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SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION—MEETING THE MULTICULTURAL CHALLENGE IN SWEDEN

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Introduction

Educational leadership in Sweden has reached a crossroad, a turning point. There is now a widespread acceptance of the fact that Sweden increasingly has many citizens whose origins and/or upbringing are non-European. In turn, the school has become a multicultural meeting place where previous assumptions about curriculum consensus and cultural order have been disturbed. The increased immigration from outside Europe has sharply raised the multicultural issue for Swedish schools. Ethnic and religious diversity and the increasing percentage of students with other traditions and languages have combined to challenge a traditional presumption of homogeneity and have evoked the need for educational changes.

A school mirrors its surrounding society. Despite the political ideal of a common school where a variety of social groups come together in Sweden, housing segregation¹ can deny this intention. Schools in socially privileged and ethnically Swedish districts have a different student composition compared to schools in socioeconomic disadvantaged and ethnically diverse areas, so-called segregated areas. According to the Government's budget proposal (Finansdepartementet, 2004), the improvement of educational conditions in such areas is one of the most important educational priorities since students who do not achieve accepted educational goals are highly over represented.

The National Agency for School Improvement in Sweden has acknowledged this condition. Therefore, one of its priorities has been to improve educational circumstances for students in ethnically segregated areas.

¹ Housing segregation means, in this context, how families with similar socioeconomic background and ethnic affiliation are channeled into the same neighborhoods.

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As a consequence, an in-service training program was established for teachers in 32 municipalities with the intention of strengthening municipality and school structures and methods as a way to enhance students' progress and attainment.

As change agents in these municipalities, school leaders participated in a "Leadership for Diversity" program. Using lectures, group discussions and tutoring, the program aimed to deepen the understanding school leaders have of schooling in a pluralist democracy. Specifically, the goals of this program were: strengthening and developing the principals' understanding and knowledge of multilingualism and ethnicity; enhancing their ability to identify priorities and implement necessary changes; and supporting and developing their courage to reorganize support for marginalized students.

This paper documents and discusses the responses of 70 principals to this program. A brief account of the ethical dimension of the Swedish school leader assignment precedes an exploration of how the participating principals confronted the challenge of increased diversity in their schools, what new options they identified, and what new insights they acquired through their experiences. The paper also argues for an in-service program which broadens the concept of diversity and focuses on the impact of values of individuals on schooling. Finally, the paper considers whether the program's focus on ethnicity and "immigrants" might conceal other less obvious marginalizing factors operating within the schools.

The Swedish School Leader's Ethical Mandate

The Swedish curricula² have a long history of underscoring the democratic purpose of schooling. This began with the commission for elementary school education in 1914 emphasizing the importance of learning to be an active member of society (Folkskolekommittén, 1914). The 1946 School Commission followed Dewey's (1916/1966) argument that "a democratic society can only be created by education" (p. 87) and affirmed that the school's primary task was to foster democratic human beings.

During the closing decades of the twentieth century, internalization of these concepts by schools became evident. For example, it was generally accepted that students should be prepared for a life with other cultures, emphasizing equality, solidarity and a joint responsibility (Nilsson, 1997). The current curricula and the School Act stipulate that the school has to impart, and shape pupils to these fundamental values upon which their society is based.

² The Swedish three curricula (for the Preschool; the Compulsory school system from 1998, Lpdö98; Preschool Class and the Leisure-time Center, Lpo94; and the Non-compulsory School system, Lpf94. The latter both from 1994), are regarded as the *document* which contains educational goal and guidelines.

The key reference points are to the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable (Lpf94, ; Lpfö98, ; Lpo94). This prescription applies to all employed in schools, staff as well as pupils. These values are meant to saturate all school activities and constitute a common frame of reference. All who work in school should uphold the stated values and should "very clearly disassociate themselves from anything that conflicts with these values" (see for instance Lpo94, p. 5).

The state mandated curricula also acknowledge cultural diversity and emphasize the importance of an international perspective:

Awareness of one's own cultural origins and sharing a common cultural heritage provides a secure identity which it is important to develop, together with the ability to empathize with the values and conditions of others. The school is a social and cultural meeting place with both the opportunity and the responsibility to foster this ability among all who work there. (see Lpo94, p. 5)

The importance of an international perspective means, besides the capacity to analyze and navigate in a global world and society, developing and understanding cultural diversity within the country.

The curricula also promote an equivalent and equitable education for all. It implies that education should be adapted to each pupil's circumstances and needs, and be based on the pupil's background, earlier experiences, language, and knowledge, irrespective of where in the country it is provided. The school has a special responsibility for those pupils who for a variety of reasons experience difficulties in attaining the academic goals. The principal has, as pedagogical leader and head of teaching and non-teaching staff, the overall responsibility for that the school's activities as a whole are focused on attaining the educational goals i.e., that the curricula's intentions are put into practice.

A set of educational ethics for school leaders were formulated by the Swedish Association of School Principals and Directors of Education in the late 1990's. This code is supposed to guide the principal's decision-making and ethical positions. It provides the framework on which the principal should base his/her decisions, a framework where equality is the fundamental principle. The code of ethics specifies guidelines such as: 'No one should be exposed to bullying or any other type of harassment' and 'The principal is to respect the integrity of the individual and not misuse confidential information.' These ethical rules are all in line with the curricula's democratic values and should permeate all educational activities and, further, individual values should be examined considering their coherence with the curricula's

promoted values. The principal's concern with content and quality of work should also be based on ethical decision-making. Consequently, quality requires ethical considerations for the people impacted by the decisions taken by the principal.

This brief account of the principal's duties and responsibilities according to national steering documents and the codes of ethics, illustrates a discrepancy between the intention formulated at central level and their realization at local level. The reality is that students who do not achieve accepted educational goals are highly overrepresented in segregated areas of the communities. The remainder of the paper will describe and analyze an in-service program for school leaders which is aimed at closing this gap between espoused and actual educational practices in Sweden.

The Program

The "Leadership for Diversity" program was one year in duration and focused on multilingualism and ethnicity. Three two-day seminars with lecturers and group activities that focused on bilingualism and ethnic diversity formed the foundation of the course. All activities aimed to discuss and critically examine the principal's beliefs, responsibilities and actions as school leaders in multicultural schools. Questions such as "What does this mean for me as a school leader?" and "What kind of actions does it require from me?" were discussed in connection with the lectures' content. Further, the instructors contributed with short lectures on leadership theories. In addition to these lectures and group discussions, the principals met in smaller groups where the program's themes were examined in more depth through further reading or collegial tutoring focusing on self experienced dilemmas³.

Before the program commenced the principals were asked to give three examples of challenges in their everyday work as leaders in multicultural schools. Further, data was continuously gathered by participant observations taking notes during seminars, group discussions, tutoring sessions and informal interviews. The general focus of the investigation was therefore the principals' comments, questions and reflections. Every two-day seminar ended with two questions which the principals answered in writing: "What new insights did you gain?" and "What actions must you now take as a school leader?"

³ The concept dilemma describes a problem to which there are at least two possible solutions or possibilities of which none is more acceptable than the other. Collegial tutoring implies, in this program, a gathering where principals describe problems or dilemmas they have encountered or will face. Different points of views and arguments are highlighted during the discussion with the aim to find alternatives for action.

At the end of the program, the principals answered a follow-up questionnaire linked to their earlier responses. The questions asked in what way had new insights influenced their practices? What had happened to their intentions for change? The main purpose of the survey was to discover whether the participants could describe the effects, if any, of the program. A number of patterns emerged from the data analysis and are presented below.

Challenges and Dilemmas Perceived by the Principals

Sixty-one principals submitted a total of 168 examples of challenges experienced in their daily work. Six themes emerged from this data: learning organization (58 examples); values and beliefs (47); language (37); parental cooperation (12); competition with independent schools (9) and coping with the community (5).

The first theme, 'learning organization' embraces the principals' difficulties in creating an organization with a shared goal based on an understanding of the school's mission. The challenges that they identified highlight their struggle to implement methods which improve all pupils' goal fulfillment irrespective of social class, gender and ethnicity; and their efforts to enhance the teachers' desire to learn and readiness for change. Other examples reveal teachers' negative attitudes towards their teaching assignment and collegial work.

The second theme that emerges from the data concerns attitudes of principals to the multicultural environment of their communities. The principals expressed the difficulties they encounter in enhancing educators' understanding of their joint responsibility for inclusion and the value of diversity: How do I get my staff to suspend Swedish culture as a norm and take a wider perspective on, and understanding for 'the Other.'

The third theme was language, including educator perspectives of bilingualism and their common responsibility for all pupils' linguistic development, irrespective of the school subject or the pupil's origin. Parental cooperation, the fourth theme, highlights difficulties encountered in improving cooperation with families from non-Swedish traditions. Theme five related to competition with charter schools; and the sixth theme addresses the difficulties associated with including pupils with immigrant background into the societal web.

When the principals met in smaller groups for collegial interactions the issues they raised were quite similar to those described above. They raised issues which revealed their struggle to create a structure which supports school achievement and, further, to handle individuals or groups within the organization who work against the school's mission and values. As a principal expressed it: "We talk about the staff culture, but what about the principals' culture? How do we engage with those who work in conflict with our assignment?"

The situations that principals describe illustrate their concern with staff members' prejudicial and unethical treatment of those pupils, parents or colleagues who, in various ways, "disturb" and challenge any common understanding of homogeneity or ingrained assumptions about "good teaching." These situations also exposed for them the school leaders' individual biases: "My individual biases become visible during our discussions. I have to go home and reconsider my values".

School leaders in multicultural schools are responsible for developing an education service that provides equality of opportunity and high achievement for all students. This implies, amongst other things, providing for a curriculum that includes Swedish as a second language as a subject of instruction. This responsibility also requires an understanding of the educational needs of the multilingual group of pupils. During the tutoring sessions for the participants in this program, some ambiguous points and uncertainties concerning linguistic development and mother tongue teaching emerged. Principals asked: "What is meant by mother tongue instruction? How do I as a principal handle these issues when not even I know what it means? and How do I include mother tongue teachers into the school organization?"

Opinions on what constitutes good teaching can apparently differ between educators and families. The situation the principals reported also revealed conflicts grounded in differing attitudes towards such things as: what it means to support pupils with special needs, the origin (national or religious) of mother tongue instructors, and parental cooperation. Questions that arose included: "Who has precedence in the interpretation of 'good teaching' and 'the student's best interest'? The school or the family? How is an authentic collaboration created to give voice to marginalized groups?"

Identified Effects of the Program

The overall goal for the leadership program was to strengthen the principals' authority, courage and capability to motivate and accomplish organizational changes and priorities which would raise the level of measurable pupils' attainment in segregated schools. According to the majority of the participating principals this goal seemed to have been fulfilled. "Yes, I hope so. I focus these issues in a different way; Maybe not my capability but my courage. I do not longer permit any staff member to base their arguments on assumptions, but base their discussions on research; and this program has given me authority to challenge my staff and create a joint understanding of our mission as educators."

Lectures and group activities addressed different aspects of school leadership and the difference between inter- and

mono-cultural education. As a result, new insights emerged about how they might exercise intercultural leadership. "I have to map out my school from a cultural perspective; I have to examine how we treat our pupils; How do we prepare a parental meeting and how do we know the parents understand us?; I have to elucidate the school's values and their concrete signification"; and "A new insight is the importance of a leadership which creates a joint understanding of what needs to be done and why."

Other insights were linked to the individual self: "I now understand my reactions and gained new understanding for how things stick together"; "I did not know much about these issues so after today I am more conscious and clear in my role as a principal, and I have become more conscious of staff members biases."

One principal, who considered that the program contributed to her personal growth, developed this view:

Yes, getting sight of my own thoughts during this program has... well all training programs do not result in that but this did. I felt that I changed while the program's content promoted deeper reflections and made me more humble. But it bothered me when we [in group discussions] turned a blind eye to our biases. Once, after a lecture, I said to the other 'Hey, we do the same when we sit and categorize "the Other" (conversation with Karen, principal)

Concrete effects of the program are described as: being more strategic; a more explicit emphasis on rules, guidelines and policies; and an increased focus on multicultural issues: "I try to scrutinize segregating systems – how we behave and express ourselves. I think more in terms of structures and how they could be changed; I attach more importance to the work with the staff's understanding of their mission and accountability"; and "I have made my staff more conscious of these issues- but some are still sleeping."

Other participants described how they subsequently initiated discussions about multicultural issues with their in-school leadership teams, superintendents and school boards:

I have been better able to view things from different perspectives. For instance, when we [in the leading team] discuss how difficult it is to know the immigrant pupils' special need of support I say well yes, it is difficult to know but how do we handle this in other cases when we are insecure about concrete needs? Well we ask questions! If we regard all people as humans it would be much easier. (Karen, principal)

The participants in the program identified several other aspects of their learning from the program. These are discussed in turn as follows.

Enhanced Learning About Linguistic Development

Principals are responsible for the organization of language teaching in the schools they lead. This requires knowledge and understanding of multilingualism and consciousness about the connection between learning and language. The participants in this leadership program expressed an enhanced awareness regarding the importance of a conscious lingual support starting in preschool. Further, the staff's joint accountability (irrespective of their profession), for the multilingual pupils' educational needs became visible. "I have to make class room visits with focus on the teachers' linguistic strategies; I have to draw up a plan together with the mother tongue instructors to support pupil's linguistic improvement; I have to elucidate some concepts. What is meant by mother tongue teaching, first and second language, and student's guide?"; and "I have realized that the staff's knowledge about these issues is very poor". As a consequence, some principals have commenced to map their staff's competences.

Other described effects are the recognition and inclusion of mother tongue instructors: "I have increased the collaboration with mother tongue instructors and teachers in Swedish as a second language"; and "I have introduced the mother tongue instructors to the staff, their names, origin and their competences and, as a principal summarized the program's effect: Today, I have a different attitude to linguistic issues."

Enhanced Learning About Ethnicity

Lecturer and group activities focusing the program's second theme, ethnicity, contributed to an enhanced understanding of the subject which, in turn, influenced the participants' leadership: "Yes, today I question my staff's attitude towards immigrant families and New knowledge has made me more confident." Lecturers who presented critical views on the multicultural society aroused thoughts about the concept of nationality and the construction of "the Other": "Who and what determines Swedishness? Born in Sweden? Feel like a Swede?" and "We create immigrants in school." Another insight was the importance of recognizing racism but also an increased awareness of the need to examine their own actions: "What do I do in my daily work which promotes exclusion?" and "How do I respond to unacceptable actions?"

Lectures and discussions broadened the concept of multiculturalism to include more than ethnicity, something which challenged or confirmed earlier standpoints: "Diversity is much more than I considered" and "Diversity also includes social class, not only ethnicity. The view point, "I see diversity more clearly now, even in my school where immigrants are in minority" was developed in a conversation:

"The program has definitely contributed as a wakeup call for diversity and other humans' situation, why "they" behave in a, for us, strange way. It has become very, very explicit." One principal who during the program intended to map the school's culture realized his plans: "We have a better picture of the school's cultural situation today." Another participant felt that the program had given her support to continue an ongoing process: "New perspectives has developed our school improvement work." Those who before the program had not paid any attention to ethnic diversity were helped by the course: "We have not addressed diversity earlier but now we're on the road."

Some Critical Voices

The above summary of the principals' accounts of the program's effects illustrate how "Leadership for Diversity" is experienced by those who were positive about the program. Yet, there are some principals who considered that the program did not have any effects on them as school leaders since linguistic and ethnicity are themes they have included in their ordinary work, or alternately does not fit into their scheduled activities: "A lot of the issues brought up during seminars are questions we work with all the time"; "This spring lasting development is on the agenda"; "Diversity may come later"; "No, lack of time and we have spent time on other issues this spring" are other comments. Others express difficulty in finding time for all tasks and with a lack of collegial support to pursue the multicultural issue: "Lack of time. Reality strikes back when I get back from the seminars; It is more difficult when I don't have any colleague with me at the program."

Discussion of Findings

The participants in "Leadership for Diversity" were in general positive about the program's content and relevance for their profession. During and after the program they could describe new insights and knowledge which, in turn, had led to different actions at their schools. Linguistic issues have been highlighted, mother tongue instructors have been visible and included, and the concept intercultural education has got a meaning. Despite all positive responses and experiences, the program's purpose and focused themes ought to be further discussed and critically examined. First, the leadership program might strengthen stereotype assumptions of "immigrant students". Secondly, focusing on linguistics and ethnicity might conceal fundamental problems and challenges in the school leaders' daily work.

Must Immigrant Background Equate with School Difficulties?

Making a connection between low achievement of educational objectives and the proportion of immigrant pupils in a school is a perspective that is unlikely to contribute much to solving

the problem of low achievement in segregated schools. According to the National Agency of Education, NAE (Skolverket 2005) circumstances outside of the school's control, such as housing segregation, also foster low achievement. Moreover, it is difficult to identify factors which have a positive impact on school success over time because pupils move from school to school between measurements. Other factors which confound the accurate measurement of impact are varying finances for the school's supporting resources; and the organization of mother tongue teaching. The NAE report reveals that it is not immigrant background per se which influence pupils' school success. Socio economic factors are immensely significant. Despite ethnic origin, there is a strong connection between parents' level of education, unemployment, and disposable income. Skills in the Swedish language are therefore not the only decisive factor. However, migration and linguistic issues are significant factors for all educational agents.

Further, national and international research highlights the problem which occurs when students with overseas background are categorized with the label "immigrant children" (see for instance Cummins, 2003; Leeman, 2003; Runfors, 2007; Todd, 2006). "Immigrant children" is a heterogeneous group so the concept ought to be clarified when it is used. Does it refer to pupils from Norway, France or Pakistan? Pupils born in Sweden by parents who arrived in Sweden in their early childhood? Pupils with parents with university education and well integrated at the labor market? Or newly arrived refugees with traumatic war experiences? The variety is immense which makes it difficult to talk about "immigrants" as a homogeneous group.

One reason for categorizing pupils as immigrants is that they have legal right to mother tongue instruction and teaching in Swedish as an additional language. Yet, this categorization might have other effects. It might conceal other factors which operate within such a diverse category (Runfors, 2007). Gender and social class are also recognized as significant factors for school improvement. In an educational research overview Tallberg Broman et al. (2002) illustrate how social background, gender and ethnicity still have an effect on what students take from contemporary schooling as they are fostered to their different positions in a gender, class and ethnic hierarchy (see also Gale & Densmore, 2003). There is a need for actions which counteract these stratified perspectives as they, in general, influence interactions and school success. Another consequence of labeling "immigrant students" is the concept's impact on expectations on this group. They are often described from a deficit perspective, as "different" compared with the "ordinary" and "normal" Swedish student (Gruber, 2007; Runfors, 2007). Moreover, children and students with overseas background might also be locked up in their culture, even against their wishes (Gerwitz & Cribb, 2008; Leeman, 2003). Their school behavior and reactions might, out of sheer kindness, be interpreted according to the notions of their ethnic origin and culture, instead of their

individual circumstances, experiences and needs. This might strengthen a "we-and-them" attitude:

When we articulate and define the "problems" with other's culture, we must realize how "we" are included within this interpretation – as it is our own values which form the basis for our arguments. We do a disservice to projects aiming to reduce social tensions if we regard cultures as homogenous unities. (Todd, 2006, p. 52)

Other studies illustrate how a learning environment that includes educators and school leaders with high expectations on the students has a positive impact on their academic results (see for instance Butcher, Sinka, & Troman, 2007; Cummins, 2003; Day, 2007). The attention must therefore move from "immigrant students" as the problem, to the adults in school whose values influence how, and for whom, school activities are conducted. This does not imply that problems related to ethnic diversity should be neglected. However, they should be analyzed without categorizing a group of students and parents against a common denominator - their overseas background.

Leadership for Diversity and Inclusion – A Challenge?

Leading an organization characterized by ethnic diversity requires specialized knowledge. Principals participating in the program reported on in this article developed new understandings, knowledge, initiative and courage in establishing equal opportunities for all students, illustrating the values of the in-service training program. Yet, when the principals describe the challenges they encounter in their daily work, they do not in the first place describe challenges and dilemmas which concern ethnic issues. Instead, they raise problems concerning the fundamental mission of schooling: to create a learning environment in accordance with stated values, rules and guidelines which promote learning and goal fulfillment for all students. Consequently, leadership for diversity requires more than enhanced understanding and knowledge about bilingualism and ethnicity. It calls for an educational leadership which acknowledges diversity from a broad perspective and an attitude which engages all agents in school (Butcher et al., 2007; Grobler et al., 2006).

Some principals declared that they, as an effect of the program, have received support in their struggle to challenge their staff's attitudes. Others reported self-critical reflections as they questioned whether they as principals contribute to a "we-and-them" attitude between different groups in their school. These are important reflections which highlight the ethical dimension of school leadership. But if that becomes the new knowledge and understanding they discover during the program, how is their awareness of their school's culture and traditions limited without reference to ethnicity? Who are advantaged and disadvantaged by the school's structure and culture?

The school leader's individual values towards "the Other" (i.e., the one who challenges traditional and stereotype notions about the 'good' and 'right') have influence on the school's inner work (Walker, 2007). His or her attitude and priorities might model and indicate the school's moral direction. This is supported by other studies of successful schools which emphasize the importance of the school leader's conscious work with values:

Their [the school leaders] ethical values pervaded all aspects of their school's policies and practices, and it was clear from the data that they regarded the students as their primary moral responsibility. There was an expectation among everyone that all professionals in the school community not only uphold the principles themselves, but also that they assume the responsibility of helping each other to honor the ethical norms. (Day, 2005, pp. 288-289. See also Begley, 2004 and Campbell, 2003)

In multicultural schools individual values must be challenged and examined in relation to the professional assignment as well as the diversity of perspectives within the organization (Campbell, Gold & Lunt, 2003; López, 2008; Walker, 2007). Difficulties arise when the majority of the school's educators and principals represent the major culture from an ethnic and class perspective. Curricula, policy documents, timetables, text books, teaching aids, rules, staff recruitment, in-service training etc. build on and reinforce the mainstream culture's assumptions of learning and socialization. The school leader has therefore to "walk the diversity walk" and welcome different perspectives and voices into the organization (Grobler et al., 2006) If diversity is not recognized and welcomed into the rooms where negotiations and decision-making take place, established hierarchies and normative assumptions of learning, will remain (Gunter, 2006; Lahdenperä, 2006). Recognition implies using diversity not only as a base for learning but also: "... using its structures, cultures and systems to think beyond its structures, cultures and systems" (Leo & Barton, 2006, p. 178).

This involves an acknowledgment of avoiding a superficial recognition, a critical and reflective attitude to daily practice is needed. This might avoid tunnel vision and inherited ways of thinking and lead, as Starrat (2004) suggests, to a questioning of their relevance for pupils' learning and integrity. Visible and invisible values, norms and rules which form the basis for community and separation, problem definitions and remedial actions, must be analyzed. How is diversity constructed? Who or what is diverse? And why? Who are the privileged retaining control and who are "the Others" under control? With what conditions are individuals categorized, and by whom? And, finally, how do school leaders contribute to the consolidation, questioning and transformation of cultural notions? (Arvastson & Ehn,

2007; Sporre, 2007). As Lahdenperä (2008) argues: "Actions, i.e., to actively lead the multicultural school's improvement, demands both an understanding beyond ethnocentrism and a certain "multicultural maturity" among the staff." (p. 22)

Concluding Remarks

Our research leads us to conclude that a service training program which aims to raise the level of measurable pupils' attainment should also focus on school leaders' individual values and notions and, further, highlight the ethical dimension of school leadership. This might include examining whether a school's culture and structure contribute to the marginalization of different groups. Moreover, representatives of society with a variety of perspectives ought to be welcomed to the discussions when in-service programs are planned, particularly those the program will affect. This might challenge established hierarchies and notions of how such programs ought to be conducted, by whom, with which content, and why. But, such challenges appear to be necessary.

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