

Institutionen för pedagogik och specialpedagogik

Learning Principalship: Becoming a Principal in a Swedish Context

A study of Principals in Education
and Practice

av

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Abstract

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Novice principals are expected to acquire professional skills by participating in education. This thesis explores novice principals' learning and their understanding of principalship in a Swedish context as they are socialised into the role through education and practice. The research questions are: How do principals engage in principal training in the interaction with their professional work practice? How can principals' process of learning and understanding be explained? What is the importance of principal training in relation to the creation of a coherent school leader role for a contemporary school context? The study focuses on principals who are participating in their third year of the mandatory Swedish National Principal Training Programme while working as compulsory school principals.

A qualitative research design elaborated from a situated practice perspective was adopted for the study, in which interviews and observations of principals in their educational and workplace practice were conducted. Teachers were also interviewed. Wenger's social theory of learning was applied as the theoretical framework for the study.

The findings show different understandings of leadership at play, closely related to identity. Principals' orientation toward work has an influence on both their participation in the programme and their experience of practice. Based on their programme participation, principals become external reviewers, mirroring their schools. Processes of learning and understanding are intertwined through principals' engagement in programmes and practices that affect schools, leading to development but also to conflicts and ruptures. Findings reveal the importance of leading the school 'from within', acting as broker and gaining legitimacy as a professional leader. As principals' knowledge is developed in relation to their previous area of experience and expertise, they need experience first of school practices to enact pedagogical leadership and second of school leadership to enable learning within the programme. Deprived of these competences becoming *all new*. Professional socialisation through education does not overcome parallel tracks due to former organisational socialisation. However, it does enable further development drawing on former experiences of school practices, school leadership and understanding of who takes an organisational orientation to their role and their work.