VALUES AND ETHICS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

STRATEGIES, ACCOUNTABILITY AND DEMOCRATIC VALUES: A SUCCESSFUL PRINCIPAL IN A SWEDISH SCHOOL

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This study investigates the leadership strategies of successful principals. Previous research has indicated that principals who are successful engage in multiple practices to meet the needs of changing educational settings. For example, the "International Successful School Principal Project" (ISSPP) identified a core set of basic leadership practices that fall into five categories. Setting directions includes visioning, fostering the acceptance of group goals and having high performance expectations. Understanding and developing people means providing individualized support and intellectual stimulation besides serving as a role model. Redesigning the organization emphasizes both creating collaborative cultures and supportive structures. Managing the teaching and learning program involves planning and supervising instruction, providing instructional support, and monitoring the school's progress. Finally, coalition building includes establishing relations with district staff and community groups (Day & Leithwood, 2007).

This article presents research that identifies the leadership strategies of a successful principal in Sweden and examines those against the ISSPP's leadership practices. It should be noted that, while these practices have value in almost all educational contexts, they may have to be adapted to local circumstances (Leithwood, 2005). The identified strategies are analyzed first from the perspective of Swedish principals being held accountable for both financial matters and for teachers/student performances. Then the strategies are analyzed against the obligation of Swedish principals to instil democratic values and provide democratic leadership. And finally, we come to the essential question of this study: Do the leadership strategies of our successful principal reflect the values of democracy as the basis of Swedish education and leadership?

Democratic Leadership and Management by Results

In Sweden, principals are expected to lead in a democratic style (Johansson, 2004; MacBeath & Moos, 2004). The notion of democratic leadership, along with an emphasis on equality, stems from the post-war period (Oftedal Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006). In current laws and regulations relating to the mission of Swedish principals, democracy as goal, as process, and as outcome is emphasized. This is explicitly stated in the national curriculum (Lpo94, 1994): "Democracy forms the basis of the national school system" (p. 3). Further, "All who work in the school should…organise daily work in democratic ways" (p. 8). A principal is expected to be a role model who leads in accordance with democratic principles which involve influence, equality and responsibility.

The Swedish curriculum act (Lpo94, 1994) also stipulates that accountability is part of the school principal's overall responsibilities. There are two types of responsibility placed upon principals: ex-ante and ex-post responsibility. Ex ante refers to a proactive orientation where principals attend to role expectations, through analysis, planning and action. Ex-post responsibility refers to being held accountable for actions and their outcomes (Starratt, 2004). As part of the restructuring of the educational system in the 1990s a "management by results" model was adopted requiring Swedish principals to be accountable for the performance levels of students and teachers, as well as for the finances (Daun, 1993; Lindblad, Johannesson, & Simola, 2002). In the Swedish educational setting, relevant performance levels of staff and students concern not only academic but also social objectives. This means that both the staff and the students are expected to know, learn about and enact democratic values. These values include "The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between men and women and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable" (Lpo94, p. 3).

In day-to-day real-life education situations, tensions frequently arise. Some arise from an imbalance between ex-ante and ex-post responsibilities, or, as some researchers describe it, from an imbalance between democratic values and result-oriented management. Indeed, the equity oriented education goals associated with the 60's, 70's, and 80's (Johannesson, Lindblad, & Simola, 2002, p. 326) may compete with Scandinavian principals' needs to cope with external accountability demands (Moos & Møller, 2003, p. 362; Moos, Møller, & Johansson, 2004). Thus, we can see a tension between a current result-oriented environment and "communities that distribute power and decisions-making."

In any case, to be successful a principal must be able to cope with the tensions, challenges, and opportunities created by the accountability-oriented policy context in which they work (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Along with taking responsibility for implementing national and district level policy, the school principal should, according to Moos et al. (2004, p. 206) provide "critical analysis and action to secure a democracy" and should be the gatekeeper (or gate opener) to the educational goals proposed by municipal and national politicians.

Values and Educational Leadership

It is not only in Sweden that education is a moral endeavour. Even a cursory literature review reveals research interest in educational leadership from a values perspective, described in terms such as moral, ethical, and democratic leadership (Johansson, 2004; Johansson & Begley, manuscript submitted for publication; Norberg, 2004). The locus of moral agency in schools is mostly seen as residing in individuals such as principals (See e.g. Hodgkinson, 1991; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Begley evocatively sums this up as "the power of one", highlighting the capability of one principal to have an impact (2007, pp. 362-363).

To deal with values, value conflicts, and ethical dilemmas the principal must be sensitive to values and, as a reflective practitioner, be able to identify, understand, and settle value conflicts. Principals have the power and the responsibility to manage value conflicts and ethical dilemmas present in the every day life of educators (Begley, 2007; Begley & Johansson, 2003; Day & Leithwood, 2007; Hodgkinson, 1991; Lpo94, 1994).

But it should be noted that principals do not act alone. "The power of many" is required to achieve the moral purposes of schooling. A shared responsibility between principals and teachers characterizes how a democratic leader carries out the responsibility in practice. This calls for the development of reciprocal trust in schools, and for appropriate use of power when clear statements and boundary-setting actions are necessary (Moos & Møller, 2003; Moos, Møller, & Johansson, 2004).

Democratic leadership consequently implies both boundary-setting and dialogue. In setting boundaries the school principal as a democratic leader exercises the power and responsibility given to them to set those boundaries necessary to protect the best interests of all students. As a democratic leader the principal also must engage in dialogue with staff members so that their task awareness and learning are enhanced in order to improve student knowledge of academic and social objectives (Johansson

& Begley, manuscript submitted for publication; Johansson & Zachrisson, forthcoming).

"The power of one" and "the power of many" relate well to the formal responsibilities of Swedish principals as individuals to be democratic, and their mandate to create and participate in democratic and collaborative processes in schools. In a Swedish setting the democratic mission of schools and principals should be reflected in all practices/strategies of successful principals.

The Study

The larger research project, of which this study was a part, focused on leadership, structure and culture as prerequisites for successful schools. It was conducted in 24 secondary schools in twelve Swedish municipalities[1] representing different parts of Sweden, governed by different local political parties and, whose school districts were of different size. For the purposes of this study one principal in a secondary school in one of the school districts in a larger municipality was selected.

The bulk of the data for the study were collected in the spring of 2006 at a Swedish secondary school, here called Anderson Secondary (part of the Anderson K-9 structure). The selection of Anderson Secondary and the principal, here called Helen, as the object of study was based on them representing the examined phenomenon, namely success. First, Anderson Secondary showed improved academic outcomes over three years (2004-2006) and according to the students is successful in relation to social and civic objectives (Ahlström & Höög, forthcoming). Thus, Anderson Secondary has raised the levels of measurable pupil attainments during the last three years. The school has been judged a successful school both in terms of academic and social outcomes within the larger research project. Second, Helen has for the past ten years been the principal at Anderson Secondary. Third, in interviews, five teachers and the deputy principal of the school regarded Helen as a successful principal. Fourth, in an earlier study Helen was assessed as taking responsibility for Swedish national objectives and obligations to a high degree.

Anderson secondary school was established in 2000 and has approximately 300 students and 30 teachers in the 7-9th forms. Parental educational level is above the Swedish national average. The student body comes from middle-class and low socio-economic status areas. Twenty percent

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[1] Sweden is divided into 290 municipalities, which are responsible for schooling, social services, culture and leisure time activities. Small and mid-sized municipalities often have one school district, while larger municipalities can be divided into several.

of the students have a foreign background. Approximately 30 % of the students attending Anderson Secondary live outside the school's catchment area.

Three researchers spent five days in the municipality. They spent 2.5 days in Anderson Secondary and 2.5 days in another secondary schooltaking interviews, distributing questionnaires, making observations, writing observation protocols together, walking around in the school building, participating in conferences, making classroom visits, having coffee and informal talks in the teachers lounge, talking to students, and to parents on a parents' evening gathering. Two-hour interviews were conducted with Helen, the deputy principal, and five teachers from different subject areas. The research aim to search for factors of success allowed for the five teachers to be selected by the principals.

Helen has extensive educational training, having attended the National Head Teacher Programme, and taken courses in marketing, business economics, a masters' course for leaders, as well as having attended various conferences and studied leadership literature. The deputy principal is a former teacher. Two teachers, T1 and T2, have been employed since the 1990s, while T3, T4, and T5 have worked four years at Anderson Secondary.

The schools in this municipality are managed by a school board and by a school superintendent. The municipality is divided into school districts, each led by a district head. The superintendent, the chair of the school board, and the head of the school district where Anderson secondary school is situated were interviewed. They were asked to describe the principal's support and demands in this municipality and school district.

The analysis of all transcribed interviews provided evidence of success as regards prerequisites, processes (described as strategies), and school outcomes. I therefore decided to elucidate the strategies of this successful principal in areas described by principals and verified by teachers, and mirrored against district level prerequisites. The interview data were supported by data from the above described sources and by data from municipal, district and local school documents.

Findings

Helen's success as a school leader emerged from the data as a mosaic of strategies. We will look at ten different challenges confronting Helen and the strategies she uses to deal with them.

External Strategies

Like other principals Helen is expected to meet a great variety of external demands. The external strategies employed by Helen concern district level obligations, principal/parent relations, and developing international links.

Strategy #1: Responding to district level obligations

The research shows that one of the factors creating tensions for Helen and her staff is the municipal elections held every fourth year. Our respondents reported that changed political leadership is followed by new goals, new decisions and new demands from the board that may not adequately consider the consequences for principals and schools.

In general, Helen has established good working relations with district level leaders, holds herself accountable for finances, respects district level deadlines, and fulfils demands set by the district. Her approach to dealing with district demands is to adopt, accept, and be loyal to expectations – even though some of those expectations do not always reflect either Helen's or the schools' needs: "It is my job to do it, I know, and I do it but I do not have to regard it as good…definitely not as support."

However, the strategy of "upward loyalty" creates tension between some teachers and Helen. She is criticized for paying too much attention to demands coming from above: "And she makes a point of obeying the rules, and not stretching these" (T3), and for being absent too often from the school site to meet district level leaders. At the same time teachers expressed appreciation for Helen's ability and efforts to communicate the local school problems to the district leaders: "She delivers our views to politicians" (T3).

Helen indicates that she is in fact walking the tightrope between school and district demands. As much as responding to district level obligations is an important strategy for her, it is an area where her influence is rather constrained. This was clearly articulated by the superintendent: "In X (the name of the municipality) it is tough. Here you cannot do what you want. That is a fact. You have to like the situation. Do not do anything else." The demands include the principal's obligation to fulfil certain directives set by the district leaders: to develop schools, to manage budgetary restraints, to meet the expectations of the national curriculum as well as those of the local action programme that is prescribed on by the school board. Support to Helen and other principals occurs through a number of modalities such as formal meetings, continuous support from specialists in areas such as budgeting, staff issues, and quality enhancement, and professional development programs to principals and teachers. Dialogue and collaboration between levels is regular and involves both administrative and pedagogical matters. Helen's superiors indicated and Helen overall confirms that principals have the authority and sufficient scope of influence to meet their expectations.

Strategy #2: Establishing and maintaining parent relations

Previously, to meet the market-force of competition, Anderson Secondary embarked on a campaign to attract parents and students. Through various efforts made, Anderson Secondary has acquired a good reputation and there is now a queue of students applying to attend the school. At the time of the interview, Helen and the school were faced with a dilemma that ironically resulted from the school's success. Helen describes the dilemma: "the interface between marketing and being honest with parents…we cannot take in all children who want to come here." This is an uncomfortable predicament for Helen who is involved in building productive relationships with families and communities. She respects parents and accordingly is open and honest about the situation.

Strategy # 3: Establishing and maintaining international links

Having international relations is at Anderson Secondary seen as evidence of a successful principal, a successful school, and successful teachers and students.

> … it happens a lot around them, they travel to and fro, to EU and represent us. We have lots of study visits … and it must depend on them being successful in leading us so that we are on our part successful, and our students…, it is a chain- reaction. (T2)

Helen has as a part of her national mandate to develop the schools' international links, which aims at founding international solidarity, and for students to understand the cultural diversity within Sweden and be prepared for cross-cultural and cross-border contacts. Furthermore, at Anderson Secondary, 20 % of the student population is of foreign extraction. The international work of the principals consequently meets both national expectations and local needs.

Internal Strategies

The staff is Helen's foremost focus. Data gathered in this study clearly shows that she is committed to staff, is supportive, has high expectations for staff members and that she strives to be a role model for her staff: "My main task is my staff, whether they are teachers or not, to support

and help them, and at the same time push them and to be a role model. That is my main mission as I see it."

In the discussion below we will see the particular internal strategies (4-10) that Helen uses.

Strategy # 4: Designing and redesigning the organization

The evidence from this research is that a key overall strategy of Helen is to design and redesign the organization in collaboration with her staff. Over the years, ineffective structural and cultural factors have thereby been altered or replaced.

One example deals with instilling cooperation. In the 1990s Anderson Primary school was threatened with closure. Helen and the staff made a joint effort to save the school. A culture of thinking, working and accomplishing through cooperation was instilled. The effort is remembered by Helen: "I could not have done it by myself… I am surrounded by lots of fantastic people. But I think I have contributed to some extent.". This strategy of collaboration is undeniably accepted and upheld by all the major players - the principal, the deputy principal and the teachers.

Strategies aimed at maintaining a collaborative culture include attending to human relations issues, creating a climate of caring and building reciprocal trust. To this end, Helen takes part in birthday celebrations, and arranges and participates in extra-curricular gatherings. The role of the principals is evident in teachers' answers: "they (the principals) have worked a lot on us getting on well together" (T2).

In the planning for Anderson secondary, Helen initiated a change to the traditional structures and culture of a secondary school. Previously, autonomous teachers taught single subjects in classrooms, and given their time schedules, teacher collaboration was further hampered. Through collaborative consultation with the main actors in the school, Helen instigated changes in the structure of student groups and teacher teams. Moreover, the physical structure of the school was altered so that it would support and reinforce a collaborative culture.

Strategy # 5: Meeting the challenge both to exercise leadership and distribute leadership

Shortly after the year 2000, Helen's workload increased due to the school's increased enrolment. To respond to this workload Helen, exercising her mandated authority to do so, recruited a deputy principal. Together the two analyzed, re-thought, and re-structured the organization. To facilitate participation and encourage collaboration in the larger school, various task-groups were created, leaders for teams

selected, and a master schedule for various planning meetings was established for the year. Helen remembers: "We delegated more to the teacher teams." Consequently, the major strategy used to deal with the challenges was to distribute leadership. While Helen's leadership is one of distributed leadership, she is nevertheless, as she says, "*still the leader.*"

Strategy # 6: Setting directions

National and district level steering documents serve as starting-points for setting direction for the school, which Helen strategically sets by working with and through the school's staff. Students and parents are informed of the school's ambitions and some become actively involved. One teacher says: "They (the principals) have succeeded in getting teachers to strive in the same direction. … the principal, staff, parents, and students are able to strive towards the same goals." In practice, the direction-setting is realized through the strategies discussed below.

Strategy #7: Instituting change as part of the overall vision

The overall guiding vision at Anderson Secondary is one of change. The strategy is to embrace change instead of resisting change: "our principals are straight - forward and explicit about changes to take place" (T2). Helen expects everyone to have a positive attitude and describes the vision: "Yes, our vision is to dare to see the future as something new… this with working forwards, there are always things to improve, there are things you can become better at."

This research reveals a number of natural professional challenges that arise within the educational milieu, such as demands and problems. These challenges can serve as a basis for necessary changes regardless of whether the demand emanates from national, district level, or local school, or whether it concerns the whole school, teams of teachers, or individuals. This leads to the next and interrelated strategy # 8, which is clearly emphasized by the interviewees.

Strategy # 8: Meeting the challenge to be on top of demands and problems

During the preceding year the school as a whole was confronted with a major challenge. From one semester to another the student population grew due to a school district re-organization. Anderson Secondary unexpectedly received a high number of immigrants from a neighbouring school. The situation was demanding: a crowded school, changed climate, cultural clashes, tensions due a lack of appropriate structures and procedures to deal with the new students professionally, and strain on teachers and staff.

Helen provided support to teachers herself and via external professionals. Strategic decisions were made. For example, professional development programs dealing with multicultural issues were initiated for all staff.

The previous semester Helen had spent considerable time and energy handling problems between teachers in one teacher team. Overall the interviewees reported that Helen provided feedback, and that she is seen as supportive and appreciative of teachers and is judged trustworthy: "You feel that you have the principal at your back and that you can trust her to be there if anything happened" (T3).

Dialogue as well as boundary-setting characterizes Helen's leadership, according to interviewees: "Here you have a say, but this I decide on. I am the leader and these decisions are for me to come to... and it is nothing to argue about…"(T3).

Strategy #9: Developing staff and accepting accountability for staff performance

The district, Helen, and her deputy principal provide formal professional development opportunities to individuals, teams and the whole school. Besides that, frequent in-service and formal and informal learning opportunities are part of the agenda at Anderson Secondary. The findings of this research show that in practice, staff and school development programs work together to develop direction-setting. The annual goal setting, planning and quality reviews has, according to the interviewees, made possible a shared vision, shared basic values, and shared group goals. Moreover, formal performance appraisals and spontaneous dialogues are also part of the leadership strategy. The principals recognize that quality of staff is important and are committed to hiring the best possible staff: "When we recruit new teachers we try to be very clear. This is what we stand for, and if you work here, this is what it is all about" (Helen).

Among the important responsibilities that the two principals have assumed is that of taking responsibility for student outcomes. This they do by paying attention to teachers' performance. Professional support coupled with demands and expectations are the means to foster teacher and other staff development. Classroom visits are conducted regularly with the aim of improving teachers' classroom practices: "They make classroom visits in all groups. And thereafter these are discussed… with the teacher" (T5). The classroom visits combined with the monitoring of the teaching and learning processes, a joint responsibility of Helen and the deputy principal, is one way to take accountability for staff performances.

Strategy # 10: Directing student learning and accepting accountability for student outcomes

Helen repeatedly defines the purpose of schooling and leadership as *"all about the students."* This ethics of student-centred values is verified and shared by the other interviewees. The school culture calls for action whenever democratic values are threatened or violated. When problems concerning students or between students occur, acting on this strategy, which staff members clearly internalize, staff members, as well as students, are reactive and even pro-active: "All grown-ups intervene… and students are really good at signalling when something is going on"*(T3).*

Helen takes responsibility for social objectives and democratic values. Based on experiences of the previous fall when the rapid growth of the school created various problems, she has made strategic pro-active decisions. In the coming fall, with the additional student enrolment, the teachers are from the beginning of the school year to give priority to the democratic values even in subject-related teaching so as to orient new students to the Anderson Secondary culture. Helen argues that democratic values serve as a prerequisite for all academic learning.

Taking accountability for student academic performance is another strategy, also related to how the teaching and learning is conducted. The discussions are according to teachers initiated by the principals: "… when the results were not good. Why … you have to analyze. The principals are very good at that too. They ask why it is like this, what do you think?" (T2*)*

The responsibility to promote student success rests on the school. However, given the pressure of the large number of new students, Helen is hesitant to say that the school actually will able to meet this objective quickly enough to show up in the grades of students, rather she fears that the grades at school level will fall. Nevertheless, she still expresses trust in teachers and students.

> But next year the results will decline due to the student population. This does not imply that the teachers have become worse… This does not mean that they (students) do not get on well or haven't done their best… (Helen).

Strategies, Accountability and Democratic Values

The ten strategies described in preceding sections of this article will now be matched against the ISSPP core set of basic leadership practices, analyzed from the perspective of accountability, and from the perspective of democratic values and leadership.

While financial affairs are prerequisites for leadership practices and teaching and learning practices at Anderson Secondary, they do not constitute the centre or starting-point for these practices. Instead, the central focus of Helen's leadership practices, is taking responsibility for staff and students' performances and results (Johannesson, Lindblad, & Simola, 2002). In this regard, this study's findings affirm the work of the ISSPP researchers. Helen uses various 'successful leadership practices' (Day & Leithwood, 2007) and strategies aimed at 1) setting direction, 2) maintaining a collaborative culture, 3) developing staff, and 4) designing and redesigning the organization. Helen further 5) builds coalition with external interested parties. The data from this project does not reveal whether she is acting more as a gatekeeper or as a gate opener in juggling the competing demands and goals set by politicians (Moos, Møller, & Johansson, 2004, p. 206). Nevertheless, regarding Helen's current strategies of dealing with the district, the critique from teachers suggests that two things need to be communicated clearly to teachers: first, the rationale behind the "upward loyalty strategy", and second, the benefit she and the school receives from the "upward loyalty strategy".

This research reveals an aspect of neglected policy expectation in the Swedish context. Helen namely, 6) provides a contribution to the schools' educational program through reaching into the teaching and learning processes. She challenges teachers at the core of their work, and monitors progress on school and student levels. For that she has created conditions in terms of a culture of collaboration, problem-solving and change, and structures that enable the identification of problems, the analysis and discussion of strategies to remedy the problems at hand, and actions to be taken. Irrespective of whether or not she recognizes problems as based on "value conflicts" (Begley & Johansson, 2003), Helen reacts and acts when problems arise. The positive disposition of problems provides a solid base for continuous school improvement, since problems are acknowledged as drivers for necessary improvements. This makes Anderson Secondary a story of success despite problems and dilemmas. Significantly, change was identified as being the vision that encouraged and supported the positive reaction to and resolution of demands and problems.

The question arises: Do Helen's leadership strategies, including the demands for accountability, reflect the call for democracy as the basis of education and leadership? Helen clearly leads in democratic and authentic ways. Her professional values mirror national democratic values in the curriculum such as influence, equality and responsibility (Lpo94, 1994). She treats people with respect, and cares about people that she leads. Helen further promotes democratic values in education through putting democratic values first and results in terms of grades second, while still striving for the achievement of both for all students. Her leadership strategies make democracy visible as behaviour, content, and outcome (Lpo94, 1994; Norberg, 2004).

A key characteristic is the interaction and interrelatedness between "the power of one" and "the power of many." Helen exercises democratic authority. "The power of one" is used in her taking role responsibilities seriously (Begley, 2007). She is a gate keeper for democratic values and "the best for students." Boundary-setting is one practice for which teachers expressed appreciation (Johansson & Begley, submitted for publication; Johansson & Zachrisson, 2008). To create and maintain "the power of many", she works with and through staff in collaboration and based on reciprocal trust and dialogue (Moos & Møller, 2003; Moos, Møller, & Johansson, 2004). She distributes leadership to the deputy principal and to team leaders while still being the leader herself. Much of Helen's perceptions were confirmed and reflected by the interviewees and found expression in practical actions and daily routines of the school.

This research presented turned out to be a story of success. Success is achieved thanks to and/or despite challenging circumstances, and some teachers worry that Helen will not be able to cope much longer. Based on the empirical evidence provided by this study it is argued here that both Helen and Anderson Secondary can rely on one, perhaps un-reflected basic and institutionalized "coping strategy" when dealing with future challenges. Helen's values-driven leadership and the democratic values that show in staff members' commitment and actions at Anderson Secondary, serve as necessary prerequisites for Helen and the school to remain on top of problems and demands.

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