



# VALUES AND ETHICS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

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## IN SCHOOL COMMUNICATION: DEVELOPING A PEDAGOGICALLY FOCUSED SCHOOL CULTURE

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Principals spend much of their working time engaged in communication. According to Gronn (1983) "Talk is the work, i.e. it consumes most of an administrator's time and energy" (p.177). In most schools, personnel reflect a mixture of experience, opinions and expectations. This variety can contribute to tensions and dilemmas that need to be handled by the principal. Depending on what principals and teachers choose to talk about, some issues will be highlighted. In the conversations that principals and teachers conduct, not all issues are pedagogically relevant. It can be a challenge for principals to direct communication and actions so they contribute to sound educational outcomes for the students. In Sweden, as is the case in most countries, principals are expected to act as pedagogical leaders (Utbildningsdepartementet, 1994). For the purposes of this article, pedagogical leadership is defined as leadership with focus on fulfilling the objectives in the national curriculum as the primary means of achieving successful student outcomes. Consequently, the question is: Do the communication practices of principals support a pedagogically focused school culture?

Several structural aspects of communication processes are accessible to leaders as ways of focussing conversations on teaching and learning. These include the timing of meetings and the discretion to call meetings (Ärlestig, 2008, Forthcoming). However, it also follows that carefully scheduled meetings and focused agendas do not necessarily guarantee that communication will contribute to student success. There are other factors that affect the quality of the communication processes. Englund (2007) asserts that "Good communication contributes to sensemaking, thus sensemaking is dependent on each participant and the specific content, situation, context, etc. No communicative situation is totally predictable because it is created in the present moment, in the situation" (p.9).<sup>1</sup>

Trust, openness, and authenticity are all qualities that influence how a message is understood. Trust can be described as the 'taken for granted' aspects of

<sup>1</sup> Authors own translation.

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interaction and is often manifested in two common forms: (a) institutional trust i.e. the expectation of appropriate behaviour based on the norms of the institution and (b) relational trust i.e. trust in the competence of the individual person (Seashore Louis, 2007). The presence or relative absence of trust becomes a prerequisite for how open and collaborative the communication climate can be. Trust also influences the authenticity the principals and teachers show in their conversations. These are important aspects of an organizational culture that influence the sense making that occurs during conversations. Moreover, organizational culture can be revealed through language and conversations (Dumbleby & Burton, 1998). Reflecting on how information is received, by whom and when messages are distributed within a professional organization is a way to become more conscious about the close connection between communication and culture. Situations that sometimes are described as 'communication failures' can often be shown to be culturally-based problems (Schein, 1998), which indicates that how communication is used is often intertwined and mixed up with attitudes and values that are inherited in the schools culture. In this sense culture and communication can be described as reciprocal processes (Kowalski, Petersen, & Fusarelli, 2007; Miller, 2006), where organizational culture affects the communication style to a high extent and vice versa.

Teachers' and principals' attitudes and values can be seen to influence administrative practice (Begley, 2001) in the sense of their effects on how communication is delivered and understood. Communication reflects the senders' aims, knowledge, and individual values about both the communicated content and the communication processes. How the receiver understands a message depends both on the content of the messages and the way it is delivered (Clegg, Kornberger, & Pitsis, 2004). Essentially, communication ought to be seen as a pervasive and critical component of the leadership role rather than simply as a role-related skill (Kowalski, Petersen, & Fusarelli, 2007). It is therefore interesting to find empirical data on how the school culture and the way principals and teachers use communication will affect the extent to which the messages of conversations will contribute to successful outcomes. This study explored the connections between the underlying values of individuals and how these values and trust impact the communication process between principals and teachers in five successful schools. Since the Swedish curriculum (Utbildningsdepartementet, 1994) states that academic knowledge and social and civic knowledge is equally important, the schools' work towards democratic fundamental values was taken into consideration. The five schools chosen were identified as successful in terms of the achievement of both academic and social objectives (Ahlström & Höög, 2008). Building on the notion that communication and organizational culture have a reciprocal relationship, this research explored how and to what extent principals' communication supported a pedagogical approach

to leadership focusing on collaboration, teaching and learning issues.

### **Culture, Values, Trust and Communication: Making Linkages**

Culture, values, trust and communication are variables that are closely connected and often intertwined. Culture can be defined as deeply rooted perceptions that organizational members share. Culture is often seen as difficult to change and even to recognize for the involved actors. One explanation for this is that culture springs from values, and values are subjectively interpreted. In effect, values belong to the individual and take on potentially unique qualities. Values are therefore "unique to the individual and descriptive of a group" (Hodgkinson, 2002, p.3). One way to understand culture is to find its origin. Schein claims that culture springs from three sources: beliefs and values from the founders of the organization, learning experiences among the members, and new values and assumptions brought in by new members and leaders (Schein, 1997). Therefore, if the principal is aware of the school's culture and her/his own values, s/he is in a better position to work towards the school's educational objectives. On the other hand, if the cultural contexts are unknown, unexamined, or taken for granted there is a risk of misinterpreting the actions and intentions of people (Fairholm, 1994; Rönström, 2006).

Looking at the processes from a communication perspective, Clegg takes it a step further and claims that all communication and miscommunication constitute and construct organizational reality. Communication always has a meta-aspect that affects the messages (Clegg, Kornberger, & Pitsis, 2004). Depending on how the information is formulated, the message can reveal the relation between the sender and the receiver as well as their values. Using irony, accentuating certain aspects, and referring to mutual experience can underpin the intended message so it supports or contradicts the spoken message. At the same time, these aspects of our contextual communication are often unconscious behaviours of the actors (Fairholm, 1994) that affect the organizational culture and trust among the actors.

One aspect of a principal's communication is to steer conversation towards teaching and learning issues. How principals communicate affects how they are perceived, their ability to pursue change and the attitudes of those with whom they are interacting (Kowalski, Petersen, & Fusarelli, 2007). Communication mirrors feelings, knowledge and values especially in every day conversation where meetings and ordinary issues are a matter of routine. For example, conversation inside schools can be directed towards narrowly managerial preoccupations like creating a safe and secure environment with few interruptions rather than the promotion of stimulating discussions about different pedagogies and perspectives on learning (Ärlestig, 2007). Norberg (2003)

argues that it is important to do retrospective analyses of situations and communication to become aware of whether the individual's values match the person's actions. This suggests that staff can become so imbedded in the cultural norms of their organization that they are unaware that their communication and actions contradict their own professional values and aims. For example, arguing for the importance of collaboration but not giving time and opportunity to discuss different opinions and to solve issues together can be one example when communication content and the communication process contradict each other.

Trust between principals and teachers influences both the school culture and communication patterns. Although principals have formal authority and power and can acquire relational legitimacy through their individual knowledge, experience and skills, trust can reconcile the power differences between leaders and followers and open up new ideas and diverse perspectives. Optimal trust is reciprocal and therefore must be grounded in a relationship where both actors are dependent on each other (Clegg, Kornberger, & Pitsis, 2004; Møller et al., 2007). Trust can be seen as dependent on the quality of communication (Moye, Henkin, & Egley, 2004). If the issue is controversial, trust is even more important. Assuming that trust, individual values, culture and communication are closely connected, it is reasonable to assume that to contribute to good student outcomes a pedagogical leadership focused on collaboration, teaching, and learning issues requires that the principals' individual values and communication are consistent and aligned with the school objectives. Consequently, trust plays a significant role in enabling leaders' to impact the school culture in a positive way. If the leader's communication patterns and her/his values are not consistent, the spoken information can be laden with messages which will potentially contradict and negatively affect the school culture and the trust accorded to the principal. Ideally, principals' communication mirror their responsibility, presence and authenticity (Starratt, 2004) as well as what they value. The balance between creating structures, making decisions and remaining open to different opinions requires what Johansson has termed as 'dialogues and border setting'. 'Dialogue' involves and captures teachers' ideas and knowledge, and 'border setting' focuses professional work on fundamental educational values and purposes (Johansson & Begley, Forthcoming; Johansson & Zachrisson, 2008).

## Method

This study was a component of a larger project called 'Structure, Culture and Leadership – Prerequisites for successful schools?' A research team visited each of 24 Swedish secondary schools for 2.5 days. The visits were conducted over five months in 2004-2005. During that time, interviews were conducted with and questionnaires were given to principals, teachers and students. The content in the interviews and questionnaires covered a wide range of issues.

The interviews were semi-structured and many of the questions to teachers and principals were similar. Since the research mostly covered issues related to organization and leadership processes, the principal interviews took two hours while the teacher interviews took only about one hour. All interviews were taped and transcribed.

In the portion of the study relevant to this article, the focus was on the five schools that were labelled as successful in the main project. The successful schools were chosen to find positive examples of how communication can support a pedagogical focussed school culture. My earlier research shows that the principals in these schools communicate more frequently about teaching and learning issues and school outcomes as compared to the other schools in the project. These principals also participated in more subsequent meetings with their teachers than the principals in the other schools (Ärlestig, 2008, Forthcoming). The interviews with the principal and five teachers at each school were analyzed. I inductively and deductively analyzed the interviews looking for verification of values that reveal any underlying messages in the communication. The focus for my interest was mainly on the questions that covered communication and cultural aspects of the school. Assuming that communication and culture are prerequisites for the understanding of activities conducted to reach academic objectives, as well as social and civic objectives, my analysis was guided by two questions: 1) Are the principals' individual values and communication aligned with a pedagogical leadership that focuses on collaboration and learning for all students? 2) Are aspects of relational trust, institutional trust and principals' trust in their teachers visible?

## Findings

In all five schools under investigation, all principals claim that communication is an important aspect of their work. However, the five schools were found to vary in terms of the characteristics in the communication culture. Using information provided by the teachers' and principals' responses to questioning, a short description of each school can be provided. Each profile illustrates the extent to which the principals support a pedagogically focussed culture. These descriptions were used as a background in the discussion to explore the extent to which the principals' communication related to the school culture, trust and a focus on teaching and learning issues.

### *Lemon Hill*

The school has 380 students and 22 teachers. The male principal has been in office since the school started five years ago. The principal and the teachers have agreed to work towards five main issues (pillars). When the school was first established the staff spent a lot of time building community and establishing mutual values. One teacher said "We often discuss our main pillars and work towards them during our meetings. The principal wants us to refer to a common

professional knowledge base so we talk a lot about teaching and learning issues.” There was a combination of conscious work towards the national objectives, following the local policy documents and a concern for the best interest of individuals and relations. The teachers described the openness among the staff. “The first [thing] I think about concerning communication is openness. It is totally open – to ask questions, and of course to criticize, when you think we go too fast or this seems ridiculous and so on.” The school has an open architecture allowing anyone to observe what activities go on in the classrooms. They were accustomed to having many external visitors.

The principal formulated his intentions and opinions clearly in frequent dialogues with the staff members. He said of himself, “What I am, or what others tell me, is that I have a keen ear and that I listen a lot to what others tell me. I can relate their examples with new ideas that contribute to the conversations about how we shall proceed.” According to the teachers the principal has a role where he balances openness and control. One said “I think the principal needs to interact a lot with his followers to become successful. To lead an organization, the principal needs a certain amount of control. He is not like a hawk always watching but he knows and he acts in a humble way where he always talks with us and checks our opinions. Interaction is important.” The principal agreed “As a principal I have to make decisions so we can move on. You can feel that enough is said, and you have to make a decision even if everybody doesn’t approve. Often people come afterwards and tell me that it was a relief that I made the decision and that we had to move on.” The school culture can be described as collaborative and with a focus on teaching and learning. By balancing control, dialogue, and support, the principal works towards the school objectives with the main pillars as a foundation for his communication. He sets directions through dialogue that connect the past to the future and to the main issues in their present situation.

#### *Evergreen Hill*

This school was rebuilt during 2000 and has 300 students and 33 teachers. Both the principal and the deputy principal were female. The climate was described by teachers as open, straight forward and confirming. One teacher said “The communication is very straight forward. We always have dialogues. It feels like we have a plain communication style that is easy to understand. We are all co-workers, all of us.” Another teacher said “we know as teachers what we believe in and we express our views in discussions. It is an open climate, and people get angry sometimes, but that does not cause any problems.” The principals had a positive focus on improvement and change and encouraged collaborative work. The principal stated “if you do not want to collaborate, you are not wanted here. You are in the wrong school. Those kinds of signals have been sent to teachers who have quit later on.”

The principals had a close relationship with their teachers. The deputy principal said “I think it is very important to be accessible. There is a need for that among the staff. I believe that to create relations you need to be accessible.” The principals distributed a lot of information and had structured conferences with recorded minutes of the proceedings. When the teachers thought there was too little time to discuss teaching and learning issues, the conference system was changed. One teacher explained “We wanted more time to discuss teaching and learning in the teams. This year we doubled the time to discuss educational matters in the teachers’ teams. The principal influences the work by contributing with issues and data to discuss in the team.” The principals were open for dialogue. Another teacher said, “The principals are good at creating a positive climate even around challenging issues.” The principals were described as straight forward in their communication and feedback. They were considered to have a keen ear.

The principals made classroom visits with feedback conversations afterwards. The deputy principal declared, “I am a pedagogical leader because I am engaged in the teacher’s work. I make visits and I look at how they work. I love school improvement. I read everything I get hold of. I am curious about new things. I ask the teachers how they work and suggest other perspectives.” The teachers claimed that the principals are persons who have the guts to act. They relied on the principals and knew that the principals’ presence would influence the school work. The teachers’ description of the principals suggests they had everything under control at the same time as they involved the teachers in decisions and dialogues. In this school, collaboration was highly valued. The principals’ work provided stability and work towards change by support to the teachers through confirmation and concrete feedback. They combined their communication with a warm, positive and compassionate attitude towards their teachers. When hiring new teachers, they consciously selected and declared what values and aims they were striving for.

#### *Fennel Hill*

The school was built in 1968, with 350 students and 25 teachers. The school has a male principal. The communication in the school was described by one teacher as “straightforward, clear and in a way direct and quite spontaneous.” Another teacher expressed it as “Everybody in the staff gets to know what is going on and we inform each other.” The principal was often visible, walking around in the school. One teacher said “He is often talking and moving around among students and teachers so everybody knows him.” Another teacher continued, “He moves around a lot. He does not sit calmly in his office. Instead he talks to us teachers daily and ask things ‘do you think this is a good idea...’ or ‘I have been thinking about this...’ He participates in many meetings with parents and students. So there is a lot of dialogue between individuals and also among the members of the whole group.” His primary interest was with the students, but he also had confidence in the teachers.

The principal was described as open and straight forward. He was a visible leader, not afraid of conflicts, and he was a good listener. He was a leader who according to one teacher can make ideas come through. He had a lot of ideas, knew what he wanted, and was not afraid to strive towards his goals. The principal claimed that he had to think about not becoming too dominant or taking over in meetings. The principal said "I am open-minded, honest and clear. I say what I think and want and then I need to take responsibility for that. I know that they (the staff) do not always think and want to do the same things, and that is enough reason to open up an issue for discussion." His straightforward approach and sometimes fast responses could include words or solutions that were not appropriate. Some teachers claimed that the principal was not sensitive enough towards the culture and sometimes hurt individuals with his comments, especially female teachers. It was a rough start with the principal according to one of the teachers: "In the beginning there were some tough years together with our new principal. He has always been engaged and striving to do a good work which is in his favour. Now, after working together for many years the communication works much, much better."

In this school, the culture was built on informal contacts and frequent dialogues to promote improvement. The principal was visible, and communicated both informally and formally as often as possible. He was open and spontaneous, and always discussed ideas and methods. The relational attitude combined listening with ideas and suggestions that encouraged democratic behaviour.

#### *Ginger Hill*

The school had 470 students and 36 teachers. They had one male principal. The school was built during the 60's. The teachers described a heterogeneous staff, where everyone respected various opinions and ideas among the members as long as there were open conversations and dialogues about the different perspectives. One teacher said "The communication must be open-minded, we have an open climate and not at all the same opinions, but in the end we find a mutual way to handle different issues." There was an emphasis on education and in-service training for teachers and team leaders.

The principal had a vision and was engaged and well prepared when it came to issues associated with teaching and learning. He was interested in theory and was well updated with new initiatives and research. One teacher said "You should not raise issues with the principal if you are not sure of what you want to say. You need to be well prepared to convince him in a discussion about educational matters if you have other opinions than his." One teacher claimed that the principal sometimes was too theoretical and therefore could be hard to understand. The principal wrote a newsletter every week that addressed primarily educational issues and new research. He also made classroom visits now and then. The principal tried to focus his communication on more strategic issues

connected to understanding basic values in relation to teaching and learning. He worked mainly through the teacher team leaders. The principal said "If you can convince the team leaders to take a stance in teaching and learning issues, they will motivate others and through them the ideas becomes a part of everyday work". The principal described himself as shy and said that he preferred theoretical discussions compared to more practical work.

The teachers as well as the principal demonstrated respect for individual opinions and experiences, even as they strived for collaboration. The principal was structured in his approach and well prepared in meetings. He was not as visible in the school as the principals in the other schools. He directed the main part of his conversations towards teaching and learning issues. Learning both among the students and among the teachers was highly valued.

#### *Kiwi Hill*

The school buildings were from the 50's and were currently under extensive renovation. The school had 320 students and 47 teachers. Both the principal and the deputy principal were male. Some of the teachers admitted that even if they as individuals did not experience any trouble in their communication with the principals, there were communication problems within the school. One said, "I have good communication with the principal, I can say most of what I think and get confirmed, but within the school there are many that would rather talk behind one's back than say things straight forward. We can see that in the evaluation forms." Some teachers were afraid to raise questions and argued that it might affect their salary. Another teacher described it as "one need to express oneself vaguely, there is an anxiety for keeping one's job, a concern that one may be viewed as not doing professional work and a fear of ending up in conflicts."

The principal compared the school with a company or with a sports team. He argued that results and a good reputation in the neighbourhood were important. Many issues were communicated on a general level. Although there were a lot of meetings they mostly dealt with issues outside the classroom. There was a focus on the individual and the individual's performance. At the same time the principal did not visit classrooms, something one teacher reacts to by saying,

In the salary dialogues we discuss different issues and I get feedback but unfortunately too many teachers think that the focus is on negative behaviour that comes from complaining parents and students. It is too seldom that someone goes to the principal to tell him how good a teacher is. There is a distortion in emphasis since the principal has never visited my lessons. He relies merely on hearsay and if he has something to say about my lessons I would like to have better grounded opinions on actual visits to my classroom.

The principal thought that pedagogical leadership was overrated and said “the educational steering or the pedagogical leadership that everyone talks about in the policy documents and other forums are not always wanted- it has just become a libellous pamphlet.” The principal thought that it was sometimes enough if he participated. “It is fun to participate in a non- communicative way; well that’s communication too; to show up is a way to show that you care.”

The school culture in Kiwi Hill was a mix of different subgroups. The principal’s and the deputy principal’s communication patterns differed from each other even if they emphasized that they worked together and communicated the same ideas and thoughts. Many of the teachers said it was easier and more reliable to talk with the deputy principal. Still, it seems like the principal had a higher impact on both trust and the school culture. The principal often described his relations through sports metaphors. He advocated communication and relations at the same time as he said that he was not able to change his communication style and that he was a bit tired of all education and in-service training that always raised communication as important. He trusted his teachers and thought it was more important to participate and listen than to contribute with his own knowledge. The underlying message was that he supported winners and he was more interested to communicate the schools strength and ability to people outside the school than work with learning and improvement within the school. He had an ambiguous attitude towards communication, teaching and learning and collaboration. The teachers did not trust their principal and choose to not talk with him about some of their ideas and problems.

## Discussion

In our main research project, 5 out of 24 schools were characterized as successful in relation to what degree they had reached academic and social/civic objectives (Ahlström & Höög, 2008). According to the Swedish curriculum, academic and social/civic objectives are equally important (Utbildningsdepartementet, 1994). Principals in Sweden are expected to act as pedagogical leaders to reach the school objectives (Utbildningsdepartementet, 1994). This has the effect to encourage them to manage diverse expectations and act democratically with relationships in mind and to focus on collaboration and learning (Höög, Johansson, & Olofsson, 2005; Johansson & Begley, Forthcoming; Møller et al., 2007; Törnsten, Forthcoming). How they communicate in relation to their pedagogical leadership affects how they are perceived, their ability to pursue change and their teachers attitudes towards them (Kowalski, Petersen, & Fusarelli, 2007). Since communication can mirror principals’ intentions and values, communication can be used not only as a tool to reach objectives and aims, it can also be used as an instrument for analysis (Norberg, 2004).

The remaining portion of the discussion will focus three different aspects of the principals’ communication that are relevant to how the principal contributes to a pedagogically focused school culture. These are: (1) keeping principals’ values aligned with the school culture and the curriculum, (2) maintaining high expectations and trust through communication between principals and teachers, and (3) alternate principal communication strategies from school to school.

In four of the schools discussed in this article there were signs that the principals’ individual values were in accordance with the school culture and the Swedish curriculum. Both teachers and the principals gave various examples of a pedagogical leadership. Principals and teachers described an informal and close relationship. Collaboration and learning were expressed values shared by the principals and the teachers. A mix of individual opinions and personalities contributed to dialogues and new understanding. The principals had a vision and shared ideas about how to work with teaching and learning issues. They had found a balance between control and support where the teachers appreciated the principals’ personal engagement and enthusiasm with issues related to the work with the students. Kiwi Hill School differs from the others. The teachers express uncertainty about the central values in their culture and the role of the principal. They said that the communication was not open and instead of working with issues connected to teaching and learning they engaged themselves in general issues related to things outside their own classroom. The principal’s emphasis on individualism and competition rather than cooperation probably influenced the school culture towards minimal openness and collaboration compared to the other schools. It is hard to determine his degree of knowledge about the objectives of the national curriculum and interest in working towards them. It seemed more important to him to market what they already were achieving in the schools rather than to work for collaboration and the development of a learning environment. Even if the deputy principal in this school tried to be a pedagogical leader and a good communicator, his efforts were over-shadowed by the principal’s communication patterns and values. In all five of these successful schools the teachers were engaged and had high expectations on their principals. The school communication culture influenced what and how issues and opinions were treated. There were different opinions and values among the teachers as a group and the teachers and their principals. Professionals are demanding and the challenge is to use their passion and diverse experiences to create good and constructive dialogue about teaching and learning. In a power relation such as the one between leaders and followers conversation that includes risk and challenging ideas need to occur in an atmosphere with a certain amount of security. Security has a close connection to trust, such as trust shown in an open and respectful culture, trust towards the organization and principal role, trust in the individual principal knowledge and experience, and/or as trust in the form of the conversation. The culture in four of these schools suggest that

trust was built in three directions; principal's trust in teachers, teacher's trust in the individual principal and teacher's trust in the principal's role as both a manager and a leader. The teachers understood that their leader has the right and responsibility to use his authority. They also appreciated the individual principal's engagement and knowledge in issues related to teaching and learning. The principal expressed a trust for the teachers and their importance by hearing their views and opinions. There were also frequent examples of the principals' high expectations of their teachers. In the four first schools discussed in this article the stability rested on both institutional trust and on a relational trust (Seashore Louis, 2007), which contributed to open communication and a reliance on a mutual capacity to handle different issues. Again there was a difference in the relations in Kiwi Hill School. The trust manifested for the principals and their ideas was low. This was to some extent the result of too little involvement by the principal in teaching and learning issues and his low interest in the teachers work inside the classrooms. The principals in the first four schools showed trust in their teachers by asking for their opinions and inviting dialogues about their work. In Kiwi Hill school the principals said that they trust their teachers and gave them freedom to act without conversations or interactions with them. The teachers in this school also felt that principals' judge them based on others opinions which made them cautious in raising sensitive issues with the principals.

Even if communication problems sometimes are cultural problems the principals' knowledge and awareness of how communication can support, hinder or conserve the schools culture and build trustful relations affect good school outcomes. Poor and sometimes unreflective communication can underpin negative cultural aspects and contribute to preserve the existing patterns. A critical presence on the other hand, can help to verbalize a problem and set it aside to create a more authentic communication (Starratt, 2004). Communication can be used to interpret and become aware of the school culture. Each principal in this study had his/her own strategy for and emphasis on how to build relationships and communicate. Their conversations were influenced by their values and revealed their aims and understanding of what was important in their leadership and in the curriculum. The principal at Lemon Hill School sets direction by referring to the school's main pillars. His values and communication were consistent with the schools founding values which provided both stability and opened up for new ideas. At Evergreen Hill School, affirmation combined with the principals' warm attitudes contributed to a learning climate. The principal at Fennel Hill School was a frequent communicator. He used every opportunity to start dialogue and discussions. At Ginger Hill School, the principal had a more formal relation to his teachers. He was always well prepared and knowledgeable. He worked through the team leaders to make his ideas come through. All four principals had found a balance between border setting and dialogue (Johansson & Begley,

Forthcoming; Johansson & Zachrisson, 2008) and showed a pedagogical leadership directed towards collaboration and teaching and learning issues. The principal at Kiwi Hill expressed some statements one would associate with a principal oriented towards conducting a pedagogical leadership. One example was that he claimed that communication, and especially listening, was important. On the other hand he gave few concrete examples and presented an ambiguous picture of what he wanted and what he did. He did not use his communication with teachers as a means of initiating dialogue that supported collaboration and teaching and learning issues.

## **Conclusions and implications**

Both culture and communication involves familiar behaviours and routines of which we are not always aware. Viewing communication as pervasive to the role means that communication can be used as a basis for analyzing principals' leadership as well as gaining insights into school culture. A lot of a principals' communication is spontaneous and informal and the agendas of planned meetings can often be dominated by routine. Nonetheless, the dialogue and conversations also inevitably mirror the principals' values, aims and knowledge.

Two aspects that especially seem to influence the communication process are if the principal's personal values are in accordance with the school objectives and the degree of trust between the principal and the teachers. In Sweden, pedagogical leadership is a part of the expected principal role. That role includes working towards the national objectives by using the values described in the curriculum. A democratic behaviour, respect for different opinions and transparency through dialogues are examples of values that ought to describe the principals communication. These values should be apparent not only in the content of principals' communication but also in the way communication is conducted. If there is a discrepancy between the communicated content and the principals' aims, values and knowledge, the message will be unclear and the hidden message will probably influence the school culture and the teachers' actions more than the spoken message in itself.

To what degree the principals' aims and values are aligned with his/her words and actions probably have an affect on the trust between principals and teachers. Openness and a democratic behaviour can be seen as a part of the institutional trust in school organizations. In four of the schools trust was built in three directions. Since the principals are in a power relationship, the awareness of how their communication reflects their values and what they focus on become even more important. The trust in the relationship between the principal and the teacher becomes a prerequisite to how the messages are interpreted and understood. Low trust often requires a more structured communication. Using more conscious and structured communication patterns can help to align the aim

and the content of the communication and reduce the affect of underpinning messages. In four of the schools the principals' communication shows that they are aware of both their own values and their influence on school culture. They consciously use communication to focus on collaboration and teaching and learning issues which contributes to a pedagogical focused school culture. The analysis of Kiwi Hill school shows that it is hard to conduct pedagogical leadership without authenticity and presence (Starratt, 2004), and border setting and dialogue (Johansson & Begley, Forthcoming; Johansson & Zachrisson, 2008).

Analyzing these school communication processes also shows that trust, culture, and communication are closely connected and intertwined. There is a sensitivity in the interplay between values, communication and trust, which is easy to feel and react to but hard to measure or put in words. To contribute to a pedagogically focused school culture requires principals whose individual values and communication are aligned with each other and the school's mission. Whether consciously or unconsciously, communication can build trust and facilitate change, or perverse and undermine openness and collaboration. We already know that school culture is an important variable in successful schools (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Leithwood, 2006). The results of this study indicate that principals' use of communication is an important variable associated with creating or maintaining a pedagogically focussed school culture. Even if all five schools are labelled successful in relation to student outcomes the pride and satisfaction in the first four schools indicate that some qualities in the schools' work can be hard to capture if success is only related to students' academic outcomes. More research about how communication processes and pedagogical leadership related to outcomes in less successful schools as well as how communication in successful schools are related to sustainability is warranted.

The values and culture that influence the environment where the students get their education should not be underestimated.

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