocultural context. Leadership practice is situated in cultural, historical and institutional settings (Wertsch, 1991). Hence, human actions are mediated through designed artefacts, language and organisational arrangements. The ways these structures are constituted affect the way leadership practices are defined by enabling and constraining certain practices. However, structures do not determine practice. Spillane et al. (2004, p. 22) argue that since human agency is embedded in the situation, 'structures, as meditational means, provide a basis for action from which people pick and choose in an effort to accomplish desired ends'. They borrow from Swidler (1986), who considers structural properties of social systems to be a 'tool-kit' of rules and resources that may facilitate actions, and culture to be a 'tool-kit' through which social actors arrange strategies of ac-

tions. From a distributed perspective, it becomes meaningful to find out how aspects of the situation enable and constrain leadership practice.

Criticism of Distributed Leadership

Thinking of leadership as a distributed practice is a relatively new perspective for thinking about leadership in schools. Part of its popularity, it can be argued, comes from the fact that distributed leadership as a concept has no clear definition. This enables a wide variety of interpretations and positions. Distributed leadership, according to Hargreaves and Fink (2006), is leadership that spreads and according to Elmore (2000), distribution is the glue in the commitment to joint questions. Bennett, Wise, Woods and Harvey (2003, p. 4) identify the use of distributed leadership as a synonym for shared, collaborative, facilitative, participative and democratic leadership.

Ambiguity in the definition and the slippery use of the concept have caught the attention of critics (Hall et al., 2011; Hartley, 2009, 2010). Hartley (2007, 2009) stresses the underemphasis of power relations in the perspective and argues that even if leadership is distributed, power and control remain centralised. Democracy within the concept is also questioned (Hatcher, 2005; Lumby, 2013; Torrance, 2013), as leaders are generally appointed not elected but also as a distributed perspective on leadership does not occur naturally (Hartley, 2007; Torrance, 2013; Woods, 2004). The 'top-down' approach, Hartley (2010) argues, strictly limits the opportunities for authentic distributed leadership based on participation of teachers and leaders. Instead Hartley (2010, p. 281) states that distributed leadership is 'mainly about accomplishing the organisational goals which comprise the instrumental tasks and targets set by officialdom'. Hartley's statement refers to the fact that internationally distributed leadership has also been positioned within the political discourse and used as an instrument in political agendas (Torrance, 2013). Distributed leadership has been presented as a solution to leadership crises, work overload pressure and difficulties in school management structures (Gunter & Rayner, 2007; Murphy, 2005). For policy makers, distributed leadership has become an instrument for involving teachers in the leadership of schools regardless of their formal role or remit (Hallinger & Heck, 2009). Another question in relation to the concept concerns the contradiction regarding the actors involved. Distributed leadership is considered to rest on a base of expertise rather than on hierarchical positions (Bennett et al., 2003). Therefore leaders can be both formal (i.e. having a position in the hierarchy) and informal (not having a position within the hierarchy but possessing expertise). But distributed leadership is sometimes also defined as a collaborative process involving all teachers in the school (Elmore, 2000), something that leads to uncertainty about how to empirically investigate distributed leadership.

Mayrowetz (2008, p. 425) suggests that the very different ways that distributed leadership is used have allowed and encouraged researchers *to talk past each other* and Harris (2013) suggests that the variation in its meaning has resulted in both misunderstandings and misrepresentations. She advocates the importance of looking at empirical evidence before making any assertion, assumption or claim about distributed leadership.

> Distributed leadership does not guarantee better performance; it is not a panacea for success, it does not posses any innate good or bad qualities, it is not friend or foe (Harris, 2013, p. 552).

Spillane and Orlina (2005) add that from their point of view, a distributed perspective on leadership is a framework for thinking about leadership and analysing leadership practice. 'It is not, in itself, a prescription or recipe for how to lead' (p. 173). They argue that as a theoretical framework, the perspective is normative only in the sense that it foregrounds some aspects and backgrounds others.

Distributed Leadership in This Study

The distributed leadership perspective is an alternative way of understanding leadership practice and from a distributed perspective it is the nature, form and impact of leadership practice that are of importance. In this study, I use the distributed leadership perspective by Spillane et al. (2001, 2004) and Gronn (2000, 2002) as a framework when examining leadership as a distributed practice in schools. The perspective offers me a useful language for defining leadership practice but also for selecting what to include when empirically studying leadership in schools. In line with Spillane (2006) and Gronn (2002), I see leadership in schools as a process, taking place in the daily interactions of multiple leaders, followers and their situation. I therefore find it inadequate to concentrate my study solely on formal leaders. Firstly, leadership in schools involves several people and is created in relations and in interaction between leaders and followers. Followers are co-creators of leadership activity and must therefore be included when studying leadership. Secondly, since distributed leadership is more than a delegation of tasks or activities from one leader to another (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006), it is better to represent it as a collective activity situated in practice. Hence, aspects of practice need to be included. Leadership is situated in an environment saturated with artefacts. These artefacts are created and recreated by leaders as representations of ideas and intentions but the artefacts are also defining components of leadership practice. How leaders use designed artefacts, language and organisational structures give me important information about how leaders and followers understand and use leadership practice in their schools.

As well as using distributed leadership as a perspective for studying leadership practice in schools, I use it as a term for describing leadership arrangements that are present in many Swedish schools, including for example teacher teams with teacher team leaders, school improvement groups with process leaders or development leaders. However, as Harris (2013) concludes, leadership arrangements such as these are not automatically good. To examine the quality of distributed leadership and how it relates to school improvement, we must look at more than the formal leaders. Hence, an important point of departure in this thesis is the premise that school organisations, in order to improve, need to create conditions for capacity building (individual and collective) including all parts of the organisation.

Capacity to Improve

Capacity to improve is a complex concept that has been defined in multiple ways. There is a substantial overlap in definition with concepts such as competency and readiness (Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1993; Flaspohler, Duffy, Wandersman, Stillman & Maras, 2008). In studies of organisational change, capacity is often associated with the individual. A more comprehensive definition of capacity is: the skills, motivations, knowledge and attitude necessary to implement innovations, which exist at the individual, organisational, and community levels (Wandersman, Clary, Forbush, Weinberger, Coyne & Duffy, 2006).

Within the field of education, Stoll (1999) and Harris (2001) adopt more of a process-oriented perspective on capacity and conclude that capacity to improve is all about creating conditions and opportunities for collaboration and mutual learning. More precisely, Stoll (1999, p. 506) defines internal capacity as 'the power to engage in and sustain continuous learning of teachers and the school itself for the purpose of enhancing student learning'. Capacity to improve is, in Stoll's definition, not a static state but a dynamic learning process. Furthermore, it is not restricted to individual members of an organisation but involves the organisation as a whole. Capacity thereby includes a personal, an interpersonal as well as an organisational dimension (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). To these dimensions Fullan (2006) adds the external dimension and includes those supporting the organisation. He thus concludes that capacity to improve is multifaceted.

To build internal capacity, Stoll (1999) argues, three key influences need to be considered: the individual teachers, the school's social and structural learning context and the external context. Stoll maintains that nothing is more important for internal capacity than the individual teachers as learners. Teachers need to engage in continuous learning. The opportunity for them to do this, according

to Stoll, depends on, among other things their beliefs, motivation to learn, their confidence that they can make a difference and their sense of interdependence. As teachers interact with the learning context that they are part of, individual capacity building is not isolated, but is rather part of the school's internal capacity. Thus, social forces such as the relationships between teachers, culture, power issues, structures and leadership, all at local school level, are considered to influence capacity building at school level. Finally, although a school's capacity to improve is internally driven, the external context cannot be ignored. The external context, in terms of policymakers at municipal level or independent school actors as well as global change, influences schools' internal capacity to improve.

It can thus be concluded that individuals are just one dimension in building capacity. For capacity building and learning to take place, the situated context in the local school and the structural and cultural conditions in place are also of importance, as is the external national context with its international influences. This is supported in Pettigrew's (1985) review of research on strategic organisational change, where he concludes that research on change rarely takes account of context, is not process oriented and often lacks a historical connection.

When Blossing (2008) developed his framework for analysing schools' capacity to improve, he builds on Pettigrew's (1985) results and on organisational development theories (Burke, 2008). With his organisational and sociocultural perspective he argues that both practice and agency must be taken into account (Blossing, Nyen, Söderström & Hagen Tønder, 2015). Blossing's perspective can be summarised in the following four points: infrastructure of the school organisation, improvement processes, improvement roles and improvement history of the organisation. Oterkiil and Estesvåg (2012) also take an organisational perspective on schools' capacity for improvement as they develop their framework for identifying important areas influencing schools' capacity to improve. They draw on the Burke-Litwin (Burke & Litwin, 1992) model of organisational change and use the distinction between transactional factors (school-level factors, such as structures, resources and climate, and individual-level factors) and transformational factors (external-level factors as well as school-level factors such as leadership and culture).

Following Stoll (1999, 2009), Blossing (2008) and Oterkiil and Ertevåg (2012), I consider capacity to improve to have an individual as well as a collective dimension. In this thesis the focus is on the local school level, and thus I consider the collective and organisational level to be of particular interest. Capacity to improve on local school level can thus, broadly speaking, be built through focus on social learning, situated activities to support professional collaboration and leadership distributed in the organisation, as Blossing and Ertesvåg (2011) also conclude.

School Improvement and Capacity Building

The definition of capacity presented by Stoll (1999) includes an intended outcome: the aim of enhancing student learning. Thus, capacity to improve is closely connected to school improvement. Stoll (2009) considers school improvement to be 'a series of concurrent and recurring processes through which different partners collaborate to enhance students' experiences and outcomes, while creating the capacity to take charge of change and sustain learning' (p. 124).

As with capacity to improve, it is hard to find a common definition of school improvement in research literature. However, in most definitions school improvement is described as a systematic process, taking place in order to make principals and teachers more capable of achieving the national and local objectives for schools. Hopkins (2005) defines school improvement as 'a distinct approach to educational change that aims to enhance student learning outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change' (pp. 2-3), a definition that I agree with. Thus, school improvement implies systematic work in which the present situation is mapped and analysed in relation to local and national objectives. The work is further systemised by means of continuous evaluations of the implemented activities as well as the progress throughout the entire process, and finally the results are analysed in relation to the points of departure and in relation to the objectives to be achieved. The term school improvement is, however, frequently used in everyday language to refer to reforms and more unplanned changes that take place in local schools.

Although school improvement is planned and systematic, it is generally regarded as a non-linear process. However, at a more general level Miles, Ekholm and Vanderberghe (1987), and also Fullan (1991), regard school improvement processes as being composed of four phases: initiation, implementation, continuation/institutionalisation and outcome. Initiations for improvement can come from needs in the organisation, identified by teachers (bottom-up), by internal or external leaders (top-down) or as a mix of both. For improvement initiatives to be institutionalised, time needs to be given in the improvement process to learning, questioning and reflecting on the present situation. It can, however, be concluded that quick results are often expected and perseverance in the process is often lacking. School improvement processes need to include both restructuring and reculturing in order to reshape practice. However, in the absence of a longer time perspective, improvement processes in schools are often limited to restructuration, and fail to produce results (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). If school improvement is to result in sustainable improvement it is also necessary to change the culture, the people who realise the structure in the school. However, as many researchers (e.g. Dalin, 1995; Fullan, 1991; Harris, 2002; Larsson, 2004) have concluded, for school improvement to be successful it must be owned by

those involved in the improvement process and be of relevance to their day-to-day life in the school.

As mentioned earlier, school improvement is also about building capacity for managing change. According to Harris and Muijs (2005), a collaborative work practice and collegial relations are core aspects of building capacity for improvement. Mitchell and Sackney (2001) also emphasise this, as well as stressing the importance of a commitment among colleagues to learn together about teaching and learning, to become a learning community, in order to improve practice. However, creating learning communities is, as with school improvement in general, a complex process that requires trustful relations, time for commitment and a supportive leadership (Harris & Muijs, 2005). Blossing et al. (2015) highlight sensemaking and history as important aspects in relation to learning and capacity building. They argue that capacity building is developed and learned when practitioners meet in communities and learn together. The opportunity for this to take place is a product of organisational history.

> This history has evolved through the social life of the school organisation and materialises in teachers' and school leaders' relationships to each other, the organisation they have built, the capacity they embrace, the meaning they have given to it and the identities they have developed. (p. 71)

While school's capacity building for change is internally driven, it is not an isolated project for the individual school. Rather schools are highly sensitive to external influences and dependent on external partners, parents, the district level and policymakers when building capacity. Fullan (2006) argues that capacity building has to be 'multifaceted', implying continuous exchange and interrelationship between the necessary conditions in terms of structure and culture, and the development of social learning and expertise, internally as well as with external facilitation. However, there seems to be a bit of a catch-22 as the schools that are most in need of development seem to be the ones that are most incapable of building capacity, and in addition have poor external support for their improvement processes (Hatch, 2001; Midthassel & Ertesvåg, 2008).

As this thesis has the local perspective in the foreground, school improvement is understood as a systematic process of work that takes place at local school level, including both teachers and leaders, and that aims to enhance student learning in relation to local and national objectives. Schools' internal capacity for improvement is understood as the personal, interpersonal and organisational resources available in specific school contexts to support and handle the improvement process in order to accomplish the local and national objectives that the school has to meet. However, school improvement at local level takes place in historical and institutional contexts that have an influence on

organisational conditions but also on how teachers and school leaders make sense of school improvement initiatives and act accordingly.

Concluding Reflections

In summary, the point of departure in this thesis is that to understand the construction and qualities of distributed leadership in local schools, one has to take into account that local schools are embedded in an institutional context in which 'logic of appropriateness' and organisational legitimacy are guiding principles and thus contribute to conservation of practice. However, as local schools have their own history, local conditions and people working there, interpretations and sensemaking at local level are core activities in the construction of leadership practice at local level. Thus, interpretations at local level can align with the institutional logic but also open up for other interpretations and institutional change. Moreover, to understand the construction and qualities of distributed leadership one has to focus on all aspects that constitute the current practice, organisational arrangements as well as actions by and relations between people, leaders and followers, in practice. A distributed perspective on leadership makes it possible to capture these dimensions. Finally, by focusing on the process and practice of distributed leadership, capacity building becomes a useful concept relating distributed leadership to local school improvement.

3
Previous Research

In this section, I will present research relevant to this study. Initially I will focus on national and international research highlighting distributed leadership as an internal capacity for school improvement processes. This is followed by a brief overview of research focusing on the organisation of teachers in teams, which I understand as an initiative to distribute leadership and responsibility in the organisation in order to support school improvement. After that I focus on principals' pedagogical leadership. Formal leaders play an important part in the construction of leadership practice and as pedagogical leaders they have an important role in capacity building for improvement at local level. Finally, I present research that highlights teachers' and principals' increased responsibility for improvement at local level and extended professionalism in relation to the reconstruction of the Swedish educational system that has taken place since the 1990s.

Searches for relevant literature have been carried out in the databases Summon and Eric, with the help of keywords such as 'distributed leadership', 'school improvement, 'professional learning communities', 'school leadership' and 'accountability'. Additionally, handbooks, research overviews presented in earlier theses and published articles of relevance to this study have been used. The search procedure can be compared to snowball searching.

Distributed Leadership as Internal Capacity for Local School Improvement

In 2006, Muijs and Harris considered the empirical research base for distributed leadership to be weak (Muijs & Harris, 2006). However, in 2008 Harris and Spillane argue that growing research results give distributed leadership empirical power and a few years later Harris states that, 'armchair theorising' has given way to more empirical evidence of distributed leadership as capacity building (Harris, 2012; Harris & Spillane, 2008). Empirical support can also be found in

literature that doesn't have distributed leadership as its main focus (Harris, 2007). For example the field of teacher leadership, which in many cases is framed within the distributed perspective on leadership, but exclusively restricted to the leadership roles of teachers, expands the empirical base of distributed leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In addition, empirical studies about school improvement, principal leadership and teacher development contribute empirical evidence which supports the idea of distributed leadership as capacity building for school improvement (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2005; Muijs & Harris, 2006, 2007; Møller et al., 2005). Further, a positive relationship between distributed leadership, teacher motivation, successful redesign of schools and student learning outcomes has also been identified (Hallinger & Heck, 2009; Harris, 2008; Mayrowetz & Smylie, 2004).

In descriptive studies close attention has been paid to different patterns of distribution in organisations as well as in what way the different patterns of distribution affect organisational outcomes (Harris, 2007). Both MacBeath (2009) and Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon and Yaskina (2007) have found patterns of distribution that in different ways have a more positive effect than others on organisational outcome and change. Leithwood et al. (2007) stress the importance of planned and aligned distributed leadership practices. They also, in line with other results (Day et al., 2009; Harris, 2008; Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz & Louis, 2009; Smylie, Conley & Marks, 2002), underline that the formal school leader plays a central role in creating conditions for a successful outcome. Consequently a well-functioning distributed leadership practice is not something that shapes itself. Teachers have to think about their roles differently by assuming responsibilities beyond their classroom for the purpose of overall school improvement (Mayrowetz, Murphy, Louis & Smylie, 2007). To prevent isolation of independent work units and the development of different agendas, the formal leader has to keep the organisation together by being an active participant in different work groups (Harris, 2007; Mayrowetz et al., 2007). In teacher leadership research, it has been noted that how the introduction of teacher leadership positions is carried out is of importance for whether capacity for improvement is created. Hence, it has been proven that the engagement from the formal leader is of great importance (Blossing, 2013; Olin, Lander, Blossing, Nehez & Gyllander, 2014). Teacher leaders need to be supported in their role and to be given tools and skills that are useful in their new positions (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Formal leaders have to support teachers who take on responsibility and give feedback on their work (Leithwood et al., 2007). It has also been shown that when introducing a more distributed leadership practice, both organisational structures and organisational culture must be supportive (Muijs & Harris, 2006, 2007; Murphy et al., 2009; York-Barr

& Duke, 2004). Formal leaders have to make time available to participate in the practice and be strong advocates for the teacher leaders, in order to prevent contradictory ideas about distributed leadership from arising.

Empirical studies on distributed leadership practices have also shown them to have an impact on teacher engagement, effectiveness and organisational commitment (e.g. Angelle, 2010; Harris & Muijs, 2005; Hulpia & Devos, 2009; Silins & Mulford, 2004). Mascall, Leithwood, Strauss and Sacks (2008) show that teachers' academic optimism is higher when leadership is distributed in "planful" ways, and Hulpia and Devos (2009) found teachers' organisational commitment to be higher when school leaders empowered teachers to partici-pate and when participative decision-making was practiced. It has also been noted that distributed leadership contributes to school improvement through the spreading of good practices and initiatives by teachers (Muijs & Harris, 2006). Distributed leadership, together with trust and cohesion, contribute to the development of change capacity in the organisation (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Also Hardy, Edwards Groves and Rönnerman (2012) highlight teacher leadership as something that facilitates school improvement. When following teachers and teacher leaders from different municipalities who had taken part in a professional development course, Hardy et al. concluded that practices of collaborative learning were fostered if the right conditions were created: time for teachers to work together, the empowerment of teachers to set the conditions for their own work, and supportive leaders at school and district level. Under the right conditions, practices of professional learning led to development of teacher leading practices for educational change. Teacher leaders used the com-petence, confidence and learning generated during the course to facilitate the learning of other teachers in their own schools. Hence, they stress the need for professional development for teacher leaders in order for them to take on lead-ership that promotes school improvement (Edwards Groves & Rönnerman, 2013).

Looking at more and less successful schools, Björkman (2008) concludes that leadership in the more successful schools is understood as part of the schools' internal capacity for school improvement. He further concludes that in the more successful schools, leadership is to a greater extent distributed to teacher teams, in order to generate a leadership practice of extended involve-ment and participation. Moreover, Björkman concludes that the distributed leadership practice has a sensemaking function. Internal collaboration and par-ticipation in leadership practice are useful tools for succeeding with improve-ment processes and natural tools for the principal to use in the improvement processes. In line with these results from Sweden, Norwegian researchers have also found leadership in successful schools to be distributed to teacher teams

characterised by collaboration, team efforts and a strong focus on the development of environments that are conducive to learning (Møller & Eggen, 2005; Møller et al., 2005).

Hallinger and Heck (2009) confirm the influence of distributed leadership on capacity for school improvement in their quantitative analysis, and conclude that distributed leadership is a key factor in school improvement processes. Distributed leadership has also been shown to have impact on the possibility of school improvement initiatives becoming sustainable in the organisation and thereby by extension having the potential to influence student outcomes (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). The relation between leadership and student outcomes is however difficult to verify and only a limited number of studies have tried to examine this relationship (see e.g. Leithwood & Janzi, 2000; Silins & Mulford, 2004). The results are thus limited, which is not surprising, since the direct influence of leadership on students' results is assumed to be somewhat weak (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Witziers, Bosker & Krüger, 2003). In the studies conducted by Leithwood and Janzi (2000) and by Silins and Mulford (2004), however, it was concluded that when leadership is distributed to teachers to a greater extent and the teachers are empowered in areas that they consider to be important, student engagement and outcomes are more likely to improve.

Challenges and Obstacles

Studies presenting positive results of distributed leadership practices are predominant. However, empirical studies have also identified challenges as well as obstacles when trying to distribute leadership more widely in the organisation (Leithwood et al., 2007). Harris (2014) summarises the challenges relating to time, culture, professional reluctance and the fear of getting it wrong. Teachers to whom leadership is distributed can have difficulties in taking on more functions. They also need to get support in order to develop the qualities necessary to becoming proficient in their leadership. Formal leadership can also be a barrier to the implementation of more distributed leadership practices (Hatcher, 2005). In hierarchical settings, principals can resist distribution out of a fear of losing control and power. Distributed leadership can then turn out to be a delegation that doesn't result in an increase in power. Wright's (2008) results from case studies demonstrate restriction in the use of distributed leadership in school organisations. Principals choose to distribute leadership to people that they know support them. In this way distributed leadership turns out to be a limitation of collective and democratic leadership, as a result of a lack of transparency in the decision-making processes. According to Wright, distributed leadership, when exclusively implemented in a 'top-down' approach, could be interpreted as misguided delegation or even coercion (Wright, 2008, p. 11). These can be argued to be 'false' forms of distributed leadership, in which the

intention is not to disperse leadership to give teachers power, but for formal leaders to improve their chances of implementing the changes they have planned. Wright also noted that principals use distributed leadership as a way of dealing with their increased workload. This can in one way be seen as positive as it might enable principals to take part in and contribute to the improvement of practice. However, it can also be a barrier to teacher leaders making room for more long-term improvement work. Blossing (2013), who studied the work of change agents in three municipalities, also identified a focus on daily work, closely connected to the principal, although the intention when introducing change agents was to support long-term school improvement.

To clarify, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) emphasise that distributed leadership should not automatically be seen as 'good leadership' or leadership that is supportive of capacity building. If leadership is distributed to teachers without qualifications, distributed leadership will rarely result in shared knowledge, professionalism and improved organisational capacity. The same applies if leadership is distributed without power. Hence, I conclude that it is not enough to study the structural arrangements of distributed leadership practices in school organisations; focus also needs to be placed on how distributed leadership is interpreted and understood and thus how it turns out in practice.

Organisation of Teachers in Teams

Historically, teachers as professionals have exercised a high degree of autonomy. In 1975, when Lortie conducted his comprehensive study of teachers in the USA, he came to the conclusion that teachers were conservative and that teachers' work was characterised by individualism. Teachers' conservatism resulted in ignorance of or redefinition of policies and national initiatives designed to improve teacher practice. As a result numerous school reforms failed to reach the classroom level (Cuban, 1993; Elmore, 1996; Sarason, 1990). When Rosenholtz (1989) took an organisational perspective on teachers' work, she also identified individualism but concluded that teachers' attitudes and behaviours were a result of the social organisation of the workplace. When collaborative working structures were present, they positively contributed to teachers' experiences of their job as well as to school improvement.

In relation to these early studies of teachers' work, Fullan (1991) proposed sensemaking, professional learning and collaborative cultures as solutions that could lead to future development and educational improvement. This approach to teachers' professional practice became the dominant one in the 1990s not least because of the introduction of the concept of 'learning organisations'. Sweden can however be considered to be a forerunner in this aspect. As early as the 1970s and 1980s, governmental documents (Prop. 1975/76:39,

Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980) and local school improvement initiatives (Miles & Ekholm, 1985) were based on the idea that collaborative working structures and shared responsibility could contribute to improvement. The idea was that the professionals, who knew the core work and the local conditions, were to take responsibility for the development of the professional knowledge base and suggest directions for improvement at local level. This development of teacher professionalism to also include collaboration, as well as a wider responsibility for improvement connected to the school as an organisation, has been described as extended professionalism, in contrast to the restricted professionalism defined by teachers' individualism and conservatism (Berg, 2003).

The intention presented in the SIA report (Prop. 1975/76:39; SOU 1974:53) to allow teachers to jointly take responsibility and improve practice on the basis of needs identified in the local organisation, contributed to the implementation of teacher teams and leadership positions for teachers in Swedish schools in the 1980s (Ahlstrand, 1995; Granström, 1990; Kallós, 1985). However, research during the 1980s and the 1990s shows that although collaboration in teams was advocated, individualism in teachers' work still prevailed (Lander, 1985; Sandström & Ekholm, 1984), even though exceptions could be found, mostly among teachers teaching the lower school levels (Ekholm, Fransson & Lander, 1987). Research shows that the introduction of collaborative structures, such as teacher teams, did not result in improvement of the pedagogical practice among teachers. Instead work in teacher teams was in most cases concentrated on administrative and organisational issues (Ahlstrand, 1995; Blossing, 2000; Gannerud & Rönnerman, 2007; Gustafsson, 1999; Ohlsson, 2004). This resulted in teachers not being challenged by their colleagues and a lack of joint development in relation to classroom work and to student learning. However, in the long run changes have taken place. We can conclude that the increased focus on improvement at local level has led to an increase in variation in structural arrangements in schools. Blossing and Ekholm (2008), after studying school improvement initiatives in 35 schools over a 20-year period, claim that organising teachers into teams had over time increased the schools' capacity to improve on an organisational level, although it had not to the same extent led to learning on a teacher and classroom level, showing that an introduction of collaborative structures alone has little potential to build capacity for school improvement and that new structures in schools cannot automatically be expected to be used as intended.

The intention with the introduction of teacher teams was that a new working culture would evolve in schools and improve collaboration and capacity building. However, Hargreaves (1994) argues that it is not collaboration in general but a more pervasive or critical form of collaboration, involving shared

responsibility for the educational practice and shared decision-making, that creates conditions for school improvement to take place. Thus Hargreaves emphasises that culture is a key factor in capacity building and distinguishes four different forms of school cultures: 'collaborative culture', 'contrived collegiality', 'individualism' and 'balkanization'. In a collaborative culture, according to Hargreaves, teachers work together voluntarily and spontaneously with a development-oriented focus conducive to school improvement. However, Hargreaves asserts that this kind of culture is not common, which affects the opportunities for successful school improvement to take place in schools. Both Staessens (1993) and Nias (1998) came to similar conclusions when analysing school culture. In the study of improvement initiatives in 35 schools over a 20-year period, Blossing (2004) also found differences between the schools that were related to differences in improvement cultures. Blossing found the dominating culture to be a 'systematic goal- and result-oriented' culture, with challenging leadership from the school leader and a distributed leadership practice with leadership positions for teachers that were oriented towards school improvement. However, 'the passive organisational oriented' culture was nearly as common. In these schools, formal leaders were more passive and responsive to the current teacher culture and teachers were more reluctant to be organised into teacher teams, resulting in a lack of capacity for school improvement.

Leadership in Teacher Teams

Few studies within the Swedish context put focus on leadership in teacher teams (e.g. Björkman, 2008; Ohlsson, 2004; Tillberg, 2003). In many cases leadership in teacher teams can be conceptualised as co-produced by the teachers (Ludvigsson, 2009; Møller & Eggen, 2005). However, specific leadership positions for teachers also exist, of which the teacher team leader position can be considered the most established. With the increase in organisational structures intended to support capacity building for school improvement, the range of leadership positions, in relation to content, assignments and title, has increased (Skolinspektionen, 2012). Process leaders, development leaders, learning leaders and first teachers are some examples. So far, only a limited number of studies have drawn attention to these positions in the Swedish context (e.g. Alvunger, 2014; Blossing, 2013; Olin et al., 2014; Rönnerman & Olin, 2013).

A common result within the existing research is that teacher leader positions are in many cases perceived as unclear both in terms of responsibility and authority (Ohlsson, 2004; Skolinspektionen, 2012). This gives rise to a problematic situation for teacher leaders, as they do not know what is expected of them and how to act in relation to the teachers. The unclearness in terms of responsibility and authority makes it difficult for teacher leaders to push the work forward. Rather they tend to restrict themselves to administrative duties and as a result

they end up being no more than an informational channel between the principal and the teachers (Björkman, 2008; Skolinspektionen, 2012). This seems to be a common scenario, whether the assignment is generally or more specifically oriented. Blossing (2013) and later Olin et al. (2014) found that leadership positions such as change agents and process leaders, positions specifically oriented towards school improvement, to some extent also become oriented towards functions connected to the operative work organisation rather than the development organisation. Blossing (2013), who has developed a model with four ideal roles of the change agent, concludes that *the assistant* and *the guide* connected to the operative work organisation are more common compared to *the project leader* and *the organisation developer* connected to the development organisation. Olin et al. (2014) give a similar picture for process leaders. The orientation of the role of the change agents and process leaders was shown to be dependent on the degree of strategic planning in the municipality, as well as how the change agents and the process leaders understood the aims of their positions, but most importantly how other teachers and the formal leader at local school level perceived these positions. Thus aspects of school culture, hierarchy and power relations became prominent.

Ohlsson (2004) argues that in more hierarchical organisations, there is a risk of teacher team leadership being perceived as a middle position, between the formal school leader and the teachers, where the task of the teacher leaders is to push through the decisions of the formal leader. In other schools formal leaders try to counteract this perception by arranging formal meetings for teacher leaders so as to guarantee that everybody's voice is heard and promote a more democratic leadership approach (Woods, 2004). Björkman (2008) comes to the conclusion that in more successful schools, leadership distributed to teacher teams is derived from a clear, well-communicated and common vision from the principal that is accepted by the teachers. This is an important precondition for a leadership practice that incorporates extended involvement and participation. In successful schools, teacher leaders function as preservers of a common vision. Björkman also concludes that in successful schools, teacher leadership assignments are alternated between teachers in the teams and principals have a clearly stated goal of spreading leadership practice to the entire staff in order for all teachers to become acquainted with it.

Additionally, Björkman (2008) emphasises the importance of professional training for teacher leaders in order for them to fulfil their assignment and allow for capacity building and school improvement, something that is also highlighted in the international literature (e.g. Muijs & Harris, 2007; Poekert, 2012; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). However, training for teacher leaders is something that is treated very differently in different schools. Lack of relevant training for the

assignment, together with lack of time for preparation and an unclear context to work in, can further contribute to the difficulty of distributing leadership to teachers in practice (Skolinspektionen, 2012). Rönnerman and Olin (2013) conclude that preschool teachers who have taken courses in action research, and thus have acquired skills for working with their colleagues, contribute to capacity building for improvement in their organisations, in particular when they are backed up by favourable conditions within their teacher teams. Rönnerman and Olin further stress the importance of dialogues between teachers and between leaders at different levels, thus emphasising the importance of both teachers and leaders in the organisation having a common understanding of teacher leadership and a perception of school improvement as a shared responsibility.

Collective Learning and Capacity Building in Teacher Teams

According to Ohlsson (2004) one of the reasons for organising teachers into teams relates to the idea of reflective dialogues as a basis for collective learning and capacity building. It is well documented that learning is an important feature of organisational processes that build capacity for school improvement (e.g. Björn, Ekman Philips & Svensson, 2002; Leithwood, Leonard & Sharratt, 1998; Mulford & Silins, 2010) and collective learning in particular is something that appeals to both practitioners and researchers.

In the beginning of the 2000s, Scherp (Scherp, 2002; Scherp & Scherp, 2007) used a learning organisational perspective when studying schools and found that teacher teams are considered by teachers to be an important factor in creating learning environments for teachers that can build capacity for improvement in the organisation. Moreover, for learning to take place, leadership within the organisation was highlighted as important. Teachers request participating school leaders who clearly communicate a pedagogical direction in order to create shared meaning in the instructional work as well as in the improvement work. In the schools that Scherp studied, school management groups including teachers were in some cases present, but in observations he noted that the content in these groups to a greater extent centred around *what to do* compared to *what have we learned from this*, which can be considered as central from a learning perspective (Scherp, 2002). Blossing and Ertesvåg (2011) also stress the importance of leadership in teacher teams in relation to a learning perspective and argue that leadership is a prerequisite for upholding mutual engagement and developing a shared repertoire in improvement work. In the absence of formal leadership, or if the formal leaders are lacking in competence, mutual engagement between colleagues that can contribute to the development of a shared repertoire and organisational capacity becomes difficult to establish.

Scherp and Thelin's (2004) results from particularly improvement-oriented schools show that it is primarily factors on the local school level that teachers

consider to contribute to an improvement-oriented environment. A problem-based school improvement culture and a leadership that challenges prevailing notions, creates good conditions for learning and deepens the understanding of the assignment, are considered to be important for a learning school organisation. Larsson (2004) also uses an organisational learning perspective when analysing the result of school improvement initiatives in four schools. His results show that a prerequisite for building capacity is when teachers' individual competences can be coordinated and integrated into organisational competence. For this to be the case Larsson stresses the importance of seeing improvement initiatives as a common task. When teachers have the idea that school improvement is accomplished through individual professional development, it becomes difficult to generating organisational learning and reach the intended goals (Larsson, 2004; Larsson, Berglund & Löwstedt, 2007). Moreover, especially favourable conditions for improvement are created when teachers see each other in action, as this transparency with regard to each teacher's actions creates opportunities for both learning and monitoring of teaching.

Based on analysis of two improvement projects in Norway, Blossing and Ertesvåg (2011) also stress that failure of school improvement initiatives is dependent on both teachers and principals having an "individual learning belief". An individual learning belief, they underline, in contrast to a social learning perspective, prevents school improvement initiatives from having an impact on the entire organisation. Lack of participation or voluntary participation together with low frequency of meetings in improvement processes, they argue, are signs of an individual learning belief. Blossing and Ertesvåg advocate a holistic view of the school as an organisation in order to build capacity for improvement and they stress teachers' collective learning as an important condition for school improvement. Collective learning in a collaborative culture has been linked by several researchers to the concept of 'professional learning communities' (PLC) (see e.g. Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997; Louis & Kruse, 1995; McGregor, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006; Stoll & Louis, 2007).

Professional Learning Communities

In the literature on capacity building and school improvement PLC is a central concept (see e.g. Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Harris & Jones, 2010; Stoll, 2010). Although the concept has no universal definition, many of the aspects used to describe PLC relate to Argyris and Schön's (1978, 1995) organisational learning and Senge's (1990) five disciplines for learning organisations. Achinstein (2002a) defines a professional learning community of teachers as 'a group of people across a school who are engaged in common work; share to a certain degree a set of values, norms, and orientations towards teaching, students, and schooling;

and operate collaboratively with structures that foster interdependence' (Achinstein, 2002a, pp. 421-422). Within research, PLC is argued to be an important contributor to capacity building and school improvement. Classroom motivation, work satisfaction and collective responsibility for student learning are considered to increase when PLC are established (Harris & Jones, 2010; Little, 2002; Sigurðardóttir, 2010).

Several researchers using the concept of PLC refer to Wenger's (1998) social learning theory and the concept of 'community of practice' (Bezzina & Testa, 2005; Busher, Hammersley-Fletcher & Turner, 2007; Harris & Jones, 2010; Klar, 2012; Stoll et al., 2006). From Wenger's (1998, 2000) point of view, learning takes place in communities of practice that arise spontaneously both within and outside organisations. According to Wenger, participation in communities of practice is essential to our learning and it is within these communities that human beings are capable of developing meaningful knowledge. Communities of practice are built up by 'groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis' (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). Moreover, Wenger (2000) underlines that communities of practice are dependent on the internal leadership, stressing the importance of multiple forms of leadership that can be confined to a few people or widely distributed. Leaders play a critical role in the development of the community as they provide the resources for negotiating meaning across perspectives. As brokers, leaders are able to make connections across communities of practice and thus create new meanings. As Wenger concludes, it is the process of negotiation of meaning that is central to the participation in communities of practice.

The idea of PLC has become a prominent image for schools to strive for in relation to school improvement. But similarly to the concept of distributed leadership, PLC has been used normatively and argued to be 'the solution to many of our schools' problems' (Achinstein, 2002b, p. 6). By using PLC as a multi-purpose concept, no attention is given to conditions in the local context. In relation to communities of practice, Wenger emphasises that communities of practice are not good in and of themselves. Learning in communities of practices is directed by the members and can thus be both in line with and in contrast to the goals of the organisation. Likewise PLC can orient its professional interaction towards the conservation of existing practice rather than towards challenging this practice, thereby preventing school improvement processes. If capacity building and school improvement are to be supported, the level of learning energy, the depth of social capital and the degree of self-awareness must work together to foster a positive learning involving innovation and experimentation (Bryk, Camburn & Louis, 1999).

Principals' Pedagogical Leadership

Swedish principals have, since the SIA report (Prop. 1975/76:39; SOU 1974:53) in the 1970s, been responsible for organising the internal work of the school so that all students are provided with good conditions for learning. Further, it has been stated that principals should be pedagogical leaders, responsible for developing the school and the teachers. Arranging for and taking active part in distributed leadership practices contributing to capacity building can be considered part of principals' pedagogical leadership. Pedagogical leadership as an aspect of principal leadership has been increasingly emphasised and gradually become the most important task of principalship (Nestor, 1993; Utbildningsdepartementet, 2001).

Pedagogical leadership is a multidimensional and ambiguous concept with no clear definition. Nestor (1993) sees pedagogical leadership as being hard to pin down to a specific task and defines it as 'the influence a school leader exercises in relation to the teachers through various actions, which aims to influence them to develop teaching in accordance with the objectives and guidelines set out in the Educational Act and the curriculum' (p. 183, [my translation]). Ärlestig and Törnsén (2014, p. 858) outline a model of pedagogical leadership consisting of three interrelated perspectives related to process-steering, goal-steering and result-steering. Pedagogical leadership, they argue initially, involves working with teacher capacity, and the instructional core of schooling taking place in the classroom. Secondly, pedagogical leadership is about setting directions, expressing high expectations, and encouraging and creating prerequisites for collaboration and communication of teacher activities. Thirdly, pedagogical leadership is related to student performance and school results. As student learning is the primary objective of pedagogical and instructional learning, Törnsén and Ärlestig (2014) advocate a leadership focus where both teachers and principals are learning.

As a concept, pedagogical leadership is used primarily in the Nordic countries. Comparing it to international concepts, pedagogical leadership has similarities with instructional leadership, democratic leadership and other definitions of collegial leadership practices (Salo, Nylund & Stjernstrøm, 2015; Sinnema & Robinson, 2007). Initially, instructional leadership was used to mean a direct leadership of a strong, hands-on leader who supervised teachers in the classroom. Over time, the definition of instructional leadership has broadened to include leadership practices aimed at enhancing teachers' professional learning and growth, as well as creating conditions for successful teaching practices (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Thus, definitions of instructional leadership and pedagogical leadership have converged.

Although the importance of a pedagogical leadership that involves teaching and learning and builds capacity for improvement is well documented, it has to a large degree been overlooked by principals and seen as part of the teachers' responsibility. Ekholm et al. (2000), as well as national evaluations (Skolinspektionen, 2012), show that principals, according to the teachers, deal with more general issues and do not generally undertake pedagogical initiatives to encourage educational work. Ärlestig (2008) concludes that it is rare that principals take part in teacher teams to talk about teaching and learning issues or conduct classroom visits in order to support teachers' pedagogical work and professional development. According to national evaluations, principals describe their pedagogical leadership as indirect and visible through the way they organise the school, create a common culture and follow up the educational practice through evaluations and quality reports (Skolinspektionen, 2010, 2012). Thus, principals' pedagogical leadership can be considered to be disconnected from classroom practices and from leadership practices in teacher teams. This can be seen as a result of a traditional school culture built on teachers' autonomy and an agreement between teachers and school leaders that principals should not interfere in teaching issues. Berg (1995) calls this 'an invisible contract' between teachers and principals, a phenomenon that also seems to prevail in other cultures (e.g. Graczewski, Knudson & Holtzman, 2009; Johansson & Bredeson, 2011). Even though school culture and norms about what to do and not to do as a principal seem to be changing, Leo (2014) concludes that there is still a gap between norms and actions. Principals want to be close to the pedagogical practice, but they aren't. One reason for not taking part in the pedagogical practice in the classrooms, principals argue, is lack of time, as they have to prioritise other tasks. Another reason can be that they lack knowledge about and experience of working with the core processes of teaching and learning, and thus do not know what to look for or how to respond to the teachers, for example when doing classroom observations (Svedberg, 2000; Ärlestig & Törnsén, 2014).

Research focusing on successful schools has concluded that successful principals devote much more of their time to issues that can be related to pedagogical or instructional leadership (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Höög & Johansson, 2014; Törnsén, 2009). Four areas of pedagogical leadership have been identified as salient for successful principals: setting directions, developing people, designing the organisation, and managing the teaching and learning programme. Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) also emphasise the importance of principals focusing on student and teacher learning for improvement and increased student outcomes, and they identified five aspects of instructional leadership of particular importance: (1) establishing goals and expectations; (2) using resources strategically; (3) planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the

curriculum; (4) ensuring an orderly and supportive environment, and finally and most importantly 5) promoting and participating in teacher learning and development. Of these, principals participating in teacher learning and development, as co-learners in informal and formal contexts, had the highest impact on student outcomes. Törnsén and Ärlestig (2014) argue that by conducting classroom observations and giving feedback to the teachers, principals have the opportunity to support, challenge and develop individual teachers and the entire teaching staff. Classroom observations together with dialogue and communication about the core processes of teaching and learning, they argue, have the potential to build capacity for improvement in the organisation that can actually have an impact on teaching practices in the classrooms. From a distributed perspective leadership practice is in the foreground. However, principals, like other leaders, are part of leadership practice and what functions and routines they focus on in their leadership are aspects that contribute to the interactions between leaders and followers and thus to the quality of leadership practice.

Increased Responsibility for Improvement and Extended Professionalism

As part of neoliberal governance, the expectations on teacher and school leaders to take extended responsibility for improvement at local level have further increased (Lundahl, 2002b, 2005). Changes in governance have, according to several researchers, resulted in a significant change in teachers' and school leaders' professionalism (e.g. Ball, 2003; Holm & Lundström, 2011; Jarl, 1013; Mausethagen, 2013).

For teachers this has meant that they are expected to collaborate, to be flexible and to learn continuously. Additionally, teachers are expected to constantly evaluate their own practice and develop their own solutions for how to improve practice based on analysis of data and scientific results (Carlgren & Hörnqvist, 1999). It can also be argued that teachers' responsibilities have been extended, although optionally, to include leadership assignments in which teachers are expected to lead their colleagues in order to jointly improve their practice. Leadership positions connected to teacher teams, professional development groups and most recently first teacher assignments are increasingly common. When taking a closer look at teachers' work conditions within the Swedish context, research suggests that it is difficult for teachers to actually keep up with the increased expectations. The delegation of responsibility for improvement to teachers and teacher teams has resulted in an increased workload for teachers, which together with a lack of support structures, communication and professional development has made it more difficult for teachers to take responsibility for improvement at local level. It has also been suggested that the intense focus

on improvement based on measurable results, national tests and best practices has changed the conditions for the teaching profession (e.g. Ball, 2003; Levinsson, 2013; Rye Ramberg, 2014).

Changes in governance have also resulted in changes in the conditions for principals. The workload for school leaders in Sweden as well in other countries has increased and school leaders have taken a role that has more focus on efficiency and monitoring (e.g. Gewirtz & Ball, 2000; Moos, 2009; Møller, 2009b). This has also resulted in a pressure to monitor teachers' work more closely, often in an indirect manner, through target setting and performance measurements, a development that brings changes to leadership practice and to the relations between principals and teachers. Pressure to monitor is likely to restrict the opportunities for collaboration and mutual learning, which are important aspects of capacity building for local school improvement.

The Educational Act and the national curriculum give principals many opportunities to make their own decisions about how to improve the internal organisation of their schools. However, principals can be considered to be caught in a cross-pressure of different demands from different stakeholders. Ärlestig (2014) describes the principals' situation as a power struggle between different actors, such as authorities, local school providers, teachers and parents, about who is the most qualified to make decisions about the improvement of the school. On a general level, this scenario can be understood as a competition between different logics: the bureaucracy, the profession and the market (Freidson, 2001). Holm and Lundström (2011) stress that the logic of the market is more and more of a reality for principals and something that puts great pressure on principals to become more economic and service-oriented, but also reduces the principals' discretionary power. Competition can be understood as an additional element that, besides intensifying the workload of principals, hinders long-term planning and collaboration between schools, contradicts notions of professional values and quality and thus counteracts capacity building.

Changes in teachers' and principals' professionalism can be related to Julia Evetts' (2009a, 2011) two different and contrasting ideal typical forms of professionalism in knowledge-based work in contemporary societies: organisational professionalism and occupational professionalism. Organisational professionalism incorporates rational-legal forms of authority, standardised work procedures and practices, hierarchical structures of responsibility and decision-making and external forms of regulation and control. In contrast, occupational professionalism incorporates collegial authority and a trustful relation between employers and employees as well as between employees and clients. This authority is based on practitioners' autonomy and discretionary judgements. Codes of professional

ethics monitored by the practitioners themselves and professional institutions are the basis for accountability within occupational professionalism.

Requirements for standardised practices, output measures and managerial demands for quality control, all prominent within the educational setting, have been expanding organisational professionalism, which can be seen as a threat to professionalism as an occupational value and expert judgement. However, Evetts (2011) argues that the two forms of professionalism might not always be mutually exclusive but could also be mutually reinforcing.

> … discussions among specialists, knowledge and expertise formation and its maintenance all improve the conduct of professional work and its practice while being of benefit to both practitioners and their clients (p. 416).

The organisational logic of professionalism, with its external forms of regulation, could extend transparency and control of more extreme professional power. At a micro-level it can be used as a strategy to keep control of the work of the practitioners within organisations. Distributing leadership more widely in local organisations can, in relation to Evetts' argument, be perceived as an expression of both occupational and organisational professionalism depending on the form of accountability (professional or managerial) that characterises leadership practice (Møller, 2009a).

Both national and international research report that principals struggle with the different logics and their own sense of what it implies to be a professional school leader (Uljens et al., 2013). Although there is a strong focus on national tests results, quality reports and external inspections, it still seems that there are opportunities for school leaders to pay less attention to external expectations and instead focus on building capacity for improvement by sustaining trust and loyalty within the local school organisation (Moos & Møller, 2003). This has also turned out to be a common approach to school leadership in more successful schools (Höög, Johansson & Olofsson, 2009; Møller et al., 2005).

Comparing Nordic principals with principals in Anglo-Saxon countries, Moos, Johansson and Skedsmo (2013) conclude that Nordic school leaders, when having to deal with external expectations, prioritised developing internal capacity to a greater extent and in so doing opened up for distributed leadership practices where teachers and middle leaders can take part in decisions and also direct the work. Principals in the UK and USA on the other hand had a much stronger tendency to take command, relying on their capacity as the formal leader when trying to implement changes. The differences in response between Nordic school leaders and their Anglo-Saxon counterparts can be related to differences in history. The Nordic welfare state model, with a democratic and reflective leadership, allowing teachers to take part in distributed leadership

practices, has been the guiding principle for school leadership within the Nordic countries (Moos et al., 2004).

Møller (2002) describes democratic and reflective leadership as a leadership orientation that implies 'power-with' rather than 'power-over' in the relation between teachers and principals. Although principals have formal power, they very often build teams around them and seldom make decisions without discussing them with teacher representatives, middle leaders, administrative leaders, development leaders etc. As Moos (2013) concludes 'most school leaders know from experience that it is very difficult to have teachers change practice, if they have no ownership of the development' (p. 222). It is the principal who has the formal decision-making power, but in practice, much of the power lies with teacher colleagues and in teacher teams. Similarly both Ludvigsson (2009) and Nordzell (2007) argue that the 'strong' school leader with exclusive control over the school is an illusion. School leadership is rather co-produced and in practice both teachers and school leaders can be in control.

Concluding Reflections

To sum up, in policy documents but also in some research, distributed leadership has been presented as a major solution to problems relating to school leadership. However, as previous research suggests, distributed leadership in itself is not a good or a bad thing. Several researchers have nevertheless concluded that under the right conditions, distributed leadership can build internal capacity for local school improvement, as it empowers teachers, increases collaboration and contributes to a collective learning environment. However, previous research has also presented challenges and indicates that how and for what purpose leadership is distributed has an influence on how it is expressed (Harris, 2012). This raises several questions and can thus be seen as a starting point in finding out more about how distributed leadership is constructed at local school level.

The Swedish school context has a history of local responsibility for school improvement and distributed leadership in local schools. However, Swedish research in the field has shown that the introduction of collaborative structures and leadership positions for teachers has not generated collaborative learning among teachers and improved student outcomes to the extent that might have been expected. The extended responsibility for improvement at local level as part of neoliberal governance has resulted in increased demands for results together with new working conditions for principals and teachers (Lundahl, 2002a; 2002b). Hence, as a result of the desire to live up to expectations, Swedish schools as well as schools in the rest of the Western world are at risk of embracing new concepts and structures without taking the local context into account (Moos et al., 2004). It therefore seems reasonable to claim that we need

to broaden our knowledge about how teachers and school leaders understand and make sense of distributed leadership arrangements, such as new structures and leadership positions that have been introduced to increase collaboration, shared decision-making and responsibility, and also to find out more about how different arrangements relate to capacity building and local school improvement. With this study I intend to contribute to this knowledge base and to the wider discussion of leadership within the educational field by examining how distributed leadership is constructed in local schools within the Swedish context.

4
Conducting the Study

In this section I present the research methods used in the study, together with reflections about the research process and ethical considerations.

This study has been conducted with qualitative research methods (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2010). In leadership studies the use of quantitative methods dominates (Bryman, 2004). Research about school leadership is no exception. However, in Sweden the use of qualitative methods when studying leadership in schools is well established (see e.g. Berg, 1995; Brüde-Sundin, 2007; Ludvigsson, 2009; Svedberg, 2000; Tillberg, 2003), as is the use of qualitative methods in the field of school improvement (see e.g. Blossing, 2000; Larsson, 2004; Olin, 2009). I understand leadership as a process, constructed through social interaction between different actors, artefacts and structures, and situated in practice (Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Ogawa and Bossert, 1995; Spillane, 2006). In order to study leadership through this perspective, focusing leadership on the level of the school, as well as attempting to understand the individual actors' (or groups of actors) perception of leadership practices, the research has been inspired by a case study approach (Cohen et al., 2010).

Case Study

The case study is used as research method when complex social phenomena are to be understood in depth and has as one of its advantages that it investigates contemporary phenomena within their real-life context (Yin, 2009). Researchers use case studies when they want to explore, gain knowledge about and come to understand how people experience events, human relationships and other factors in real life. As my interest and intention is to examine how distributed leadership is constructed in real life in local schools, I find the case study to be a suitable method. Flyvbjerg (2011) stresses that the advantage of the case study is that 'it can "close-in" on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice' (p. 309). It is the details, richness, completeness and within-case variance that are the strength of case studies. Accord-

ing to Yin (2009), the use of case studies is preferable when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are unclear. In case studies, the context is an important determinant of both causes and effects. Case studies strive to illustrate what it is like to be in a particular situation by giving detailed descriptions. According to Geertz (1973), the function of case studies is to provide 'thick descriptions' of participants' lived experiences of thoughts and feelings about a situation. In order to do this, I have given considerable room to descriptions in all four papers and also enriched the descriptions with direct quotations. I have used a multiple-case design (Yin, 2009) with three schools included. Each school is seen as a specific case consisting of teachers and leaders in a school context. Stake (2005) identifies a case as a unit and as a bounded integrated system in which '[i]t is common to recognise that certain features are within the system, within the boundaries of the case, and other features outside' (Stake, 2005, p. 444). I attempt to trace the interactions between the features within each particular case in order to understand it. For this study, the organisation of distributed leadership and the teachers' and principals' understanding of distributed leadership and its relation to capacity building and school improvement became the object of study for each of the cases. This case study can thus be argued to be instrumental (Stake, 2005), as the particular cases chosen are used to gain more insight into distributed leadership as an object of knowledge as well as to contribute to the field of distributed leadership and its influences on school improvement. By using a multiple-case study design, I hope that a better understanding and a richer theoretical description of the object of knowledge will be possible. A justification for this choice is provided by Peattie's (2001, p. 260) argument that dense case studies are more useful for practitioners and more interesting for social theory than both factual 'findings' and the high-level generalisations of theory.

Sampling of Case Schools

For the study I used information-oriented sampling. This was done with the intention of including schools with different arrangements of distributed leadership practices (Cohen et al., 2010; Yin, 2011). I sent a request for schools with distributed leadership, teacher leader positions and collaborative structures, such as teacher teams and school improvement teams, to a selection of school managers at municipal level. After follow-up discussions with school managers regarding the purpose of the study, I contacted six principals. Based on the principals' description and perception of their school and with respect to the differences in collaborative structure (for example, teacher team organisation and development organisation), leadership positions and school type, I selected three case schools. The three case schools chosen are all public compulsory schools, which allows the possibility of studying a variation in leadership prac-

tice in schools having the same policy documents to relate to and similar peda-gogical issues to handle. The schools are not situated in similar social contexts. I do not consider social context to be crucial to the internal arrangements that are possible. Rather it is the internal organisational arrangements that are the focus of the study, as well as how the schools use their 'room for action' to make their own organisational arrangements and how this is influenced by internal rules, norms and understandings. I will here give short descriptions of each of the three case schools.

The North School is a lower secondary school with students in grades 6 to 9 locat-ed in an urban area. The school has about 50 teachers and 430 students. One principal manages the school. The teachers are divided into subject groups and teacher teams led by teacher team leaders. Each teacher team includes teachers who teach different school subjects and who mainly teach the same group of students. The school organisation also includes a school management group that consists of the principal and the teacher team leaders. The teachers have been organised in teacher teams for the last 10 years and in subject groups since the school was established in the 1970s.

Figure 1. Organisation of the North School
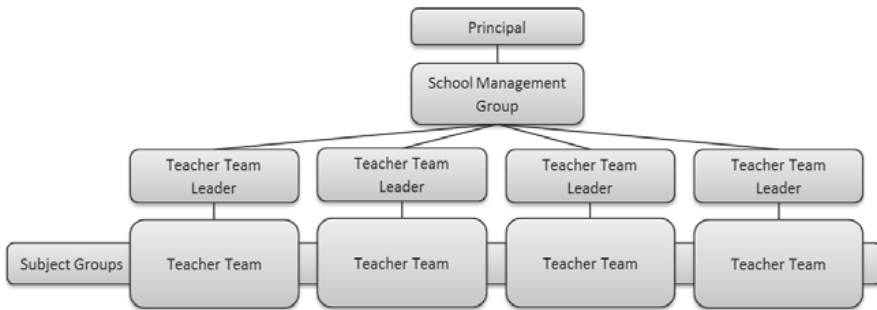
The South School is a compulsory school with classes from preschool to grade 9 located outside a small town adjacent to an urban area. All classes are mixed-age, with two grades in each class. The school has about 35 teachers and 410 students. A preschool and leisure centre for younger students are also included in the school unit. The school manager and two principals manage the school. The teachers are divided into subject groups and teacher teams, including teach-ers from preschool to grade 9. The school organisation has been present since the school opened in the 1990s. Since 2004, the school also has a school devel-opment group that consists of teachers, one of whom acts as development leader. The school manager, the principals and the development leader comprise the school management group.

Figure 2. Organisation of the South School
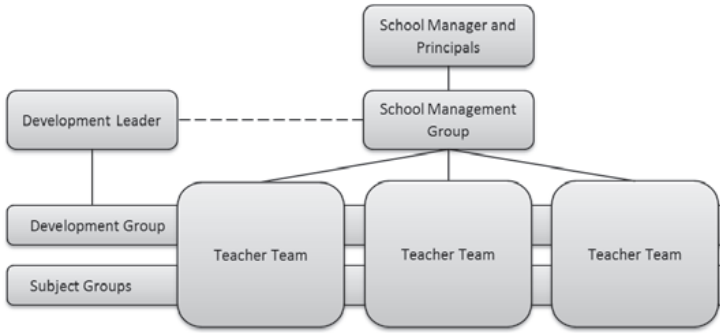
The West School is a primary and middle school with students from preschool to grade 6, located in an urban area. The school has about 35 teachers and 340 students. The school has one principal and one deputy principal. The school organisation includes three teacher teams led by teacher team leaders who are part of the school management group, together with the principal and the deputy principal. The school also has four learning groups led by teachers as learning leaders who work with improvement areas encompassing the school, including all teachers. The teachers have been organised in teacher teams since the early 1990s and in learning groups for the last two years.

Figure 3. Organisation of the West School
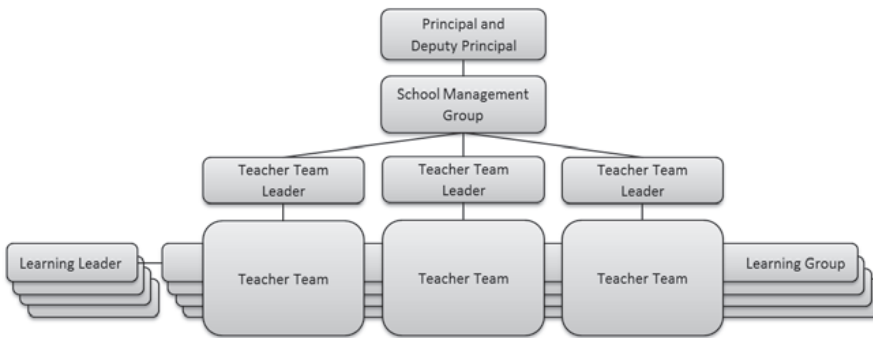
Qualitative Data

There are no specific methods associated with case studies. Instead the researcher is free to choose and combine both qualitative and quantitative methods when generating data. In order to describe and analyse the construction of distributed leadership at local school level, this study used two types of qualitative methods: observations and semi-structured interviews. Data was collected

over a period of one and a half years (February 2011–June 2012) with follow-up interviews in January 2014.

Observations

In the initial phase of the study, I conducted observations in each school. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that taking part in a specific context by observing is a good way of getting to know the local routines and power structures. It also gives the researcher a sense of what might come up in interviews later on. The observations were valuable for me in understanding the school contexts and situations that the teachers and principals highlighted later on in the interviews. My presence in the schools also allowed the principals and teachers to get to know me as a researcher and feel confident with me in later interviews. Observations also served additional purposes. By observing, ideas about questions specifically relevant to the local conditions in each case were generated. Observations together with interviews also made it possible for me to compare statements in the interviews with events observed. Merriam (1998) argues that this is a way to increase the internal validity in a case study. Finally, observations were also a complement to the interviews, as the interviewee may not always feel confident talking about all issues. For example teachers can experience limitations with regard to criticising principals or colleagues in leadership positions when being interviewed.

Altogether the case study included 53 direct observations in which I did not participate in the conversations but rather took a passive role as observer, which can be defined as a role in which the researcher 'observe[s] and interact[s] closely enough with members to establish an insider's identity without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership' (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 380). The observations were conducted in a variety of meetings held at each school including, for example, morning meetings, teacher team meetings, management group meetings and development meetings. Morning meetings were short meetings and lasted for about 20 minutes; the rest of the meetings lasted from about 50 minutes to 2.5 hours. When observing I focussed especially on meeting content, the leader's role and the relationship between the leader(s) and the teachers. The observations can be defined as semi-structured (Cohen et al., 2010), and unstructured field notes were taken. Observations in the North School and the South School were also digitally audio recorded. Summaries of the observations were written and significant parts were transcribed verbatim and used in the analysis.

Interviews

I used semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al., 2010; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) as the main data in the case study to get a deeper understanding about the

object of knowledge in the three schools. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), semi-structured interviews conducted with an open framework enable a two-way communication. Knowledge is thereby constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. I used interview guides (different variants for teachers, teacher leaders and principals) with an outline of topics to be covered and open questions. The vocabulary used in the interview guides was adapted to the specific concepts used for organisational structures and leadership positions in each school. As each interviewee is unique and as the researcher posed the questions differently in every interview, follow-up questions took different directions and this therefore also made each interview unique. The interview questions were intended to cover the following areas: leadership roles and relationships, attitudes and understandings of school improvement and finally school infrastructure. In the follow-up interviews with the school leaders, a fourth area was added which focused on the changes in the Swedish school policy context and its influences on the school's internal work and life. Examples of interview guides can be found in the Appendix.

In each school, all formal school leaders (school manager, principal, deputy-principal) and almost all teacher leaders (except for one teacher team leader and one learning leader in the West School) were interviewed. A sample of teachers in each school were also interviewed. The selection of teachers for the interviews was made with regard to gender, age, teaching group/teaching subject and teacher team. Altogether 45 interviews were conducted. To create a relationship of trust in the interview situation I contacted all informants in person and/or by mail to inform them about the study and to agree on a suitable time for the interview. The interviews were audio recorded but I also gave the respondents the opportunity to complement their interviews without being audio recorded at the end of the interview situation. The interviews were conducted in secluded rooms in each school. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Small words as 'mm' and 'aha' were excluded.

Table 1. Interviews and observations in the three case schools.[2]

School	Semi-structured individual interviews	Semi-structured group interviews	Direct observations
North School	1 principal (3 interviews) 4 teacher team leaders 8 teachers	1 teacher team leader	22
South School	1 school manager 1 school manager (new) 2 principals 1 development leader 9 teachers		17
West School	1 principal (3 interviews) 1 deputy principal 2 teacher team leaders 3 learning leaders 5 teachers	1 principal and deputy principal	14

Coding and Analysis

According to Cohen et al. (2010) 'qualitative data analysis involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data; in short, making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities' (p. 462). To organise, code and analyse the data, a software tool (Atlas.ti 6.2) for qualitative analysis was used. When analysing, I used a combination of deductive and inductive methods. The aim of the study defined the outer framework and the initial analytical concepts for the analysis. Gradually as the three research questions became clearer, additional analytical concepts were introduced that eventually extended the analysis.

In the analytical process I initially read the interviews and the observations several times in order to get a sense of the whole. This reading, in combination with literature in the field, generated new thoughts and reflective memos that formed the input for further analysis. After getting a sense of a whole, a more systematic approach was applied. The analysis followed the method described as content analysis (Cohen et al., 2010; Saldãna, 2009). In content analysis both pre-existing categories and emergent themes are used to interrogate texts and analyses and reduce them into summary form. Content analysis can be said to involve coding of each unit of meaning appearing in the qualitative material, construction of categories in which each unit of analysis can be placed, and thereafter comparing categories and making links between them in order to identify emergent patterns and more general codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, the coding process is completed as conclusions are drawn from the text and from relations between the different patterns that emerge (Cohen et al., 2010; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). In order to provide further insight into

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[2] The number of interviews and observations are different in the articles and the introductory part as all the empirical data are not used in each article and as observations and interviews were conducted over time.

the coding process, I will give some examples of the different steps in the coding process used to analyse the empirical material for the second paper and the third paper.

When analysing the empirical material for the second paper I started by coding what school leaders and teachers described as the content of teacher leadership. Initial codes such as: delegating tasks, communicating information, chairing meetings, challenging colleagues, inspiring, leading discussions, supporting development processes and supporting colleagues were generated. After this I started a new round of coding with a focus on how school leaders, teacher leaders and teachers expressed their understanding of teacher leadership, the different leadership positions and the relations between teacher leaders, teachers and school leaders. This round of coding generated codes such as: middle position, loyal to the school leaders, structured, mutual trust, courage, organisational resource and facilitator. Following that, I connected the two rounds of coding to the analysis instrument and the two perspectives of leadership, individual and systemic (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995) by using the different dimensions in the two perspectives as comprehensive codes. From this procedure different patterns of teacher leadership stood out and conclusions could be drawn about how differences in leadership perspective influenced the organisation and expression of teacher leadership and, in addition, teacher leaders' ability to influence the pedagogical development of their teacher colleagues.

In analysing the empirical material for the third paper, the theoretical framework of sensemaking (Weick, 1995, 2001) was the point of departure. However, in the first, inductive phase, I used descriptive codes and coded the material without making deeper interpretations. In the next round of coding the initial codes were grouped and more comprehensive codes generated. Some examples of these codes were: a challenging approach, resistance among colleagues, unclear direction and shared responsibility. Thereafter the coding process was connected to Weick's description of the different phases in sensemaking processes: pragmatic interpretations (resistance, hesitancy, openness), complexity reduction (holding on to what is known, renegotiation, concretisation) and establishment of coherent cognitive frameworks (established or new, individual or collective). In relation to these phases, different levels of progress towards an establishment of shared meaning and new frames for understanding were identified in the three schools and this was seen to be dependent on norms and values, interactions between school leaders and teachers, supportive artefacts and teacher leaders' role as 'change poets'.

Since this study includes three cases, the within-case analyses were followed by cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). With cross-case analysis the researcher can make abstractions across the cases in order to build general ex-

planations that can fit the individual cases despite their being different with regard to detail (Yin, 2009). Miles and Huberman (1994) state that cross-case analysis can generate 'more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations' (p. 172) but underline that cross-case analysis is tricky. Ultimately, Merriam (1998) concludes that cross-case analysis, in the same way as within-case analysis, can result in analysis on different levels and thereby can also result in simple but unified descriptions across cases. My intention with the cross-case analysis was not to generate generalised conclusions beyond the case study but rather to highlight similarities and differences between the cases in order to deepen understandings and explanations, in order to strengthen identified justifications for the overall conclusions within the case study.

Validity and Reliability

Research must be trustworthy. If it is not, it becomes fiction and thereby loses its utility (Morse et al., 2002). Firstly, to ensure validity and reliability, qualitative research has to be conducted in an ethical manner (Merriam, 1998). In addition to this, the researcher can improve validity and reliability by undertaking a number of actions during the research process. Below I present what I have done to increase the validity and reliability of the present study.

Internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality (Cohen et al., 2010; Merriam, 1998). One way to enhance the internal validity is by using triangulation in which multiple sources of data are used. This study combines observations and interviews. By doing this it becomes possible to examine the relationship between what was said by the participants in the interviews and what was done and could be detected in the observations in relation to the object of knowledge. Further, to enhance internal validity in a study, Merriam (1998) suggests long-term observations, member checks, peer examination, participatory research and clarification of the researcher's assumptions. Apart from method triangulation, each school was studied over a half year, which can be considered a relatively long time. Each school was also revisited after a period of time for follow-up conversations, in order to give the participants the opportunity to comment on the results. The follow-up meetings were also an opportunity for me to give feedback on the schools' work and highlight strengths and opportunities for development. In the West School this was done at a workplace meeting and in the North School and the South School at a management team meeting. Moreover, the aim of the study was made clear to all participants at the outset of the study. It should however be noted that although increasing the internal validity, these measures should not be understood as allowing the study to capture the 'real world' (Kvale, 1989). As Cohen et al. (2010) stress, the researcher is always part of the world being researched and therefore cannot be completely objective. For this reason, Cohen et al. (2010)

underline reflexivity as an important aspect of validity. Researchers bring their own biographies to the research situation and should acknowledge their own selves in the research, seeking to understand how they come to influence the research. As it is impossible to eliminate the "researcher effect", which results from the researcher being part of the world that is researched, a highly reflexive researcher, who is aware of his or her influence, is preferred. This has also been my intention in the study. To live up to this I have for example made myself aware of the fact that my previous experiences from the field made it easy for me to familiarise myself with school leaders and teachers and that I had to think about this in relation to my role as researcher. This became evident, for example, in the interviews. When the respondents felt that I was familiar with the school context they took for granted that I understood how they thought and what they meant and now and then ended their half-spoken arguments with 'you know'. In order to better understand the perspective of the respondent rather than make interpretations based on my prior understandings of how things might be, I kept asking new questions to make the respondents use their own words and express their own understandings. Kvale (2007) further underlines that validity does not belong to a separate step of an investigation but rather permeates all parts of the research process and 'rests on the quality of the researchers' craftsmanship throughout the investigation' (p. 123).

External validity is connected to the possibility of making generalisations from results found in one study and applying them to other situations (Merriam, 1998). According to Yin (2009), generalisations in case studies imply analytical generalisations, to develop and generate theories, and not statistical generalisations. My intention in this study has been to do this, as well as to contribute to an expansion of the empirical knowledge in the field of distributed leadership. Although the results cannot be assumed to apply to schools in general, the multi-case study design, in comparison to a single-case design, gives a wider illumination of the research objective. Hence, results can contribute important knowledge to the field, something that has been lacking and also called for by other researchers. From the presented results it is up to the readers to make their own judgements about whether the results can be applied in their own context (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009).

Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated (Merriam, 1998). As case studies are conducted in real life, reliability is problematic in the sense that a single reality available to be studied for a second time does not exist. Human behaviour is never static. Instead reliability in case studies is more about whether the researcher's results are consistent with what actually occurred in the natural setting under research (Cohen et al., 2010; Merriam, 1998). It has been my intention to fulfil this.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics in qualitative research is of great importance both for the credibility of the result and for credibility in relation to the people participating in the study. Stake (2005) expresses it as follows: 'Qualitative researchers are guests in the private space of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict' (p. 459). The researcher has a responsibility towards the informants, to inform them about the ethical considerations guiding the study and to establish a trustful relationship with them (Silverman, 2010). The Swedish Research Council has published guidelines for research in humanities and social science (Vetenskapsrådet, 1990) as well as more general guidelines targeting all research fields (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011). Four main requirements are put forward in the ethical guidelines addressing humanities and social science: *information request, participant approval, confidentiality and the rights to make use of information*. I have carefully considered these requirements when conducting this study.

The first requirement stated by the Swedish Research Council underlines that the researcher should inform the participants concerning the purpose of the research and the conditions for participation. I first contacted the schools by means of an email addressed to the principal. In an attached electronic letter I presented the research project and myself. In the next step, a personal meeting with the principal or principals in each school was set up, in which I presented the intentions and the design of the research project in more depth. After the presentation, the principals were given the opportunity to discuss the research project, and their potential participation in it, with their school management groups and with their teachers, before they confirmed their schools' participation in the project. With this arrangement the principals became gatekeepers, giving access to their school (Cohen et al., 2010). To make sure that the teachers were informed about the research project, I started my attendance in each school with a presentation for all teaching staff about the research project and myself.

The second requirement states that the researcher must obtain participant approval from all those taking part in the study. This was done several times during the study, as the research design included both observations in different group meetings as well as interviews. Each time I attended a new group, the research project was introduced and the participants were given the opportunity to agree to participate as well as to be audio recorded. I informed the participants that participation was voluntarily and that they had the right to withdraw whenever they wanted. The people taking part in the individual interviews were also given extended written information about their participation, including information about how the interviews were to be used and about confidentiality. The interviews took the form of trustful conversations but the interviewees

were also informed that if they felt unconformable with any question they did not have to answer. However, this did not happen in any of the 43 individual interviews or in the two group interviews.

The third requirement concerns confidentiality. The researcher is to guarantee anonymity for all participants in the study but also guarantee that information about the participating schools and individuals are stored in a way that prevents unauthorised access to the material. It is also the researcher's responsibility to inform the participants about how the collected data could be used. Fictitious names are used for the three schools participating in the study. This was done throughout the whole research process when presenting the schools and the results, both in written and spoken contexts, in order to secure anonymity. In observations and interviews I informed participants about this strategy, but also informed them that there is always a risk that an external reader can recognise and reveal the school's identity. Within the schools it has not been possible to keep all participants anonymous. Principals and to some extent teacher leaders are identifiable within each school. However, in order to reduce opportunities for identification, when I have found it necessary, I have left out additional information to reduce the chances of specific statements being linked with a particular individual. This was obviously more effective in the schools with several teacher leaders or principals.

The fourth and final requirement stated by the Swedish Research Council highlights the right to make use of the material collected in the research study. In line with their recommendations, the material will be used only for research purposes, as well as being used only by or under supervision of the collecting researcher.

Concerning the establishment of a trustful relationship between the researcher and the participants, my background as a teacher has been of importance. I have found it easy to make contact with teachers and school leaders and I have also found my previous experiences as a teacher useful when coming to understand their context and arguments. Researching a context similar to one which the researcher has been part of is of course a delicate balance. It is of importance as a researcher to act professionally and keep the distance needed in order not to jeopardise the results, especially in a case study, where an unethical researcher has the opportunity to choose among the available data to present the picture he or she wishes (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). To avoid a situation like this, after conducting the empirical study in each school, I presented the results to the school leaders and the teacher leaders. Each presentation has been followed by a discussion about the findings. This has made the principals and teacher leaders aware of the findings but also given them the opportunity to give their response.

5

Summary of the Papers

In this section I present brief summaries of the four papers that are included in this thesis. Writing the papers and this introductory part has been more of a parallel process than a linear process. New questions that have been raised during the research process and in the analysis of the empirical material have formed the basis for new research questions. There is thus a progression in the analysis and the results, and the papers are presented in the order they were written in order to communicate this process to the reader. The table below (Table 2) provides a comprehensive picture of the four papers included in the thesis. In the first paper organisational structure and culture are in the foreground. In the second paper this is complemented by an analysis of how differences in leadership perspectives influence the organisation of distributed leadership. The third paper puts an emphasis on understandings, with a focus on principals' and teachers' sensemaking about improvement initiatives. Finally, in the fourth paper internal values and norms are examined in relation to external changes and institutional pressure from the environment, in order to find out how this influences local leadership practices and the ability to build capacity for improvement in local organisations.

Table 2. Overview of research questions, theoretical frameworks and study focus in the four papers

Included papers and research questions	Theoretical framework	Study focus
Paper I How do schools organise for distributed leadership to support the establishment of developing and learning school organisations and how can the different outcomes be explained?	Distribued leadership theory (Spillane) Communities of practice (Wenger)	Development aspects of school organisations
Paper II How is teacher leadership organised and expressed, and how do differences in leadership perspectives influence the expressed leadership modes? How much scope do teacher leaders have to influence the pedagogical development of their teacher colleagues and how can the different outcomes be explained?	Individual and systemic leadership perspective (Ogawa & Bossert) Distributed leadership theory (Spillane)	Leadership modes
Paper III How do teachers and principals make sense of school improvement initiatives? How can the outcome of the initiatives be understood in terms of how meaning is constructed?	Sensemaking theory (Weick)	Construction of meaning in improvement processes
Paper IV How do school leaders make of sense of, and respond to, external demands related to the new policy context, and how do they take action and handle the tension between these demands and internal (personal and organisational) norms and values?	Sensemaking theory (Weick) Institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan, Weick)	Coupling mechanisms

Paper 1

Distributing leadership to establish developing and learning school organisations in the Swedish context

The first paper of the thesis examines the influences of distributed leadership when establishing developing and learning school organisations. If school improvement is to take place, distributed leadership and learning among teachers in professional learning communities (PLC) has been proposed as necessary. In Sweden an intention to improve practice through collaborative structures, shared responsibility and common learning has been promoted since the 1970s. Ever since then, there has been consistent progress towards more collective working organisations in Swedish schools. However, both Swedish research and international research have highlighted the difficulties in bringing about learning and sustainable school improvement in local school organisations. The research questions that framed the study were: How do schools organise for distributed

leadership to support the establishment of developing and learning school organisations and how can different outcomes be explained?

The distributed perspective on leadership (Spillane, 2006) and Wenger's (1998) understanding of learning and leadership in communities of practice formed the theoretical point of departure. From literature in the field of organisational development, five aspects that are significant for developing and learning organisations were chosen: (1) organisational structures; (2) goals, visions and values; (3) responsibility and decision-making; (4) reflections and evaluations, and (5) attitudes. These aspects were further investigated in order to examine how schools organise distributed leadership to support the establishment of a developing and learning school organisation. Although the aspects are well known in literature, their use in schools is not simple. In many cases extensive rearrangements are needed for a developing and learning school organisation to be sustainable.

Through interviews and observations, the study investigated differences and similarities in the three school organisations and highlighted emerging tensions. In the analysis it was concluded that the schools had organised distributed leadership and collaborative structures in different ways. It was suggested that when schools separate development issues and management issues (i.e. these issues are dealt with at different times, by different groups and are connected to different leadership responsibilities), this enhances the opportunities for development and learning in the organisation. The study also indicates that the establishment of developing and learning school organisations create tensions between different interests, which affects the outcomes in the three schools. These tensions were related to the five aspects. Firstly, in relation to organisational structure a tension between management issues and development issues was detected, which was apparent in leadership focus, formation of teams, time allocated for learning and the communication in the schools. Secondly in relation to the development of goals, visions and values, a tension between problem orientation and learning orientation was identified. Thirdly, the development aspects of responsibility and decision-making were in focus, where tension between individualism and collectivism appeared. Fourthly, tension between a confirming and a challenging orientation was perceived in relation to the development aspect of reflection and evaluation. Finally, in relation to the development aspect of attitudes, a tension between unprofessionalism and professionalism was detected, a tension that appeared to be due to teachers' different perceptions of collaboration, readiness to change and whether the focus was on teachers' needs or organisational needs. In summary, the results of the study highlighted the problematic nature of successful implementation of developing and learning school organisations. Professional attitude and extended collaboration were

presented as vital aspects in order for apparent tensions to be transformed into shared norms and mutual understanding of meaning in work, which also implies that school leaders have something to learn from the development aspects and the emerging tensions, which may guide further actions for school improvement.

To conclude, the study suggests that the potential for a positive outcome when trying to establish developing and learning school organisations is dependent on a dynamic interplay between the organisation of distributed leadership, the issue in focus, principal support, legitimation of leadership and a professional attitude towards collaboration and development in the organisation.

Published as:
Liljenberg, M. (2015). Distributing leadership to establish developing and learning school organisations in the Swedish context. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 43*(1), 152-170.

Paper 2

Teacher leadership modes and practices in a Swedish context – A case study

The second paper explored distributed leadership from the teacher leadership perspective. Since the introduction of the national curriculum in 1980, collaborative efforts by both teachers and principals for driving improvement have been emphasised and by the end of the 1990s, teacher teams started to participate in school governance along with the principals. With the increased workload of principals and their difficulties in managing the dual managerial and pedagogical leadership role, ideas about distributed leadership that were emerging abroad attracted increased interest.

The paper explores the distribution of leadership and the main actor's leadership modes, and their effects on the pedagogical development of their teacher colleagues. More specifically, the paper addressed the following research questions: How is teacher leadership organised and expressed, and how do differences in leadership perspectives influence the expressed leadership modes? How much scope do teacher leaders have to influence the pedagogical development of their teacher colleagues and how can the different outcomes be explained?

The distributed perspective on leadership (Spillane et al., 2004) and Ogawa and Bossert's (1998) institutional perspective on leadership in organisations were used for the analysis of teacher leadership in the three schools. An analytical instrument was constructed based on Ogawa and Bossert's two perspectives on leadership, the individual and the systemic, complemented by Spillane et al.'s

(2004) notion that leadership is best understood as practice and thus both leaders as well as situated leadership practice should be studied.

Based on the analysis of interviews and observations, three different teacher leadership modes were identified in the three case schools – coordinating, change-focused and learning-facilitating. In the North School, the teacher team leaders demonstrated coordinating leadership with high focus on routine administrative tasks, and the mathematics developer demonstrated a learning-facilitating leadership through mentoring and guidance. In the West School, the teacher team leaders and one of the learning leaders displayed coordinating leadership, while the other learning leaders displayed change-focused leadership, oriented towards tasks and achievement of goals. In the South School, the development leader manifested change-focused and learning-facilitating leadership. The findings indicate that leadership perspectives (individual or systemic) in the organisation or of individual leaders strongly influenced the positioning of teacher leaders, the orientation of their leadership practices and (hence) their potential to influence the professional development of their colleagues. The results show that the deployment of teacher leaders in the three schools' management and development structures differed substantially. In the North School and the West School, teacher team leaders played a managerial role, and both their positions and leadership practices appear to be consistent with an individual leadership perspective. The South School had no formal teacher leaders in the management structure. In all three schools, teacher leaders were also deployed in developmental roles, corresponding to a systemic leadership perspective, but with elements of an individual perspective. Regarding the scope for teacher leaders to influence pedagogical development, relevant knowledge and training may have a significant impact. Furthermore, prioritising development efforts for teacher leaders seem to be productive, as combining managerial and development tasks is apparently difficult.

To conclude, the study indicates that the leadership perspective (individual or systemic) strongly affects the leadership mode, competence and positioning of teacher leaders, and ultimately the ability of teacher leaders to promote the development and learning of their teacher colleagues. However, teacher culture is also important. For principals, the results highlight the importance of considering which skills are valuable for leaders of development initiatives and teachers' professional development. The results also demonstrate the value of principals and school authorities taking into account their local culture when establishing new leadership positions, as increasing delegation will not necessarily lead to cultural changes that support their intentions. Thus, the organisational framing of teacher leadership is crucial.

Unpublished manuscript:
Liljenberg, M. (resubmitted). Teacher leadership modes and practices in a Swedish context – A case study.

Paper 3

Att skapa mening i lärares samarbete och gemensamma lärande - Tre skolors försök (Making sense of teacher collaboration and common learning - Development efforts in three schools)

In the third paper the aim was to contribute to knowledge about principals' and teachers' sensemaking when trying to develop teacher collaboration and common learning in their schools. Since the 1980s, schools have been urged to arrange for teachers to meet in groups in order to encourage collaborative learning. However, deeper pedagogical collaboration between teachers has seldom been the result. By using Weick's (1995, 2001) theoretical concept of sensemaking, the paper examined how teachers and principals made sense of development efforts in schools and how the outcome of the development efforts could be understood on the basis of how meaning is created. According to Weick, sensemaking is the process through which people in organisations both as individuals and as a collective, and in relation to institutionalised frames, reduce complexity and make pragmatic interpretations in order to be able to make sense of new concepts and practices.

The three schools used three different ideas to support the development of teacher collaboration and common learning. In the North School, the principal introduced working teacher teams. In the West School, learning groups were introduced and in the South School a common development group was introduced. The analysis showed that teachers and principals, in order to handle the new situations, initially made pragmatic interpretations based on institutionalised frames. If other credible interpretation alternatives were visualised, teachers and principals were able to establish new frames for sensemaking. Norms, values and traditions that existed in the local schools created different possibilities for this. Artefacts and the opportunity for teacher leaders to be 'change poets' in the development process also affected outcomes of the development efforts.

In the North School, the principal left it up to the teachers to make their own interpretations of working teacher teams. Teachers who did not see a need for change tried to hold on to the existing frames for teacher collaboration and learning. Norms and traditions, which can be understood as the current frame for sensemaking, thereby prevented the development of teacher collaboration and common learning. In the West School, the reaction of the teachers was

initially in line with the reaction in the North School. However, the teacher leaders did not share the initial pragmatic interpretations and invited both the principal and the teachers into new conversations. In this way, alternative interpretations were presented and supporting artefacts were introduced. In the South School, teacher collaboration was strong and the existing frame for sensemaking opened up conversations and discussions about the forms of the introduced forums that supported further development of collaboration and learning. The culture encouraged critical feedback and far-reaching suggestions that challenged principals in their desire for control. The development leader and supporting artefacts contributed to a positive result.

To conclude, the paper shows the importance of sensemaking in development efforts, especially if the intention is to change deeply institutionalised thoughts about teacher collaboration and learning. How far teacher collaboration in everyday work had evolved turned out to be important to whether teachers could make sense of the ideas introduced to support the development of teacher collaboration and common learning. It is common that schools in their development efforts make organisational changes. However, this study shows the importance of giving support to teachers in their understanding of the new arrangements as well as the importance of the principal taking responsibility for the development taking the desired direction.

Published as:
Liljenberg, M. (2013). Att skapa mening i lärares samarbete och gemensamma lärande - Tre skolors försök (Making sense of teacher collaboration and common learning - Development efforts in three schools). *Pedagogisk forskning i Sverige, 18*(3-4), 238-257.

Paper 4

School leaders as coupling agents – Mediating between external demands and internal values.

The overall aim of the fourth paper was to explore what happens when the new policy context meets the values, norms and cultural beliefs of local school organisations. Since the late 1970s, researchers have argued that school leaders respond to pressures in the institutional environment by decoupling (Meyer & Rowan 1977, 1978). However, with increasing influences from neoliberalism from the early 1990s onwards, the educational system has undergone extensive transformation that has imposed new demands on school leaders. The new context has been presented as something school leaders have to balance against other factors but eventually give way to. On this basis, this paper explored the

ways in which school leaders, as coupling agents between pressures from the institutional environment and internal norms and values in local schools, experience the current situation and choose to act 'on their own terms'. Sensemaking theory and coupling mechanisms were the theoretical point of departure in examining how school leaders, in their capacity as pedagogical leaders, responded to three aspects of the new policy context: regular supervision by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, requirements imposed by systematic quality evaluations and an increased focus on managerial accountability.

Findings from the three case schools show that school leaders in their role as coupling agents make symbolic responses to the external demands but also transform these demands to make them fit with the norms and values that prevail in their local organisations, thereby preventing neoliberal influences from taking the ascendancy. The analysis shows that supervision was something the school leaders saw the benefits of. However, requirements for actions were not seen as absolute musts despite the risk of sanctions if they were not followed. Instead, the school leaders reinterpreted and transformed the requirements they received to make them fit with internal practice. In the same way, the requirements imposed by systematic quality evaluations were something that the school leaders found it appropriate to support and devote time to in order to improve practice. New demands and frameworks for monitoring, assessment and evaluation were used and understood by school leaders as improvement tools that were useful for them in their work, rather than as a series of demands. Thus, they saw opportunities to make interpretations in such a way that internal values and norms were not contradicted. Decoupling, assimilation and accommodation were coupling mechanisms used to deal with environmental pressure. Few elements of a school leadership with a focus on managerial accountability as a result of environmental pressure were detected. For all school leaders, it was considered to be valuable to hold on to professional accountability and democratic values characteristic of school leadership in the Swedish context. Elements of pedagogical leadership were identified but when these were lacking, this was not linked to the new policy context but rather to deeply rooted norms and values of school leadership in the organisation. This indicated that conditions for sensemaking in school organisations have a major impact on the opportunities for school leaders to shape their leadership at local school level.

To conclude, the study indicates that environmental pressure penetrates schools through the norms and values embedded in local school contexts. It can be argued that the school leaders in this study were not primarily governed by the new policy context, which is in contrast to a more deterministic view of environment. Rather, in their role as the primary coupling agents, the school leaders expressed agency as they acted in accordance with their pre-existing

frameworks but also when they altered these frames and reinterpreted pressure from the environment in order to improve their local practices by using a variety of coupling mechanisms.

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6

Summarising Discussion

In this section I return to the aim and research questions presented in the introduction. The aim of this thesis has been to generate knowledge about the construction of distributed leadership practices in local schools within the Swedish context. Below, I will summarise and elaborate on some of the key results presented in the four papers. Through the discussion I thereby try to answer the aim and research questions of this study. I also aim to respond to the wider discussion of distributed leadership in the educational field and thus contribute to knowledge about the construction of distributed leadership in local schools within the Swedish context.

Organisation of Distributed Leadership in Local Schools

The first research question posed was: How can the organisation of distributed leadership at local school level be understood? Educational policy documents in the Swedish context have a long history of advocating collaborative working structures with the intention of enabling teachers at local level to jointly take responsibility for the local organisation and the educational practice (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980; SOU 1974:53). Despite this intention, changes have taken time, which can from an institutional perspective be related to the fact that professionals are guided by well-established norms and values (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2008). The intention to create more collaborative structures but also the resistance to these structures became visible in the organisation of distributed leadership in the three schools in this study. The analyses of the empirical material show that how distributed leadership is organised at local school level is embedded in the institutional context and in the local conditions and history of each school organisation. Norms and values set the premises for how the idea of distributed leadership is understood, expressed through organisational structures and leadership positions, but also

through how school leaders and teachers shape their roles and relations and try to make sense of what it implies for them to be a school leader or a teacher in a distributed leadership practice in their specific school organisation.

The first step in the approach to organising for distributed leadership, common to the three schools, was the organisation of teachers into mixed-subject teacher teams. Despite similarities in the structural arrangements, the norms and values within each school gave rise to different understandings about what activities were to take place in the teacher teams and thus also to the potential benefits of the teacher team organisation. The North School and the West School have similar histories, with traditions in what Evetts (2009a) describes as occupational professionalism, which has led to an inflexibility about which issues it was possible to discuss and take shared responsibility for in the teacher teams and which issues were up to the individual teacher to decide about. Issues related to teaching emerged as being difficult to make decisions about in the teacher teams, resulting in a decoupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) between the pedagogical practice and the activities in teacher teams. Findings from the North School and the West School (Liljenberg, 2015, resubmitted) confirm previous studies showing that work in teacher teams has a tendency to concentrate on administrative and organisational issues (Ahlstrand, 1995; Björkman, 2008; Blossing, 2000; Ohlsson, 2004). However, in the South School, the norms and values that guided the work of teachers allowed for shared responsibility for the teaching practice, conceptualised through mixed-age classes, interdisciplinary work and teachers teaching together in the classrooms, but also for a shared responsibility for the overall organisation of the school. This opened the way for a collective understanding of teacher professionalism in line with aspects of both occupational and organisational professionalism (Evetts, 2009a, 2009b) or in line with what Berg (2003) defines as extended professionalism.

All three schools had, as part of a distributed leadership, organisational structures that complemented the teacher team organisation. The focus of these organisational structures and the terms used to describe them were different in the three schools. The focus in each school can, however, be understood in the light of the institutional frames that dominated in the school in question, together with the conditions and history of each school organisation. In the North School, subject groups that had been part of the school organisation ever since the school was established in the 1970s complemented the teacher team organisation. As in many other secondary schools, the subject tradition was dominant in this school. Holding on to subject groups can thus be understood as something that hinders change within the organisation and which is a significant aspect of the preservation of organisational legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott, 2008) in the North School.

The organisational structures introduced to complement the teacher team organisation in the West School (the learning group organisation) and in the South School (the overall development group), can be understood as a response to the idea of creating collective learning among professionals to improve practice (Ohlsson, 2004; Scherp & Scherp, 2007) but also as a response to the increase in responsibility for results at local level (Lundahl, 2005). In the West School, the idea of collective learning was introduced by the new principal and was not initially in line with the norms and values of the organisation. Introducing the learning group organisation can thus be understood as an active use of power by the principal. However, in order to gain acceptance for the learning group organisation within the school, the principal used his power more subtly by trying to influence teachers' beliefs and perceptions. Additionally, shared processes of sensemaking (Weick, 1995, 2001) made it possible for the teachers to have real influence in the process (Liljenberg, 2013). The introduction of the common development group in the South School was, in contrast, clearly rooted in a local understanding of a collective responsibility for the entire school and trust among the professionals. However, in this case the teachers used their power as a collective to shape the conditions and set the premises for the group in relation to the rest of the organisation.

A second approach to organising for distributed leadership that was identified in all three schools was the use of leadership positions for teachers that were connected to the organisational structures previously discussed. The introduction of leadership positions can be considered as well established in the Swedish context (Ekholm et al., 1987; Nestor, 1991) and can be seen as originating from institutionalised thoughts about a more collective leadership structure (SOU 1974:53), based on the intention to increase teachers' ability to participate and exert influence on the leadership decisions taken at local level, an intention that can be understood as being grounded in relational understandings of leadership (Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Teachers in both the North School and the West School showed a similar understanding of the teacher team leader position that was established in these schools. Uncertainties about the position and a close connection between teacher team leaders and the formal school leaders gave a hierarchical interpretation of the position in line with the results of previous research on teacher team leadership (Ahlstrand et al., 1988; Ohlsson, 2004). This interpretation can be understood from a historical perspective, as leadership in schools has a history of being associated with hierarchically positioned school leaders, which has influences on the issues connected to teacher leadership.

In most cases, the teachers were allowed to decide what was to be included in the organisational structure and in the leadership positions. As a result of the

principals' confidence in the professionals' opinions and good relations between teachers and school leaders, teachers were given power to decide about the internal practice. However, in addition to giving the teachers a certain amount of power, the school leaders also tried to take control by influencing the teachers and by giving teacher leaders more or less support for their initiatives. In relation to some issues this was possible while in other matters the principals had no power to influence the teachers. In the same way it was impossible for teacher leaders to use formal power to gain authority in their role. Rather, in order to manage their assignments they were dependent on creating good relations with the teachers that could enable them to gain support for their ideas. Overly strong alliances with the formal leaders tended to counteract this (Liljenberg, resubmitted).

Findings also show that more of a relational understanding of leadership within the local school organisation as well as by individual actors also existed and this influenced the organisation of distributed leadership practices in the three schools. The development leader in the South School and the mathematics developer in the North School both approached their leadership assignment as more of a collective process that originated from them as leaders but was built up in collaboration with the teachers. This way of thinking about leadership, where teachers are included in the process of leadership, created a commitment and a sense of meaning that legitimated the teacher leaders' positions as well as the directions of the work in the teacher groups that they were connected to (Liljenberg, 2013). Although the results show that institutionalised understandings about the organisation of leadership practices and teachers' work were well established at local school level, the results also show that changes were possible and that different norms and values may exist in parallel, carried by different individuals or groups.

By comparing the organisation of distributed leadership in the three schools, similarities and differences have been made visible. The similarities draw attention to the fact that local school organisations are embedded in an institutional context that acts by stabilising organisational structures, roles and relations through the conservation of norms and values that set the premises for what becomes appropriate in the specific context (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Professionals, in this case teachers and school leaders, have been shown to be influential actors in preserving roles and relations even though structural arrangements in the local organisation have been changed. However, differences in the organisation of distributed leadership at local school level were evident. This shows that external pressure does not necessarily produce the same result at local level. It also shows that there is considerable room for local interpretations about how to organise for distributed leadership guided by the norms and values at local

level, which also set the conditions for whether new interpretations are made possible and thus for whether changes in current practice will take place.

Relating Distributed Leadership to Capacity Building and School Improvement

Distributed leadership has been criticised for being normatively advocated by researchers and policy representatives (Hall et al., 2011; Hartley, 2010; Torrance, 2013). With the second research question (How does distributed leadership relate to capacity building and school improvement at local school level?), I focus on the quality of distributed leadership at local level. The findings in response to this question show that the relation between distributed leadership and both capacity building and school improvement is established in the specific circumstances at local school level. Capacity building and school improvement are processes that require structures, as well as norms and values that underpin these structures. A distributed leadership practice is therefore no guarantee that capacity building and school improvement will take place.

In schools, the amount of incoming information that is seen as urgent is large and ever growing. As the external pressure and new expectations from different stakeholders increased, much of the time in teacher meetings was used for information, documentation and discussions about new daily practicalities and student welfare issues, which confirms earlier research (Ärlestig, 2008). As the number of issues that are perceived as being vital to address promptly is increasing, the room for capacity building and more systematic long-term improvement processes is reduced. It becomes important for schools to find a model for handling the more urgent issues but also set aside time for more long-term processes, if capacity building and school improvement are to take place in the distributed leadership practices.

Based on the analysis of the structural organisation in the three schools, the findings show that a separation in time and space between more everyday work and improvement work increased the potential for teachers to keep a focus on improvement and go deeper into questions relating to improvement, so as to also challenge beliefs and conceptions that are taken for granted and to allow for what Argyris and Schön (1978, 1995) would call double-loop learning. A separation in time and space between daily work and development work is also what Björn et al. (2002) recommend, if good learning environments for teachers are to be created and capacity building is to be organisational. With such arrangements there is in all cases a greater chance for capacity building although they did not guarantee, as could be seen in the West School's learning groups, that systematic school improvement processes actually came about (Liljenberg, 2015).

In addition to the introduction of organisational structures facilitating meetings between teachers, leadership positions for teachers were, in all three schools, introduced to support school improvement processes. However, the findings show that the structural conditions for teacher leaders in various ways constrained such a focus. In the West School lack of time was a significant aspect of the teacher leaders' situation. As time for teacher leaders to prepare themselves for taking responsibility for school improvement was almost non-existent, they had no opportunity to stay ahead of the teachers, both in terms of deciding the next step in the improvement process and in terms of the knowledge necessary for the teacher leaders to challenge the teachers in their thinking. Previous research by Rönnerman and Olin (2013) shows that teachers benefit from professional development courses and formal education in their role as teacher leaders. Findings from this study show that the teacher team leaders in the West School and the North School had in most cases no professional training for their assignments and thus lacked skills or tools that could be useful when leading improvement processes (Liljenberg, 2015). The findings confirm that if teacher leaders are to build capacity for improvement they need to become skilled in leading learning processes among colleagues. This could be in the form of tools that are useful for initiating conversations, evaluating practice, trying out new teaching methods, leading group processes or resolving conflicts. Tools connected to how teacher leaders can generate a leadership practice in which both teachers and leaders become involved could strengthen a shared responsibility and decision-making process with further influence on capacity building. Written documents to clarify leadership assignments for the leaders and for everyone else in the organisation did not exist in any of the schools, which could be understood as further complicating the situation for the teacher leaders (Liljenberg, resubmitted).

To conclude, with limited support from the organisational structures, it was left up to the individual teacher leaders to shape their own role, which limited organisational capacity building and made teacher leadership into more of an individual project than a quality of the local organisation. This was particularly evident for teacher team leaders in the North School and the West School. However, the mathematics developer in the North School and the development leader in the South School had greater knowledge about tools that might be useful when leading learning processes, which enabled them to build organisational capacity and focus on improvement work. A critical factor was, however, how teachers made sense of the different leadership positions and thus influenced what it was possible for teacher leaders to do.

Previous research about capacity building and school improvement highlights the importance of supportive norms and values enabling social learning,

collective responsibility and leadership stretched over both leaders and followers (e.g. Blossing & Ertesvåg, 2011; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Stoll, 2009). This is further confirmed in this study. Findings show that norms and values guiding the relations between teachers and setting the premises for teacher leadership in the North School and to some extent in the West School made it difficult for teacher leaders to undertake activities that fostered social learning and collective improvement of the teaching practice. In the South School, on the other hand, trustful relations between teachers made it possible for the development leaders to empower others to take part in leadership, share good practices and initiatives, as well as failures, and challenge the prevailing conditions of teaching and learning. If teacher leadership is to support improvement, trust between members in the organisation is vital. To improve practice, teacher leaders together with the teachers need to challenge and question the prevailing conditions, but without trustful relationships, challenging and questioning are easily perceived as threats. When this was the case, teacher leadership was to a greater extent about maintaining current habits rather than working for improvement (Liljenberg, 2015, resubmitted).

In literature, social or collective learning in school organisations is put forward as a significant factor in capacity building and school improvement (Harris, 2001; Oterkiil & Ertesvåg, 2012; Stoll, 2009). As Scherp (2002), Larsson (2004) and Blossing and Ertesvåg (2011) conclude, if improvement initiatives are to take place and be framed in a social learning perspective, learning activities have to be regular, situated in practice and supported by learning-focused leadership. The findings from the first two papers (Liljenberg, 2015, resubmitted) show that understandings of learning in the schools influenced the construction of distributed leadership. A more social understanding of learning more successfully contributed to capacity building in the organisations. This could be seen in the learning groups in the West School that met on a regular basis, with topics decided on the basis of needs identified in practice. Additionally, the development leader in the South School and the mathematics developer in the North School showed a learning-oriented focus in their leadership as they worked by asking questions, stimulating discussions, challenging existing practice and arousing curiosity about new ways of working. A more individual understanding of learning could be seen in the teacher team organisation in the North School, which was visible in the lack of learning perspective and a common direction for the improvement process in the organisation, and also visible in the teacher team leaders' lack of tools for leading learning.

The findings also show that principals' understanding about how to implement improvement work had an impact on how they organised for distributed leadership to support the improvement work. When principals had a short-term

way of thinking, quick decisions and quick-fix solutions turned out to be the essence of their actions. Short-term thinking and quick decisions tend to be associated with single-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978, 1995) and can temporarily create change in the organisation but will rarely alter deeper understandings. One explanation for principals' behaviour can be an overly diverse workload and a lack of time; another can be an absence of knowledge about how major changes are implemented. Having the capacity to improve involves being conscious of the fact that improvement takes time (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) and above all requires learning (Oterkiil & Ertesvåg, 2012). It can be concluded that when principals have this understanding, they engage themselves more in practice but also contribute to the improvement of practice by introducing supportive artefacts. In the South School the school leaders demonstrated this by their use of development plans, continuous training for all teachers and systematic quality evaluations. Additionally, the principal in the West School demonstrated this as, in a process that could be understood as a collective sensemaking process, he became aware of the weaknesses of the initial arrangement of the learning group organisation, reorganised practice and introduced supportive artefacts (Liljenberg, 2013). When teachers and school leaders have a learning approach to improvement work, it increases the opportunities for distributed leadership practices to also develop into professional learning communities (Stoll et al., 2006). For this to be ensured, the formal leader must have a role in supporting trust and respect in the organisation, which will create conditions for collaborative innovations and learning.

Further, to create a collective sense of meaning, there is a need for conversations in which different opinions and attitudes can be brought into contact with each other. Ärlestig (2008) argues that for conversations like this to be fruitful, communication must be used as an active leadership tool. For this to be possible, principals need to take an active part in distributed leadership and thereby influence its direction. Previous research has shown that principals rarely visit teachers in the classroom or give them feedback on their instructional work (Berg, 1995; Hallerström, 2006; Ärlestig, 2008). The findings in this study partially confirm the lack of involvement of the principals in the pedagogical practice. The results indicate a discrepancy between principals' and teachers' view of principals' engagement, pedagogical leadership and thus their contribution to capacity building in distributed leadership practices (Liljenberg, 2013, 2015). Teachers were asking for more pedagogical leadership from the principals, while the principals were of the opinion that they already provided sufficient leadership, although indirectly, through their way of organising and creating opportunities, an approach perceived by the teachers as vague and unclear. The principals also said that they worked with and through the teacher leaders when set-

ting the premises for distributed leadership, a method that in this study was proven to be successful only when a strong common sense of commitment and a shared understanding already prevailed, as it did in the South School. However, when teacher leaders' power was weaker, this way of leading became unclear and further strengthened the loose coupling (Weick, 1976) between the improvement work and teachers' work with students in the classroom, thereby making it more difficult for both principals and teacher leaders to build collective capacity for improvement. The principal in the West School, however, tried to change the prevailing conditions and demonstrated a pedagogical leadership more closely connected to teaching practice. In this way the principal facilitated the establishment of new routines and relations between the principal and the teachers that changed the prevailing conditions and thus contributed to capacity building in the organisation (Liljenberg, forthcoming).

Distributed Leadership in an Educational System in Transformation

Local organisations are strongly influenced by their environment, by 'the logic of appropriateness' and by organisational legitimacy (March & Olsen, 2005; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). This together with norms and values at local level form the basis of what is considered to be the appropriate and natural way of organising practice. With the third question (What influence does neoliberal education policy have on distributed leadership at local school level?), I focus on ongoing changes in the educational policy context in relation to the history of collaboration and joint decision-making as guiding principles in the Swedish context. Previous research has shown that the ongoing changes in society and the strong influences from neoliberalism across the welfare sector exert strong influence on the educational context, not only at a policy level but also at local level (Holm & Lundström, 2011; Lundahl, 2002a, 2002b; Moos, 2009). However, the findings in this thesis show that norms and values at local level form a strong counterforce to external changes. This became visible when school leaders made symbolic responses to external demands but also transformed them to make them fit with norms and values that prevailed in the local organisations, thereby preventing neoliberal influences from gaining ascendancy (Liljenberg, forthcoming).

In the Educational Act (SFS 2010:800), the opportunities for the individual principal at local level to decide about her or his local organisation have been clarified. Arranging for distributed leadership practices is, in all three schools, a result of internal decisions. It is, however, clear that the external environment exerts an influence on the decisions taken at local level. Control mechanisms and dialogues between those at local level and municipal level, together with

recommendations from policy representatives such as the OECD and the Swedish National Agency for Education all contribute to the direction taken at local level. Despite the increase in external pressure, findings in the fourth paper show that internal norms and values were major contributors to the internal operation and life in the three schools (Liljenberg, forthcoming). Formal school leaders had a significant part in this as they acted as primary coupling agents (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, 1978; Weick, 1995) and interpreted pressure from the environment through their pre-existing frameworks and through the norms and values of each local school organisation. The construction of distributed leadership can thus be seen as a result of both internal and external influence.

With the transformation of the Swedish educational system, the responsibility for maintaining high quality and improving practice has intensified for teachers and school leaders. Findings from the three schools show a clear focus on improvement. Distributing leadership more widely in the organisation was discussed by the school leaders as an attempt to create more collaboration and a focus on improvement of the teaching practice. As Evetts (2009a, 2009b, 2011) stresses, aspects of organisational professionalism have increased, but are not always consistent with how teachers perceive their role. In this study this is most evident in the North School and the West School where some of the teachers struggled to understand the meaning of improvement projects and new meetings about common improvement work. In the same way principals were shown to have difficulties changing their way of working in order to meet with the new requirements put upon them (Liljenberg, 2015, forthcoming). Changes in governance have increased economic and administrative issues and principals' workloads have increased accordingly. It is also recommended to school principals, in their role as pedagogical leaders, that they follow up teaching practice by taking part in classrooms (Ärlestig, 2008). The principal in the West School struggled with the desire to fulfil both of these duties, while the other principals had a more indirect approach to pedagogical leadership (Liljenberg, forthcoming). Tendencies of principals to think about distributed leadership as a way of coping with an increased workload were to some extent visible in the result although this was not at all the dominant view. Taking care of student health meetings and administration at group level were tasks that the principal in the North School tried to hand over to teacher team leaders to reduce the workload (Liljenberg, resubmitted).

It is in response to empirical results such as the previous one that critics have questioned what distributed leadership stands for. From the critics' perspective, distributed leadership has become highly connected to neoliberal governance strategies, intensification of teacher work and an abuse of power (Lumby, 2013; Torrance, 2013). However, in this study within the Swedish context it

became significant that the historic anchorage of the educational field within the Swedish welfare state (Moos, 2013) and the concept of a *School for All* (Blossing & Söderström, 2014) have a stronger influence on how distributed leadership practices are constructed. Although the transformation of the Swedish educational system since the 1990s has been highly influenced by neoliberal trends, there are still clear traces from the welfare era that contribute to the construction of distributed leadership at local school level. Although a strong top-down concept of leadership has been implemented and principals' formal power has been strengthened, principals give teachers a great deal of space for empowerment and participation in the construction of distributed leadership. By organising teachers in teams and working closely with teacher representatives, principals facilitate negotiation, deliberation and teacher involvement in decision-making. Although teachers and teacher leaders have little formal power, this study has shown that in practice, the power of the teaching staff is strong, both in terms of resistance and in terms of support for initiatives coming from formal school leaders and from teacher leaders (Liljenberg, 2013, 2015, resubmitted). When it comes to school improvement it is particularly clear that principals know from experience that they have to let the professionals feel that they have power with regard to improvement initiatives and the arrangements of distributed leadership. Rather than restricting teachers' responsibility in distributed leadership practices to harmless issues, principals involve teachers in translating external expectations to give them institutional and professional meaning, which means that principals give teachers room for manoeuvre in distributed leadership practices.

Findings of research show that there are an increasing number of leadership positions for teachers in Swedish schools (e.g. Blossing, 2013; Rönnerman & Olin, 2013). In contrast to schools in countries other than the Nordic ones, Swedish schools have a history of a flat organisation with few levels in teaching staff. The introduction of new leadership positions for teachers, in the same way as the strengthening of the principal's position, can be a reflection of more of a top-down perspective on leadership in line with neoliberal tendencies (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000). A potential risk in the introduction of positions is the increased risk of differentiation between teachers and more layers in the school hierarchy. Teacher leaders are also, as Ohlsson (2004) concludes, at risk of being representatives of the opinions of formal leaders. However, in this study teacher leaders were predominantly understood as representatives for teachers with some exceptions and the introduction of leadership positions for teachers can thus be seen as an additional way to provide opportunities for professional influence. As teacher leaders in this study had no formal power, they had to

build relations with teachers to obtain both trust and power to further influence the direction for work.

To conclude, the findings in this study show that despite a strong influence of neoliberalism in the Swedish educational system, norms and values demonstrating a participatory democratic thinking were dominant in the three school and reflected an idea of a trustful relationship between teachers as well as between teachers and school leaders. This was shown to be one contributing aspect for giving room for collective understandings of leadership and learning favourable to systematic improvement processes aiming to meet national and local goals. However, findings also show that at local level, it is still possible for norms and values representing more of a restricted professionalism (Berg, 2003) to remain and exist in parallel with those representing an extended professionalism, thus limiting capacity building and school improvement in distributed leadership practices at local school level.

7
Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to generate knowledge about the construction of distributed leadership in local schools within the Swedish context and thereby contribute to the wider discussion of leadership within the educational field. By applying a multi-perspective approach I have shown that the construction of distributed leadership is embedded in the institutional context and in the local history of each school organisation, but that it is also dependent on the interplay between different aspects belonging to the local school as an organisation, made visible through structural arrangements and norms and values within each organisation. Through the sensemaking perspective I have also shown it to be dependent on how individuals within local organisations come to understand and make sense of new arrangement as they construct understandings and interpretations that become integrated with their existing cognitive frameworks about 'the way things are', 'the way things should be' and 'the way things are done' in the organisation (Weick, 1995). Finally, I have shown the construction of distributed leadership to be dependent on how school leaders and teachers come to understand and respond to external messages connected to wider developments in the field of education. This shows distributed leadership within a Swedish context to be clearly connected to a democratic understanding of school leadership.

Global trends have intensified the discussion about the need for improvement in Swedish schools at both national and local level. As a result of neoliberal influences, proposals have been presented, and actions have been taken, with a view to improving student outcomes. These include more national testing and monitoring, and increased focus on skills and strong leadership from both teachers and principals. However, parallel movements with a focus on team building, professional group mentoring, collaborative learning and shared leadership practices more closely connected to participatory democratic values are also present. As the two trends tend to clash, both in terms of what actions to prioritise and in terms of their underlying values, it becomes difficult for practi-

tioners to make sense of them and find ways to deal with them. At local level, a collective sense of meaning and ownership in work becomes significant in finding out how to act in a situation like this.

For local schools to deal with messages about improvement coming from the external context, as well as needs identified within the organisation, an infrastructure with room for teachers and leaders to meet, discuss, learn and actually work together with improvement is the first requirement. If this 'room for improvement' is too crowded with daily issues or split into too many small pieces, however, it becomes difficult to actually learn together. Moreover, to support learning, tools and skills for improvement are needed. Teacher leaders, principals and teachers taking part in and leading improvement work need to have models that they can use to challenge thinking but that can also serve as routines for working. As it stands, the confidence in 'talking' tends to be too great and actually prevents 'doing' related to teaching and learning (Blossing, 2000). With new positions and new roles, new relationships occur; clear assignments and purposes decrease uncertainties in relation to these new relationships between colleagues and keep the focus on the work. Making changes to the structural arrangement tends to be the first step taken when schools, and organisations in general, are to improve their practice. However, if the purpose is to build capacity for school improvement, changes to structural arrangements have been shown to be insufficient without also changing the norms and values that support the structural arrangements. If teachers and leaders are to challenge the prevailing conditions in order to improve practice, this has to take place in trustful relationships. Having the courage to open up one's classroom for critical evaluation from a colleague can feel risky unless trustful relations prevail. An atmosphere of trust is imperative for deeper collaboration to take place. Distributed leadership rests on shared responsibility and the opportunity for the most competent teacher to step forward and lead the rest when needed (Spillane, 2006). A school in which teachers and leaders empower each another in order to contribute to the needs of the organisation will thereby allow organisational capacity to be built.

In this thesis I have shown the construction of distributed leadership to be dependent on how teachers and leaders within the organisation come to understand and make sense of new arrangements, especially when these arrangement to some extent come to challenge their existing understandings about what leadership means and how learning takes place within the organisation. From a distributed perspective, leadership is understood as activities, processes and relations in the organisation designed by organisational members to influence other members (Spillane, 2006). Leadership is thereby not restricted to a certain person or position. When arranging for distributed leadership practices, schools

have a tendency to focus on leadership positions. This does not imply a contradiction but can strengthen an already established way of thinking about leadership as hierarchical and individual, which thus counteracts the idea of leadership as relational and changeable. A hierarchical way of thinking may also affect the possibilities for beneficial organisational conditions to be established. In the same way, understandings of learning influence how teachers and leaders understand their role in the common activities arranged to improve practice and how they find meaning in the groups they are assigned to attend. Distributed leadership in the form of professional collaboration in teams is based on the idea that learning is social and takes place when teachers and leaders come together and can test their ideas and challenge their interpretations in a social setting (Harris, 2014). To improve teaching practice, the conversations in the different groups that teachers and leaders attend have to be concentrated on the improvement issue in question and how this is to be integrated with practice. However, 'learning conversations' that really change practice require more than discussion and the sharing of ideas. Learning conversations that go deeper need to be structured and include analysis, mutual reflection and co-construction of knowledge. If the organisation of teaching in schools continues to be based on an individual understanding of learning, this will mean that improvement is restricted to issues that are important to individual teachers, preserving an individualistic teacher culture and thereby counteracting collective capacity building.

Finally, leaders in the organisation and in particular formal leaders have been proven to be crucial for the outcome of the interplay between the different aspects. How the formal leader in interaction with the teachers uses the room for manoeuvre at local level in order to support the development in the desired direction is essential. This thesis has shown that there is no guarantee that the formal leader, even if she or he advocates a distributed leadership practice, has knowledge and understanding about what is needed to also establish a more widely distributed leadership practice that can support capacity building and local school improvement. The formal leader has an important role in setting the direction for the school and being a principal includes much more that managing daily matters. Now more than ever, principals have to look forward and take the lead in the improvement work in their schools. To be able to do this, principals need to participate in practice, sometimes in the classrooms but particularly in meetings with teachers and teacher leaders. However, the attendance of the principal is not enough. Rather, it is the contributions from an engaged principal who makes observations, asks questions and empowers others that can eventually prepare the way for collective sensemaking and further improvement of practice consistent with the intended direction.

Directions for Further Research

The research that I have carried out has given many answers but also opened up new questions. In this time of change, research on school improvement and school leadership is intense. Although international research is comprehensive, Swedish research is rather sparse. Moreover, as most of the international research is conducted within an Anglo-Saxon context, it is not entirely unproblematic to transfer its results to the Swedish context, as each educational system has its own history and specific conditions. I will therefore argue that we are in great need of more research about leadership in relation to local school improvement within Swedish schools.

Since the start of the research process in 2010, the number of leadership positions for teachers introduced at local school level and at municipal level to support local school improvement work has increased. Positions as change agents, development leaders, process leaders and learning leaders have become more common. During the same time, at national level, first teachers have been introduced as an attempt to open up new career paths for teachers (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2012). Despite the many different names, the purpose with these positions is often similar: to strengthen the quality and improve the results in local schools. With these positions come new relationships and new working patterns, and we need to know more about these. What do teacher leaders do? How do teachers come to understand these roles and how do principals in their role as pedagogical leaders relate to them? This thesis has provided insightful answers to these questions based on empirical material from three case schools. With this knowledge in mind, I believe it would be interesting to widen the empirical material and explore the phenomenon in a larger number of schools. It would also be of great interest to make comparisons between schools with differences in student outcomes. However, it would be useful to complement quantitative data with more qualitative research methods in order to still be able to capture nuances and more subtle differences.

Distributed leadership is not just about leaders: it is also about leadership practice. Therefore I find it highly relevant to look more closely into practice. Leadership practice is a result of organisational structures and the agency of the people taking part in these structures. In the Educational Act (SFS 2010:800), it states that it is up to the principal to decide on her or his unit's internal organisation. From an institutional perspective on organisations it is, however, clear that pressure from the institutional environment has enhanced internal stability in local schools. How principals use their room for manoeuver and use organisational structure to create opportunities for teacher learning in order to improve practice is therefore another research task that it that would be of great interest to develop further. It would be of particular interest to follow principals

and schools that show large variations in practices for collaborations, designed artefacts and organisational routines. Few previous studies have taken an organisational perspective on school leadership and school improvement (Johansson, 2011), which makes this a particularly vital question for research.

Furthermore, sensemaking as a theoretical perspective has in this thesis been shown to be a productive way to contribute to the understanding of how changes at national level and new arrangements at local level are perceived and interpreted in order to be integrated with previous routines and frameworks. However, not much research has been done about how school leaders interpret their directives and make strategic decisions for local school improvement work based on these directives. The sensemaking perspective could be productive in relation to strategic decision-making, but also in relation to how wider changes in the policy context affect improvement processes at local level and what role formal and informal leaders take on as a result of both national and local governance.

This study shows that the formal school leader has an important role in the construction of distributed leadership and that school leaders' knowledge, understandings and values are significant for whether capacity for school improvement is built. Do national principal training programmes and other inservice training programmes that principals take part in influence how principals perceive their role in improvement work and how they organise for improvement in their schools? Can the principals put their new knowledge into practice and what response do they get from the teachers? These and many more questions need to be answered to create a better understanding of the relations between capacity building, leadership and school improvement.

Epilogue

A conclusion from this thesis is that formal school leaders play an important role in the construction of distributed leadership. Along with the many different understandings of distributed leadership that abound, a misconception exists that distributed leadership is the antithesis of top-down leadership. However, formal leaders with the ultimate responsibility for decisions at local level have an important function in their schools and from their position can easily move initiatives forward, slow them down by neglect or quickly kill them off. In Sweden, the principal has by law the overall responsibility for the internal school organisation and for the improvement of their school. This means that how school leaders tackle these tasks is essential to whether distributed leadership will contribute to capacity building and school improvement. Principals have a core role in organising for improvement at local level, in particular with regard to facilitating the development of the leadership capability of others in the or-

ganisation. This implies that principals must be concerned with brokering, facilitating and supporting others in leading innovation and change.

The external pressure with regard to results, efficiency and improvement has increased. Distributing leadership more widely in the organisation has, as a result of this, been advocated as the solution for how to fulfil the goals. However, this study concludes that there is potential for schools to make their own interpretations and transform environmental pressure, thereby preventing distributed leadership from becoming an instrument to enforce managerial accountability and instead encouraging a local approach to internal capacity building and school improvement. A democratic and reflective leadership, described by Møller (2002) as 'power-with', has in this study been shown to be a way forward if distributed leadership is also to contribute to capacity building and local school improvement in the sense of a systematic process of work that aims to enhance student learning in relation to local and national objectives. However, the pressure to focus on managerial accountability, with cost-effectiveness and efficiency as measurements, while at the same time being responsible for the organisation of a leadership practice that contributes to participation, professional influence and capacity building, puts principals in a rather delicate position. For the development of distributed leadership in a positive direction, in this case in the direction of maintenance of a democratic vision of leadership that builds capacity for school improvement, a high degree of openness to collaboration, shared sensemaking and trust between different actors within local schools, as well as in relation to external stakeholders, are of particular importance. In this process, principals can be both gatekeepers and gate openers.

Svensk sammanfattning

Den här avhandlingen om distribuerat ledarskap är skriven i en tid när fokus på ledarskap och utveckling i skolor är stort. Skolledarskap och skolutveckling lyfts fram av forskare, praktiker och politiska företrädare som viktigt om skolan ska kunna möta framtida krav och ge alla barn och ungdomar möjligheten att utvecklas och uppnå läroplanens mål. Ett framgångsrikt ledarskap menar forskare, behöver baseras på tillit mellan medarbetare inom organisationen. Ledarskapet behöver också förstås som distribuerat, det vill säga som ett resultat av samspelet mellan ledare, lärare och den egna skolkontexten, samt inom ramen för professionellt samarbete och lärande. Ledarskap och då särskilt distribuerat ledarskap har blivit ett mantra för framgångsrika skolor. Genom att förstå ledarskap som en social och relationell aktivitet öppnas möjlighet för fler än de formella ledarna att utifrån sina olika kompetenser initiera ledarskapshandlingar. Med ett sådant synsätt kan distribuerat ledarskap ses som tydligt förankrat i de värderingar som sedan 1960-talet har varit vägledande för utvecklingen av ett demokratiskt ledarskap i svensk skola. Forskare är emellertid kritiska till hur distribuerat ledarskap förstås inom 2000-talets nyliberala styrning. Här blir det snarare en normativ föreskrift för hur ledarskap bör organiseras för att uppfylla krav på effektivitet än en demokratisk utgångspunkt för organisering av medarbetare.

I Sverige har nyliberala styrningsideal bidragit till att det tidigare starkt centraliserade skolsystemet transformerats till ett skolsystem som kännetecknas av marknadisering, decentralisering av beslutsfattande och tydligare resultatuppföljning. Utvecklingen har medfört förändrade roller för skolledare och lärare. Skolledarnas uppdrag har vidgats till att i större omfattning innefatta uppgifter som marknadsföring, resultatuppföljning och effektivisering. Även lärarnas uppdrag har förändrats från att i huvudsak innefatta ansvar för den egna undervisningen till att nu även inkludera arbetsuppgifter kopplade till skolan som organisation. Samtidigt har rektor genom sitt uppdrag som pedagogisk ledare, tillsammans med lärarna, ansvar för att leda utvecklingen av den pedagogiska verksamheten.

Utifrån pågående förändringar av det svenska skolsystemet och de olika tolkningar av distribuerat ledarskap som görs möjliga studerar jag i denna avhandling hur distribuerat ledarskap konstrueras på lokal nivå. Tidigare forskning

har visat att i mer framgångsrika skolor sträcker sig ledarskapspraktiken i högre grad utanför de formella ledarna och genererar därmed ledarskapspraktiker som inbegriper ett brett deltagande och inflytande för medarbetarna. Forskning visar att såväl strukturella som kulturella faktorer är betydelsefulla för hur ledarskapspraktiken formas på lokal nivå. I Sverige har tankar om delat ansvarstagande och organisering av lärare i arbetslag en lång historia. Trots detta har ett samarbete som omfattar en gemensam utveckling av den pedagogiska praktiken, och framför allt undervisningspraktiken, inte blivit en realitet i alla skolor.

I den här avhandlingen ställs följande forskningsfrågor: Hur kan organiseringen av distribuerat ledarskap på lokal skolnivå förstås? Hur relaterar distribuerat ledarskap till förbättringskapacitet och skolförbättring på lokal nivå? Hur påverkar nyliberala styrningsideal distribuerat ledarskap på lokal nivå? För att besvara frågorna har jag genomfört fallstudier på tre skolor. Genom ett riktat urval har skolor med olika typer av distribuerade ledarskapspraktiker valts. Skolorna är alla kommunala grundskolor vilket gör det möjligt att studera variationer i ledarskapspraktiker i skolor med samma styrdokument och därmed liknande pedagogiska uppdrag. Vid varje skola genomförde jag inledningsvis observationer (n=53) av olika typer av formella möten såsom arbetslagsmöte, morgonmöte, ledningsgruppsmöte. Ett särskilt fokus riktades mot mötenas innehåll, ledarens eller ledarnas roller och relationerna mellan lärare samt mellan lärare och ledare. Vid varje skola genomfördes även intervjuer (n=45) med formella ledare, lärare med olika ledningsuppdrag och ett urval av lärare baserat på kön, ålder, undervisningsgrupp och undervisningsämne.

Avhandlingen består av fyra artiklar och en introducerande och sammanfattande kappa. I kappan går jag igenom mina teoretiska utgångspunkter; ett institutionellt perspektiv på skolorganisation, ledarskap som process och praktik, kapacitetsbyggande och skolförbättring. Jag redovisar även tidigare svensk och internationell forskning om distribuerat ledarskap, organisering på lokal nivå för ökat samarbete och gemensamt lärande samt den förändrade styrningens påverkan på lokal skolnivån. I kappan redogör jag även för hur jag har gått tillväga när jag har samlat in och analyserat mitt material. I denna svenska sammanfattning presenterar jag översiktligt avhandlingens artiklar och mina slutsatser.

Artikel I

I den första artikeln studerar jag distribuerat ledarskap i relation till den lokala etableringen av utvecklande och lärande skolorganisationer. I Sverige har de politiska intentionerna ända sedan 1960-talet varit att förbättra arbetet på lokal skolnivå genom att utveckla mer av samarbetande strukturer, delat ansvarstagande och kollektivt lärande. Utvecklingen har gått mot alltmer kollektiva arbetsorganisationer. Såväl svensk som internationell forskning har emellertid

visat på svårigheterna med att få till stånd ett kollektivt lärande och en hållbar skolförbättring. Forskningsfrågan i artikeln är: Hur organiserar skolor distribuerat ledarskap som främjar utvecklande och lärande skolorganisationer och hur kan olikheter i utfall förklaras?

Från tidigare forskning om lärande organisationer valdes fem betydelsefulla aspekter som studerades närmare för att få svar på frågan hur skolor distribuerar ledarskap för att främja lärande och utvecklande organisationer. De fem aspekterna var: (1) organisatoriska strukturer, (2), mål, visioner och värden, (3) ansvar och beslutsfattande, (4) reflektion och utvärdering, samt (5) attityder. Att aspekterna är betydelsefulla är dokumenterat i forskningslitteraturen, men hur de ska omsättas i skolpraktiken är svårare att finna svar på. För att utvecklande och lärande skolorganisationer ska kunna etableras behöver i många fall betydande förändringar komma till stånd.

Genom det empiriska materialet identifierades skillnader och likheter i de tre skolorganisationerna. I analysen synliggjordes att de tre skolorna hade organiserat för distribuerat ledarskap och samarbetande strukturer på olika sätt. En slutsats som dras är att när skolor separerar utvecklingsfrågor från driftsfrågor (när det gäller tid, grupper och ledarskapsansvar) ökar möjligheterna för utveckling och lärande i organisationen. Studiens resultat visar även att skolornas försök att främja utveckling och lärande skapar spänningar relaterade till de fem aspekterna. I relation till organisatoriska strukturer skapas spänning mellan utvecklingsfrågor och driftsfrågor. Detta synliggjordes genom vilka frågor ledarna gav tid till och vilka frågor som kommunicerades i organisationerna. I relation till etableringen av mål, visioner och värden synliggjordes spänning mellan problemorientering och lärandeorientering. I relation till den tredje aspekten, ansvar och beslutsfattande, identifierades spänning mellan individualism och kollektivism. Spänning mellan en bekräftande orientering och en utmanande orientering identifierades i relation till reflektion och utvärdering. Slutligen i relation till den femte aspekten vilken var attityder, identifierades spänning mellan begränsad professionalism och utvecklad professionalism. Denna spänning kan förstås som grundad i lärares olika uppfattningar om samarbete och utvecklingsarbete och huruvida fokus ligger på lärares egna individuella behov eller organisationens behov. Sammanfattningsvis visar resultaten på svårigheten att etablera utvecklande och lärande organisationer. En positiv inställning till vidgat samarbete och gemensamma normer som gör utveckling och lärande möjligt identifierades som särskilt betydelsefullt. De spänningar som identifierats ger god vägledning till skolledare i deras roll som ledare av skolförbättringsprocesser.

Avslutningsvis visar studiens resultat att lärande organisationer för sin utveckling är beroende av ett samspel mellan organiseringen av distribuerat ledar-

skap, vilka frågor som sätts i fokus, stödet från skolledare, legitimeringen av ledarskap samt en professionell inställning till samarbete och utveckling.

Artikel II

I den andra artikeln studerar jag distribuerat ledarskap med specifikt fokus på lärare med ledningsuppdrag. Den ökade arbetsbördan för rektorer och svårigheten att kombinera det administrativa uppdraget med det pedagogiska har ökat intresset för ett inrätta olika ledningsuppdrag för lärare i den lokala organisationen. I artikeln undersöks hur de olika ledningsuppdrag som lärare tilldelas kommer till uttryck och vilket inflytande dessa lärare har på utvecklingsarbetet och kollegors lärande. Artikeln besvarar följande forskningsfrågor: Hur organiseras och kommer ledningsuppdrag som tilldelats lärare till uttryck? Vilken möjlighet har lärare som tilldelats ledningsuppdrag att påverka utvecklingsarbetet och kollegors lärande och hur kan olika utfall förklaras?

Utifrån analysen av de empiriska resultaten identifierades tre olika typer av ledarskap – koordinerande, förändringsfokuserat och lärandefrämjande. Det koordinerande ledarskapet hade ett tydligt fokus på rutinuppgifter och administration. Det förändringsfokuserade ledarskapet var inriktat på att genomföra tilldelade uppgifter och att nå de uppsatta målen. Det lärandefrämjande ledarskapet hade fokus på handledning och mentorskap. Resultaten visar att hur ledarskap identifieras och förstås av lärare och ledare i organisationen påverkar hur ledarna positioneras, hur ledarskapspraktiken orienteras och därmed vilken möjlighet ledarskapet har att bidra till lärarnas professionella utveckling. Resultaten visar även att de tre skolornas sätt att inrätta ledningsuppdrag för lärare skiljer sig åt med avseende på kopplingen till drifts- respektive utvecklingsorganisationen. I Norra skolan och Västra skolan blev arbetslagsledarnas uppdrag kopplat till driftsorganisationen och både deras roll och praktik kan förstås med utgångspunkt i ett individuellt synsätt på ledarskap. Södra skolan hade inga formella ledare för arbetslagslagen. I alla tre skolorna fanns även ledningsuppdrag kopplade till olika forum inom skolornas utvecklingsorganisation. Dessa kunde företrädesvis förstås med utgångspunkt i ett systemiskt synsätt på ledarskap. Beträffande ledarnas möjligheter att påverka kollegornas lärande och den pedagogiska utvecklingen visade sig kunskap om förbättringsarbete och relevant utbildning knutet till detta vara avgörande. Vidare visade det sig vara framgångsrikt att koppla ledarskap till utvecklingsorganisationen. En kombination av ansvar för både drifts- och utvecklingsfrågor verkade vara svårt att genomföra fullt ut.

Jag drar slutsatsen att förståelsen av ledarskap som individuellt eller systemiskt påverkar hur lärarnas ledaruppdrag formas och kommer till uttryck, vilka kompetenser som prioriteras och hur lärare med ledaruppdrag positioneras i

organisationen. Detta har i sin tur betydelse för ledarnas möjligheter att bidra till kollegors lärande och pedagogisk utveckling. Resultaten visar på behovet av att skolledare, när ledningsuppdrag inrättas, funderar på vilka kompetenser som är betydelsefulla särskilt i relation till den lokala kulturen. Nya roller och strukturer innebär inte automatiskt att även kulturella förändringar som stödjer dessa kommer till stånd. Artikeln visar att hur ledarskap förstås och struktureras i organisationen är avgörande för om utveckling och lärande ska kunna stödjas.

Artikel III

Den tredje artikelns syfte är att bidra med kunskap om rektorers och lärares meningsskapande när de på sina skolor försöker utveckla samarbete och gemensamt lärande. Trots att många skolor sedan 1980-talet har organiserat verksamheten i arbetslag, så att lärare kan mötas och lära gemensamt, har den pedagogiska utvecklingen inte motsvarat förväntningarna. Genom att ta utgångspunkt i det teoretiska begreppet meningsskapande undersöker jag hur utfallet av skolornas utvecklingsarbete kan förstås utifrån hur meningsskapande sker. Meningsskapande sker i en process genom vilka medarbetarna reducerar komplexiteten i praktiken. Genom pragmatiska tolkningar blir det möjligt att greppa och förstå utvecklingsarbetets många dimensioner.

Analysen av det empiriska materialet visar att de tre skolorna använde olika idéer för att stödja utvecklingen av lärares samarbete och gemensamma lärande. I Norra skolan introducerade rektorn begreppet "arbetande arbetslag". I Västra skolan, introducerades "lärgrupper" och i Södra skolan introducerades en gemensam "utvecklingsgrupp". Resultaten visar att lärare och rektorer för att hantera de nya situationerna inledningsvis gjorde pragmatiska tolkningar baserat på etablerade förståelseramar. Om andra tolkningsalternativ synliggjordes bidrog detta till att rektorer och lärare skapade nya ramar för meningsskapande. Normer, värden och traditioner i de lokala organisationerna gav olika förutsättningar för detta. Artefakter, så som forum för handledning och planeringsrutiner, samt möjligheten för lärare med ledningsuppdrag att fungera som "medlare" i förbättringsprocesserna påverkade även utfallet.

I Norra skolan lät rektorn lärarna göra egna tolkningar av hur arbetande arbetslag skulle förstås. Lärare som inte kunde se meningen i förändringen höll fast vid de etablerade förståelseramarna. Normer och traditioner, vilket kan förstås som den rådande ramen för meningsskapandet, hindrade en utveckling av samarbetet och det gemensamma lärandet. I Västra skolan reagerade lärarna inledningsvis på samma sätt som i den Norra skolan. Lärare med ledningsuppdrag delade inte de pragmatiska tolkningar som gjordes inledningsvis utan bjöd in både rektorn och lärarna till nya samtal. Genom detta synliggjordes alternativa tolkningar och stödjande artefakter som forum för handledning och grupper för

erfarenhetsutbyte organiserades. I Södra skolan var lärarsamarbetet starkt och rådande förståelseramar öppnade upp för samtal och diskussioner om formerna för det forum som etablerats, vilket kom att stödja fortsatt utveckling. Kulturen möjliggjorde för kritik och nya förslag som kom att utmana rektorernas önskan om kontroll. Utvecklingsledaren och stödjande artefakter i form av planerings-rutiner bidrog till en gemensam förståelse av utvecklingsgruppens uppdrag.

Sammanfattningsvis visar artikeln på betydelsen av meningsskapande när ut-vecklingsarbeten ska initieras, särskilt när dessa utmanar gällande föreställningar om samarbete och lärande. Kvaliteten på lärarsamarbetet i det dagliga arbetet visade sig vara viktigt för möjligheten att skapa mening i de initiativ som intro-ducerades. Då det är vanligt att skolor i sin önskan om att nå resultat i utveckl-ingsarbetet fokuserar strukturella förändringar, visar den här artikeln på betydel-sen av att ge stöd till lärare så att nya gemensamma tolkningsalternativ och nya förståelseramar möjliggörs. Därtill behöver rektorn ta ansvar för och stödja utvecklingen i önskad riktning.

Artikel IV

I den fjärde artikeln är det övergripande syftet att studera vad som händer när nyliberala styrningsideal möter de normer, värden och förståelseramar som råder på lokal nivå. Nyliberala styrningsideal från 1990-talet och framåt har förändrat det svenska skolsystemet och medfört nya krav på skolledare. Ett alltmer påtag-ligt yttre tryck i form av marknadsanpassning, kvalitetsuppföljning och ekono-mistyrning har förts fram som något skolledare måste balansera emot lokala intressen. I denna artikel undersöker jag hur skolledare som företrädare för sina lokala verksamheter upplever den rådande situationen och hur de väljer att agera inom tre olika områden relaterade till det förändrade styrsystemet, närmare bestämt den regelbundna tillsynen av Skolinspektionen, kravet på systematiskt kvalitetsarbete och det ökade trycket på ett starkare chefskap.

Resultaten visar att skolledarna för att bevara de interna strukturerna genom-för symboliska förändringar eller omvandlar externa krav så att de stämmer överens med lokalt förankrade normer och värden. På detta sätt förhindrar rektorerna att nyliberala idéer tar överhanden. Resultaten visar att skolledarna såg fördelar med Skolinspektionens granskning. Däremot uppfattades krav på åtgärder inte alltid som tvingande, trots risk för sanktioner. Istället omtolkade skolledarna kraven så att de överensstämde med de interna förståelseramarna. På samma sätt uppfattade rektorerna att det systematiska kvalitetsarbetet bidrog till utveckling. Nya krav och modeller för uppföljning, bedömning och utvärde-ring användes och tolkades av skolledarna mer som redskap för utveckling än som krav. Därmed såg skolledarna möjligheter att göra egna tolkningar som inkluderade interna normer och värden. I liten omfattning anammade skolledar-

na idéerna om ett starkare chefskap knutet till ökad ansvarsskyldighet. För alla skolledare var det viktigt att hålla fast vid ett skolledarskap grundat i demokratiska värden och en god relation till lärarna. För några av skolledarna inkluderade detta ett tydligt pedagogiskt ledarskap. När pedagogiskt ledarskap saknades var detta ett resultat av djupt rotade normer och värderingar i organisationen snarare än ett resultat av ett förändrat styrningsideal. Detta visar att förutsättningarna för gemensamt meningsskapande i skolorganisationer har stor påverkan på vilka möjligheter skolledare har att forma sin roll och sitt ledarskap.

Artikeln visar att externa förändringar påverkar skolor genom de normer och värden som finns inbäddade i den lokala kontexten. Resultaten visar även att skolledarna i den här studien inte primärt styrdes av yttre förhållanden, vilket står i motsats till en mer deterministisk syn på externt tryck. Snarare visade skolledarna i sina roller som lokala företrädare ett tydligt agentskap. De följde de lokalt etablerade förståelseramarna men förändrade även dessa ramar för att utveckla sina lokala praktiker.

Slutsatser

Sammanfattningsvis visar avhandlingen att organiseringen av distribuerat ledarskap på lokal nivå är ett resultat av ett samspel mellan institutionella ramar, specifika förhållanden på lokal nivå och varje enskild skolas historia. Normer och värden sätter ramarna för hur distribuerat ledarskap tolkas och förstås. Detta blir synligt genom organisatoriska strukturer och ledarskapspositioner men även genom hur skolledare och lärare formar sina roller och relationer och försöker skapa mening i vad det innebär för dem att vara skolledare eller lärare i en distribuerad ledarskapspraktik i deras specifika skolorganisation. Avhandlingen visar tydliga skillnader mellan de tre fallskolorna och därmed att det finns utrymme för lokala tolkningar om vad distribuerat ledarskap innebär och hur det kan organiseras.

I de tre skolorna var ett sätt att organisera för distribuerat ledarskap att införa organisatoriska strukturer som möjliggjorde för lärarna att träffas, dela ansvaret för den pedagogiska praktiken och utvecklingen av den. Ett exempel på detta var arbetslag som fanns i alla tre skolor, men som genom olika förståelser ledde till olika utfall. I de tre skolorna fanns även ytterligare organisatoriska strukturer. Dessa strukturer skilde sig åt mellan skolorna och kan förklaras av de lokala förståelseramarna och skolornas historia. Norra skolan hade ämnesgrupper, Västra skolan en lärgruppsorganisation och Södra skolan en gemensam utvecklingsgrupp.

Ett annat sätt att organisera för distribuerat ledarskap var att införa ledningsuppdrag för lärare kopplade till de organisatoriska strukturerna. Ledningsuppdrag som tilldelas lärare kan anses vara väletablerat i den svenska kontexten

och grundat i en tanke om en mer kollektiv ledningsorganisation och en idé om att lärare ska vara delaktiga i beslutsfattandet på lokal nivå. Resultaten visar emellertid att lärarnas osäkerhet om vad uppdragen gäller och den nära kopplingen till rektorn gör det svårt för dem att verka som ledare. En del kollegor uppfattade dessa lärare som ansvariga för att driva igenom skolledningens idéer även om intentionen var en annan. Andra kollegor uppfattade lärare med ledningsuppdrag mer som handledare och som mentor i ett kollektivt lärande.

Avhandlingen visar att skolledarna i stor omfattning lämnar det öppet för lärarna att bestämma vilket innehåll och vilken inriktning de grupper och ledningspositioner som utgör den lokala organisationen ska ha. Istället för att utöva sin formella makt försöker skolledarna påverka lärarna genom att ge dem mer eller mindre stöd för de förslag som de lägger fram. Samtidigt har skolledarna i andra frågor begränsad legitimitet och därmed små möjligheter att påverka lärarna. Sådana frågor kunde exempelvis röra användandet av nya bedömningsmodeller och undervisningsupplägg. Detsamma gäller för lärare med ledarskapsuppdrag som för att legitimera sina roller och få gehör för sina idéer behöver skapa goda relationer med lärarna.

Distribuerat ledarskap har blivit kritiserat för att användas normativt. Resultaten i denna avhandling visar att kvalitén i det distribuerade ledarskapet grundas i de specifika förhållandena på lokal nivå. Ett distribuerat ledarskap är därmed ingen garanti för att förbättringskapacitet och skolförbättring kommer till stånd. För att driva en verksamhet som främjar socialt lärande och kollektivt förbättringsarbete med fokus på måluppfyllelse behöver de lokala normerna och värderingarna göra det möjligt att ta ett gemensamt ansvar för förbättringsarbetet. För att detta ska vara möjligt krävs en organisation som präglas av tillit. Resultaten visar även att skolledningens kunskaper om hur förbättringsprocesser kan ledas påverkar hur de organiserar för distribuerat ledarskap. Att ha förmåga att förbättra innebär att vara medveten om att förbättringsprocesser tar tid och kräver systematiskt lärande. De rektorer som har denna kunskap engagerar sig mer i praktiken. De bidrar genom att understödja förbättringsprocessen med frågor och andra redskap som håller riktningen och driver framåt. När både ledare och lärare har en lärande inställning till förbättringsarbete möjliggör detta även för att professionellt lärande gemenskaper utvecklas. Om det gemensamma engagemanget inte finns visar den här studien att ett indirekt pedagogiskt ledarskap som skapar förutsättningar genom organisering och ledningsuppdrag inte är tillräckligt. Då behövs snarare ett direkt pedagogiskt ledarskap som engagerar sig i den pedagogiska undervisningspraktiken.

Resultaten från avhandlingen visar avslutningsvis att lokala normer och värderingarna fungerar som en motkraft till de nyliberala styrningsideal som under senare tid kommit att prägla det svenska utbildningssystemet. Värderingar grun-

dade i välfärdserans vision "En skola för alla", tycks på lokal nivå ännu stå starka jämfört med de nyliberala idéerna, och bidrar sålunda tydligt till konstruktionen av distribuerat ledarskap.

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Appendix

A. List of Interviews

The North School

2012-01-23	10.00-10.50	Teacher team leader 1
2012-01-23	11.30-12.45	Principal
2012-01-23	15.15-16.10	Teacher team leader 2
2012-01-24	9.00-10.00	Teacher team leader 3
2012-01-24	13.00-14.00	Teacher 1
2012-01-24	16.15-17.30	Teacher 2
2012-01-25	10.00-10.30	Teacher 3
2012-01-25	11.00-12.00	Teacher 4
2012-01-25	12.00-12.50	Teacher 5
2012-01-26	9.00-10.00	Teacher 6
2012-01-26	11.30-12.30	Teacher 7
2012-01-26	13.00-14.00	Teacher team leader 4
2012-01-26	14.30-15.30	Teacher 8
2012-05-09	8.00-8.45	Teacher team leaders
2012-05-10	11.00-11.30	Principal
2014-01-17	10.30-12.00	Principal

The South School

2012-01-31	15.00-15.55	Teacher 1
2012-02-02	9.00-9.45	Teacher 2
2012-02-02	10.30-11.35	Development leader
2012-02-02	11.30-12.15	Teacher 3
2012-02-02	13.45-14.50	Teacher 4
2012-02-02	15.30-17.00	Teacher 5
2012-02-03	8.00-9.00	Teacher 6
2012-02-06	8.00-8.55	Teacher 7
2012-02-06	9.00-10.20	Principal 1
2012-02-06	11.00-12.00	Teacher 8
2012-02-06	12.30-14.20	Principal 2

2012-02-09	14.30-15.30	Teacher 8
2012-05-07	9.00-9.45	School manager
2014-01-10	10.00-11.30	New School manager

The West School

2011-04-12	12.30-13.50	Principal
2011-04-12	15.00-16.00	Deputy principal
2011-04-14	8.00-9.00	Teacher 1
2011-04-28	8.00-8.50	Learning group leader 1
2011-05-02	8.00-9.00	Learning group leader 2
2011-05-09	8.00-9.00	Teacher 2
2011-05-10	15.30-16.30	Teacher team leader 1
2011-05-11	12.00-12.50	Teacher 3
2011-05-12	12.30-13.30	Teacher team leader 2
2011-05-12	14.30-15.10	Teacher 4
2011-05-23	9.40-10.50	Learning group leader 3
2011-05-30	8.20-9.20	Teacher 5
2011-05-30	10.00-11.25	Principal
2012-05-21	9.00-10.00	Principal and new Deputy principal
2014-01-31	8.30-10.30	Principal

B. List of Observations

The North School

2011-09-06	11.00-12.00	School management group meeting
2011-09-07	8.00-9.00	Teacher team leader meeting
2011-09-08	15.00-16.30	Teacher team meeting
2011-09-13	11.00-12.00	School management group meeting
2011-09-20	11.00-12.00	School management group meeting
2011-09-21	8.00-9.00	Teacher team leader meeting
2011-09-22	15.00-16.30	Teacher team meeting
2011-09-27	11.00-12.00	Teacher team leader meeting
2011-10-27	15.00-16.30	Teacher team meeting
2011-11-24	15.00-16.30	Teacher team meeting
2011-11-29	14.30-16.00	Subject group meeting
2011-11-30	8.00-9.00	Teacher team leader meeting
2011-12-01	15.00-16.30	Workplace meeting
2011-12-06	11.00-12.00	School management group meeting
2011-12-07	8.00-9.00	Teacher team leader meeting

2011-12-08	15.00-16.30	Teacher team meeting
2011-12-21	13.30-15.30	School management group meeting
2012-01-12	15.00-16.30	Teacher team meeting
2012-01-18	8.00-9.00	Teacher team leader meeting
2012-01-19	15.00-16.30	Teacher team meeting
2012-01-24	11.00-12.00	School management group meeting
2012-01-24	14.30-16.00	Subject meeting

The South School

2011-08-29	9.00-10.30	Principal meeting
2011-08-30	13.00-14.00	School management group meeting
2011-08-30	16.00-18.00	Workplace meeting
2011-09-13	13.00-14.00	School management group meeting
2011-09-13	16.00-18.00	School development group meeting
2011-10-11	13.00-14.00	School management group meeting
2011-10-11	16.00-18.00	School development group meeting
2011-10-13	15.00-16.30	Development work (teachers and principals)
2011-11-15	8.00-8.30	Morning meeting in teacher team
2011-11-15	11.30-12.30	Anti-bullying group meeting
2011-11-15	13.00-14.00	School management group meeting
2011-11-15	16.00-18.00	School development group meeting
2011-12-13	13.00-14.00	School management group meeting
2012-01-10	13.00-14.00	School management group meeting
2012-01-10	16.00-18.00	Teacher team meeting
2012-01-31	16.00-17.30	Teacher team meeting
2012-01-31	17.30-18.00	School development group meeting

The West School

2011-02-07	8.00-8.20	Morning meeting
2011-02-07	8.30-9.20	Learning group meeting
2011-03-08	8.00-10.30	School management group meeting
2011-03-21	8.00-8.20	Morning meeting
2011-03-21	8.30-9.20	Learning group meeting
2011-03-22	8.00-10.30	School management group meeting
2011-03-29	14.15-15.45	Teacher team meeting
2011-04-05	8.00-10.30	School management group meeting
2011-04-12	17.00-19.00	Workplace meeting
2011-05-09	8.00-8.20	Morning meeting
2011-05-10	14.30-15.30	Teacher team meeting
2011-05-23	8.00-8.20	Morning meeting

| 2011-05-23 | 8.30-9.20 | Learning group meeting |
| 2011-05-24 | 8.00-9.00 | School management group meeting |

C. Interview Guides

Exempel intervjuguide skolledare

1a. Hur länge har du arbetat som rektor?
b. Hur stor är skolan – hur många elever och anställda har du ledningsansvar för?
c. Hur trivs du som rektor?

2. Berätta lite om ditt arbete som rektor på skolan.
Vad innefattar ditt arbete?
Vilken är din roll?
Vilka frågor ansvarar du för?
Hur tror du pedagogerna ser på din roll?

3. Hur skulle du vilja beskriva skolans organisation och arbetssätt?
Hur kommer det sig att ni har denna organisation?

4. Finns det en gemensam vision för skolan?

5. Berätta om skolans pedagogiska utvecklingsarbete?
Hur planeras detta arbete?
I vilka forum arbetar ni på skolan med pedagogiskt utvecklingsarbete?
Vilka frågor arbetar ni med just nu? På vilket sätt sker detta? I vilka grupper?
Vad är din roll?
Finns andra ledare i det pedagogiska utvecklingsarbetet?

6. Hur gör ni för att utvärdera och följa upp det utvecklingsarbete som ni gör på skolan?

7. Hur skulle du vilja beskriva ditt pedagogiska ledarskap? Hur arbetar du som pedagogisk ledare?

8. Berätta om lärgruppernas arbete.
Vilken funktion har lärgrupperna i skolans arbete?
Vilka frågor beslutar lärgrupperna om?

Vilken är din funktion gentemot lärgrupperna?

9. Hur har lärgruppsorganisationen uppfattats på skolan?

10. Hur ser du på lärledarens position?
Vad var syftet när ni införde lärledare här på skolan?
Vilken funktion är det tänkt att lärledarna ska fylla?
Vad är det för kompetenser/egenskaper som är viktiga i rollen som lärledare?
Hur har lärledarna förberetts eller utbildats för sitt uppdrag?
Vilket ansvar och beslutsfattande har lärledaren?
Har lärledaren någon nedsättning i tid för sitt uppdrag?

11. Berätta om arbetslagens arbete.
Vad var ert syfte när in införde arbetslag här på skolan?
Vilken funktion har arbetslagen i skolans arbete?
Vilka frågor beslutar arbetslagen om?
Vilken är din funktion gentemot arbetslagen?

12. Vilket uppdrag har arbetslagen när det gäller att genomföra pedagogiskt utvecklingsarbete?

13. Hur ser du på arbetslagsledarens position?
Hur har arbetslagsledarna tillsats?
Hur har arbetslagsledarna förberetts eller utbildats för sitt uppdrag?
Vilket ansvar och beslutsfattande har arbetslagledare?
Vilken tid har arbetslagsledaren för sitt uppdrag?

14. Berätta om ledningsgruppens arbete inom organisationen.
Vilken funktion har ledningsgruppen i skolans organisation?
Vilka frågor ansvarar ledningsgruppen för?
Vilken betydelse har ledningsgruppen för dig?
Hur uppfattas ledningsgruppen av övriga lärare på skolan?

15. Finns det andra ledningsuppdrag på skolan?

16. Vad skulle du säga kännetecknar ledarskapsorganisationen här på skolan?
Vilka är styrkorna med den ledarskapsorganisation ni har?
Vilka är svagheterna med den ledarskapsorganisation ni har?

17. Hur gör ni för att utvärdera och följa upp den ledarskapsorganisation som ni har på skolan?
Hur skulle du vilja utveckla organisationen?
Vad ser du som skulle behöva förbättras?

18. Hur sker kommunikationen mellan olika grupper inom skolan?
Hur får du information från de olika grupperna?

19. Hur skulle du beskriva samarbetet mellan pedagogerna på skolan?
Hur sker samarbete?
I vilka frågor sker samarbete?
I vilka grupper sker samarbete?
Hur utbrett är det med samarbete i det pedagogiska planeringsarbetet?

20. Hur skulle du vilja beskriva ditt samarbete med pedagogerna?

21. Vad innebär begreppet "en fördelad ledarskapspraktik" för dig? Hur skulle du beskriva vad "en fördelad ledarskapspraktik" innebär?

22. Har du något mer som du vill tillägga?

Intervjuguide vid uppföljande intervju med skolledare

1. På vilket sätt upplever du att de nya styrdokumenten med ny skollag och ny läroplan har påverkat ditt arbete som rektor?

2. Vilka tankar uttrycker lärarna kring dessa dokument?

3. Skolverket och skolinspektionen har under de senaste åren gett ut en del dokument med allmänna råd, granskningar och lägesrapporter för skolan. Hur förhåller du dig till denna typ av dokument och hur påverkar de dig i ditt arbete som rektor?

4. Vad innebär skolinspektionens granskning av denna skola för dig och hur förhåller du dig till granskningsresultatet i ditt arbete som rektor?

5. Vilken påverkan upplever du att den kommunala huvudmannen har på ditt arbete och på din lokala skolorganisation?

6. Hur ser du som rektor på de ökade kraven på uppföljning, utvärdering och dokumentation av elevernas resultat? Vad har det inneburit för er?

7. Hur ser du som rektor på det ökade fokuset på resultat, kunskapsmätning, nationella prov, striktare läroplan med centrala innehåll? Vad innebär det för dig i ditt arbete och för ditt pedagogiska ledarskap?

8. Hur tycker du att det fria skolvalet, elever och föräldrars valfrihet och inflytande påverkar ditt och skolans arbete?

9. Vad lutar du dig mot när du sätter riktningen för skolans utvecklingsarbete?

10. Hur påverkar den kommunala nivån ert lokala utvecklingsarbete?

11. Hur ser du på lärarnas deltagande i utvecklingen av skolans organisation, ansvarstagande, ledarskap?

12. Hur ser du som rektor på din relation till lärarna? Vad kännetecknar denna relation? Hur försöker du utveckla den? Vad skulle du vilja förändra?

13. Hur ser du på förhållandet mellan din roll som chef för verksamheten och som ledare för arbetet/utvecklingen?

Exempel intervjuguide lärare

1a. Vad har du för utbildning?
b. Vad har du för tjänst på skolan?
c. Hur länge har du arbetat på skolan?
d. Hur trivs du på skolan? Varför?

2. Hur skulle du vilja beskriva skolans organisation och arbetssätt?
Vilka grupper består organisationen av?
Vilka ledningspositioner tycker du finns inom denna?

3. Finns det en gemensam vision för skolan?

4. Berätta lite om ditt arbetslag, vad arbetar ni med när ni träffas i arbetslaget?
Vilken funktion/roll har arbetslagen i skolans arbete?

Vilka beslut fattas i arbetslaget?
Drivs ett pedagogiskt utvecklingsarbete i arbetslagen? Hur då, vad då?
Vad är arbetslagsledarens funktion i arbetslaget?
Vilken påverkan har arbetslaget på ditt arbete?

5. Berätta lite om din lärgrupp, vad arbetar ni med i din lärgrupp?
Vilken funktion/roll har lärgrupperna i skolans arbete?
Vilka frågor beslutar lärgruppen om?
Vad är lärgruppsledarens funktion i lärgruppen?
Vilket ansvar har lärgruppsledaren?

6. Vad är din åsikt om den lärgruppsorganisation som ni har? Varför?

7. Vilken relation har lärgruppernas arbete till skolans utvecklingsarbete? Hur?

8. Vad är rektorns roll i skolans arbete?
Vilken betydelse har rektorn för skolans arbete?
Hur skulle du vilja beskriva rektors pedagogiska ledarskap?
Hur stämmer det med hur du skulle vilja ha det?
Hur tror du rektorn ser på sin roll?

9. Berätta om ledningsgruppens arbete. Vad gör ledningsgruppen?
Hur ser du på ledningsgruppens arbete?

10. Finns andra ledningsuppdrag på skolan?
Vilka frågor driver/ansvarar dessa personer för?
Vilken funktion har de i skolans arbete?
Har du något specifikt område som du driver arbetet inom?

11. Vad är din åsikt om den ledningsorganisation som ni har på skolan?

12. Hur skulle du vilja beskriva samarbetet mellan rektorn och pedagogerna på skolan?

13. Hur skulle du beskriva samarbetet mellan pedagogerna på skolan?

14. Hur skulle du vilja beskriva kommunikationen mellan olika grupper inom skolan?

15. Vad gör ni när det inte fungerar som tänkt i t.ex. arbetslag, lärgrupper eller mellan olika medarbetarkategorier?

16. Vad anser du är rektorns främsta uppgift i skolans arbete?

17. Vad anser du är din främsta uppgift som pedagog/arbetslagsledare/lärledare i skolans arbete?

18. Har du något mer som du vill tillägga?

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