Study Environments – A Neglected Leadership Concern

Eric Larsson and Pia Skott

1   Introduction and Aims

In recent decades, there has been a global trend of focusing on the outcome of schools, i.e., students' results. This can be seen, for example, through international comparisons, where students' knowledge is measured and compared. The Swedish National Agency for Education (2014) has counted the number of international comparisons from the 1960s to 1995 (15) and compared the numbers between 1995 and 2012 (40), concluding that both the quantity and frequency of such comparisons has increased. These measurements compare results over time and success is defined by measurable differences between students' performance, which has prompted scholars to try and explain what works and why (Leithwood and Riehl 2003; Robinsson et al. 2009; Pashiardis and Johansson 2016; Day et al. 2016).

In this performance orientation, school principals have been identified as key actors. The principal role has been strengthened and is now a position responsible for the implementation of national policy (Gunter and Thomson 2009). Principals have also become responsible for managing change and building organisations, while striving to improve their schools' effectiveness and enhance students' learning outcomes (Hallinger 2003; Hargreaves and Fink 2006; Day et al. 2007; Leithwood et al. 2012; Nordin and Sundberg 2016; Sivesind and Wahlström 2016). Accordingly, the effect of leaders on classroom activities has also developed as a research field. One basic argument is that principals should focus on activities that can affect students' learning outcomes, that is, the teaching in the classrooms. In particular, they should develop their instructional leadership, close to the core activities of teaching (Robinson 2006; Hallinger 2010).

E. Larsson (✉) · P. Skott
Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden
e-mail: eric.larsson@edu.su.se

However, schooling does not only consist of classroom activities – students, teachers and other professionals spend a lot of time in school long after the bell has rung. In this chapter, we explore the potential benefits of considering schools not only as places for knowledge production towards academic achievement, but as a *whole study environment consisting of multiple spheres* of activities and learning. Our aim is to explore the character of what we identify as the whole body of study environment of schools and to discuss the consequences for principals.

The research questions are:

– How can study environments be understood?
– Why are these environments important for school principals?

The paper starts by identifying the main focus of school leadership research. By zooming out from what are considered core activities, we will use space as an analytical tool to analyse the study environments of two upper secondary schools in the Stockholm area. We will identify three interlinked spheres of the study environment: the inner (core), the outer, and the middle spheres. We will argue that, while the inner sphere is given a lot of principals' attention, there are several reasons for them to discover the other spheres of schools and education. That is to say, the school as a formal institution and physical place of education, as well as other fundamental aspects interlinked with educational activities. We will argue that the complexity of the local school context is the fundamental but forgotten, or unexplored, aspect of school leadership. We will comment on all three spheres, but focus predominantly on the middle, since this has long been particularly neglected.

2   Previous Research on Leadership Practices and Models

As mentioned above, performance orientation has meant that successful school leadership practices have become defined by students' results in national, state or provincial tests. In *Seven Strong Claims About Successful School Leadership* (2008), which was built on a meta-analysis of previous research, Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins argue that almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of four general domains of basic leadership practices: setting directions, building relationships and developing people, redesigning the organisation to support desired practices, and improving the instructional programme. In 2019, Leithwood et al. revisited their findings, questioning whether these practices needed revision. For us, there are two important aspects worthy of consideration.

The first is about the starting point for school leadership actions. Leithwood et al. (2019) state that their basic claim, that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on students' learning, is one of their most quoted claims. Revisiting what successful school leaders do, they maintain that success depends mainly on factors within the school's walls. And when they focus on factors within the schools, they are considered synonymous with teaching activities. Nevertheless, they add some important new aspects: "for example, socio-economic

factors (Domina et al. 2018), features of the home and relationships between the home and school (Jeynes 2011; Goodall 2018)" (Leithwood et al. 2019, p. 2). Hence, socioeconomic factors are considered important, but are strictly defined in relation to teaching.

Our starting point is a bit different. To begin with, schools are places where students spend a lot of time outside normal hours, doing activities other than being taught. And schools can be understood from perspectives other than principals' or society's interest in academic results. What if we consider schools from the perspective of the learner? Could it be that learning is not only restricted to classroom activities? Could it also be that the background of the students matters in terms of the totality of the learning done at school?

Before that, we will examine a second aspect, i.e., the recognised leadership practices. Leithwood et al. (2019) report a change between 2008 and 2019, where the previous four domains consist of a large number of leadership practices. Below, we reproduce their table to show the growing complexity (Table 1).

Table 1 What successful school leaders do[a]

Domains of practice	Specific leadership practices
Set directions	Build a shared vision**
	Identify specific, shared, short-term goals
	Create high-performance expectations
	Communicate the vision and goals**
Build relationships and develop people	Stimulate growth in the professional capacities of staff
	Provide support and demonstrate consideration for individual staff members
	Model the school's values and practices**
	Build trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents**
	Establish productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives
Develop the organization to support desired practices	Build collaborative culture and distribute leadership**
	Structure the organization to facilitate collaboration**
	Build productive relationships with families and communities**
	Connect the school to its wider environment**
	Maintain a safe and healthy school environment
	Allocate resources in support of the school's vision and goals**
Improve the instructional program	Staff the instructional program**
	Provide instructional support
	Monitor student learning and school improvement progress**
	Buffer staff from distractions to their instructional work

[a]The practices in Table 1 with asterisks beside them (**) are, according to the authors, close approximations of the labels awarded the ten equity leadership practices by Ishimaru and Galloway (2014)

According to the Leithwood et al. (2019) the number of effective leadership practices has grown from 14 to 22 over the past decade, which presents a more complex picture of what it means to be a successful school leader. But the focus is still on performance and not on other outcomes, such as equity. It is here that our forgotten perspective can fill a gap. What if the successful school leader not only needs to learn the above identified 'whats' of a school leader, but also practice the 'hows' behind them? From a complexity perspective, we are particularly interested in the invisible 'whats' that remain in the shadows because of the repeated research focus on the same output variable. This is to ask: could the narrow focus on instructional aspects be concealing important aspects of which principals need to be aware?

This is where we need to remind ourselves that instructional leadership is one of the three most commonly featured leadership models in the research – the other two are distributed leadership and transformative leadership (Gumus et al. 2018). *Instructional leadership* is about focusing on the core of school activities. It is about leading the identified practices to qualify the work of teachers (Hallinger 2015). Instructional leadership is known the world over, even though the concept doesn't match the complex role of the principal. In several parts of Europe, the expression *pedagogical leadership* is far more common, which means that the instructional aspect needs to be translated into different contexts (Hallinger 2018). In Sweden, for instance, a principal is legally required to do a lot more things other than performing instructional leadership (Rönnström and Skott 2019).

Intertwined with leadership practices is the question of who the leader is, and if leadership can, or even should, be distributed in a school organisation. Here, it is important to note that different countries have different regulations concerning what a principal is formally allowed to distribute. But if leadership, at least informally, can be performed as a collective function, and if the spheres of school environments are larger than the core, who can leadership be distributed to and what kind of leadership is necessary?

In *Meaningful and Sustainable School Improvement* with *Distributed Leadership*, Supovitz, D'Auria and Spillane (2019) argue that the focus should be on interactions with others, including the development of different leadership skills. They consider it wise to involve more stakeholders in the developing processes of schools when searching for problems and designing solutions. These are all aspects to be considered when broadening the focus from core activities to the multiple spheres of schools.

3   Theoretical and Methodological Outline

In the paper, we examine two high-performing upper secondary schools in Stockholm (post-16 schools). We chose high-performing schools to go beyond the dominant focus on results in contemporary educational discussion. In these schools, a large proportion of the students have the highest grades (As) in all subjects, which means that these schools have achieved the key aim of the principal. But what else

has been constructed at these schools? The study draws on examples from two research projects. The first project includes a one-year ethnography study of the abovementioned schools, combining data such as observations (classrooms, meetings, hallways), interviews with key actors (pupils, teachers, principals etc.), documents, pictures and secondary statistics. The second project takes a leadership perspective on high-performing schools, working with stress reduction and sustainable learning in one of the schools. From this, we had recurrent meetings with the principal's team, as well as records of interviews and observations.

The theoretical frame is mostly inspired by a Bourdieusian perspective, but also by the work of geographer David Harvey. This includes the use of concepts such as assets (capitals), strategies and space to explore the 'rules' and 'stakes' of the 'game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). These concepts give us the possibility to explore the social and symbolic hierarchies *between* schools, the dynamics *within* schools, and how all of these dimensions affect what we call the 'study environment'. We want to show that students are not only objects for teaching, but subjects in constructing the everyday life within a specific school, and that this hidden aspect is important if leaders are to understand what works and why. The study environment is important to uncover what Bourdieu would call a school's doxa (for discussion, see Bourdieu and Eagleton 1992), which is the given order that we, in a specific practice, tend to take for granted. In the end discussion, we will come back to how the doxa is important when considering fundamental and forgotten leadership perspectives.

Our analysis depends on the construction of three different spheres, which all schools to some degree enjoy. First, the inner or core sphere, which represents formal educational settings, and the outer sphere – the informal place of activities that students do. Nevertheless, as we mentioned before, while the inner and outer spheres are important, this chapter focuses on the place in between, i.e., the middle sphere. We argue that the middle sphere is something that all schools have and can develop, albeit in different ways. It depends on contextual variations, such as student group composition and the specific characteristics of the school. To comprehend how we understand the interlinked spheres of the study environment, we start with an exploration of space as an analytical concept.

3.1   Space as an Analytical Concept for Understanding Study Environments

While space is a common analytical term within disciplines such as geography and sociology, the "spatial turns" is fairly new within education (Taylor 2009). This is also why a range of spatial theories from other disciplines have not yet been discussed in educational research. However, similar to Robertson (2010, p. 15), we argue that "[b]y tracing out the ways in which space is deeply implicated in power, production and social relations", we can "reveal the complex processes at work in

constituting the social relations of 'education space' as a crucial site, object, instrument and outcome in this process." In this chapter, we do not intend to uncover previously unknown theories of space and how these could be used in educational research. Neither will we provide a general overview of different theoretical perspectives on space. As discussed above, we use space to explore forgotten areas of school leadership.

Both Harvey and Bourdieu offer several ways of exploring the spatial analyses – especially how we could include the analytical tension between different spaces to understand social phenomena. The foundation of such spatial analysis is relationality. To cite Harvey (2004, p. 4), "[a]n event or a thing at a point in space cannot be understood by appeal to what exists only at that point. It depends upon everything else going on around it (although in practice usually within only a certain range of influence)". Similarly, Bourdieu (1996, p. 11) writes, "[t]his idea of difference is at the basis of the very notion of space, that is, a set of distinct and coexisting positions which are exterior to one another and which are defined in relation to one another through relations of proximity, vicinity, or distance, as well as through order relations, such as above, below and between […]". We, likewise, start our analytical exploration from these ground rules. First, we use analytical concepts such as *physical space, relative space, social space and symbolic space* to organise our own analysis and understand our data. All of our constructed spheres are related to these spatial concepts, which the reader will see in how we use our empirical examples. It is by integrating and combining them that we are able to provide illustrative cases. Secondly, for us, *relationality* is important since it explains why certain actions are recognised in some schools. Similarly, it helps us to compare and analyse the differences between our constructed spheres of the study environment. In other words, one sphere could not be defined by itself; rather, it needs to be analysed in relation to others to be properly comprehended. Although the frontiers of the constructed spheres are not always sharp, the differences between them still constitute defining boundaries.

Both Harvey (1990, 2004) and Bourdieu (1996, 2018) recognise the crucial component of an "absolute" or "*physical space*". Physical space, as we will call it here, is territorial and can be measured in various ways. Thus, it is physical in the sense that it is fixed and material. For instance, a school building has a certain geographical position on a map and the size of it can be measured. There is also a distance between the school and other kinds of infrastructure. But it also covers the everyday sphere for students, teachers, school leaders and other individuals, and also classrooms, lockers, places to eat and libraries. It is the essential physical place where activities and social processes takes place. Here, Harvey also emphasises the importance of acknowledging the concept of *relative space*. Relative space is connected to time and suggests "that there are multiple geometries from which to choose and that the spatial frame depends crucially upon what it is being relativized and by whom" (Harvey 2004, p. 3, further discussion in 1990). For our analysis, this means that, depending on the specific individual, the physical is perceived and appropriated differently. For instance, some students may only regard school as a place of education, while others may also see it as place for interaction.

Another vital component is *social space*. Although Harvey sometimes discusses the term social space in his analysis (e.g., Harvey 1970), the Bourdieusian concept is more tangible and fruitful in this chapter. For Bourdieu, social space is entwined with physical space and reflects how the latter is constituted and appropriated. To put it in another way, "[s]ocial space tends to retranslate itself, in more or less direct manner, into physical space in the form of a definite distributional arrangement of agents and properties. This means that all the distinctions proposed about physical space can be found in reified social space […]" (Bourdieu 2018, p. 107). However, unlike physical space, social space is an empirical construct. It is an analytical instrument for mapping social groups, based on the dispositions of economic and cultural assets (capitals). It displays the objective relations and differences between social agents by accounting for the 'structure' and 'volume' of capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Consequently, it unfolds the variations and hierarchies in and between those groups (classes). For us, social space provides an insight into the social origins of the students and the composition of their assets. It helps to explain why some students are more dominant and more able to navigate the study environment than others, due to their social origin. Moreover, social space corresponds to *symbolic space*, which reflects the practices, lifestyles, visions and beliefs of different social groups. Or, to simplify, symbolic space illustrates the practices and choices of social groups in their everyday activities. Therefore, it becomes necessary for our analysis, since it helps us to understand how the constructed spheres function and differ, depending on the student group's composition and the social origins of specific individuals. For example, it gives us the opportunity to explore whether schools dominated by students from well-educated families have the ability to foster other kinds of middle sphere than schools with more heterogeneous student populations.

4   The Multiple Spheres of the Study Environment

As discussed above, our study concerns the importance of understanding contextual complexities and the multiplicity of study environments. While recognising that all spheres are important, we focus on the middle sphere of the school, as it is a forgotten research area. In this empirical section, we explore the three different spheres by illustrating examples of what they might mean. To provide the reader with a thorough understanding of the middle sphere, we begin by defining the other two spheres – the inner and outer sphere. By doing this, we are able to relationally explore what constitutes the different spheres and what a middle sphere might or might not be. The theoretical dimensions of physical space, relative space, social space and symbolic space help us in this analytical exploration. First, we start by discussing the boundaries and definitions of the inner sphere as a formal sphere of education.

4.1   The Inner Sphere: A Place of Formal Education

To be able to understand how we define the middle sphere, it is crucial to comprehend the relationality between different spheres. The inner sphere could be regarded as a formal sphere of education, or the core of formal education, which usually includes institutionalised practices such as classroom activities and organised classes. Likewise, it contains scheduled school activities in other settings, such as visits to libraries, museums and parks. One key component is that the inner sphere is designed to meet the necessities of curricula and mandatory school activities. As such, teachers, principals and other personnel embrace an administrative legitimacy and therefore govern school activities and inner sphere hierarchies to provide students with certain skills.

As discussed above, the inner sphere is contextually bound to topics and subjects of education, though the constitution of it varies substantially between schools. While the curricula and mandatory activities are similar, the student group composition, resources, physical milieu and teachers' expectations differ. The same goes for the approach to education (holistic, results-driven etc.) that schools provide. That is to say, what becomes recognised in the study environment of the inner sphere depends on the positions that the larger student group endure in social and symbolic space. Since students arrive at school with different social origins (i.e., the composition of their cultural and economic assets), the lifestyles and beliefs of the students need to be accounted for. If the inner sphere is not recognised by students due to their expectations, they would hesitate to attend that specific school – mostly since it does not represent their own vision of what a good educational setting should include. Therefore, schools also experience different opportunities and results.

In the schools we feature in this study, the inner sphere can be very competitive – both for students, principals and teachers. The demands are often high, and students are generally high-achievers. The large majority of students come from homes with highly educated parents and are well endowed with cultural assets. They know how to navigate the system and are often well-prepared for their studies. This means that the inner sphere is significant for their everyday school activities, since high grades allow them to take the next step in their educational trajectory – it's the place for them to show their abilities to the teacher.

4.2   The Outer Sphere: The Place of Informal Activities

Outer sphere undertakings include studying, doing homework and preparing for class, but also friendly conversations and networking. That is to say, the purpose of these activities varies, as do the locations students use. For instance, study activities can be mixed with friendly conversations and non-interaction. Students use open areas within the school as well as libraries, coffee shops and restaurants. The outer sphere, or the informal place of school activities, is therefore not formally guided by

hierarchies and mandatory activities. In some cases, there are principles and conventions for what to do, and what not to do, which are governed by the school. The latter primarily relates to activities that are done within the school building. Mostly, however, the informal activities of the outer sphere are decided and organised by students. For instance, if students complete their homework at school, it is not because the school leaders or teachers require them to, but because they prefer to. The same could be argued for how the students manage their own time. In this sense, the use of physical space becomes relative since students decide their own activities and how they organise time and place. These decisions might also relate to unofficial hierarchies based on social norms, conventions, abilities and lifestyles, where students might follow the directions of friends and classmates.

Since the outer sphere needs to contain some relational demarcations that separate it from the other spheres, we argue that time and place become crucial markers to do so. Otherwise, it would be hard to separate student activities and decide which activities are informal or not. In a sense, by not making such a distinction, everything that students do that is included in the inner sphere activities would be informal. For us, the relational definition of the outer sphere either means that students use the school as a place to practise informal activities, or that they use places outside of school for educational activities. This means that it contains activities that are non-formalised and done outside of school hours (before and after school, during free periods etc.). In the schools featured in this study, the outer sphere is often used as a place to interact and/or study. Within this context, it could be done with various intensities and at different times of the day, although usually after the school day ends. The fundamental component of the outer sphere is that students are not regulated by formal hierarchies or mandatory activities – they can change the activities and the place of activity. Furthermore, besides the principles and conventions within the school, principals and teachers have little or no input in organising these activities.

4.3 The Middle Sphere: Between Formal and Informal Activities

The middle sphere has some regulations, but few formal hierarchies shaping the relationship between the school and students. Similar to the outer sphere, there are principles and conventions that guide what students can do within the physical and symbolic boundaries of the school – we will discuss this in detail later on. Moreover, on some occasions, parents, parent organisations, teachers or principals can contribute to organising activities within the middle sphere. For example, teachers provide foundational structure for some activities by attending events, and principals can organise schedules and physical settings for the students. Also, parents and parent organisations have the ability to help students with practicalities, which could mean

partaking in fundraisers and providing practical advice. In this chapter, we use four examples to illustrate our analysis of the middle sphere.

4.3.1 The Middle Sphere as a Physical Place to Raise Awareness and Interest

Locker doors and noticeboards are sometimes unfilled at schools, or used only to circulate daily messages about changed classrooms, sick teachers and test scores. At some schools, student councils use noticeboards to deliver information concerning meetings and questions – something also true for our schools. However, these physical places are more often used to raise awareness and interest amongst students to help less fortunate people by taking action or gathering resources. A recent example was collecting aid for arriving migrants in 2015, where students at one of the schools raised 250.000 Swedish crowns (approximately 23.000 EURO), in a short period of time. During this project, they organised bake sales, flea markets and collected money through a text message campaign. While the student council provided directions and knowledge, classes and individuals organised their own events. For instance, to stimulate students' participation, there was an in-between class competition concerning who could raise the largest amount of money. Throughout this process, noticeboards and lockers were crucial to distribute information (see Larsson 2019). They provided information on how to raise money and other resources, but also stipulated why it was important to contribute. Here, we can see how physical, social and symbolic space interact within the inner sphere. The ambitions, practices and lifestyles of students can be displayed in the physical environment of the school building. These actions also provide an insight into the social origins of the students and what they feel is important in contemporary society.

Similar events, although smaller in size, are continuously present. For example, groups with interests in biology, literature, theatre and music have get-togethers to discuss, share information and hang out. Noticeboards and lockers are also used to offer information concerning visiting scholars, Non-Governmental Organisations or speakers. Students communicate directly by handing out flyers or using information desks. In our schools, there are even an extensive set of associations that complement other extracurricular activities. These associations include a wide array of subjects, often connected to societal issues, debating, literature and culture.

The public areas of the school are a crucial part of the middle sphere as a physical place. They offer the best place to be noticed, since students regularly pass by, stop, read and discuss. They also remind students and visitors about the specificity of study environment of the school, i.e., recognised values and expectations. By this, we do not mean that each student needs to be informed and up-to-date with all activities and happenings, but that the information provides a framework of basic topics students need to be aware of. This includes information about sporting events, competitions against other schools and which universities to apply for.

4.3.2 The Middle Sphere as a Place of Interaction and Developing Skills

To continue from our earlier example, the middle sphere is a site for interaction and for developing skills. It is a physical space where people with different lifestyles, opinions, interests and positions gather. Students learn from interacting, communicating, discussing and debating. They absorb how to shape arguments, become rhetorically skilled and formulate statements properly. Furthermore, they learn how to interact properly, organise events and appropriate social skills, which means that the middle sphere is a space of contest or continuous struggles in the Bourdieusian vocabulary (Bourdieu 1989). There are several forums for students to engage and interact, yet the debate societies and associations are probably the best places to develop such skills.

> I would say, partly that you learn how much young people can handle without adults. […] Yes, it's very nice to avoid the monitoring, that 'now you are actually starting to get quite old, now you have to do something yourself'. [It is] a lot of commitment, also that you learn to look at people in a different way. […] So, it's like a big group work, but it's a voluntary group work. It contributes a lot, I know, to focus. So, to meet people who really voluntarily stay in school two hours after school […]. So, that it contributes to a community and a positive attitude towards 'geeking out'. [Student]

Generally, however, established student associations and other extracurricular activities can foster interaction. Students in charge of such associations sometimes have to lead and deliver information to parents, other students and others about their specific organisation.

Similarly, engagement and activity are required of the student council and student unions. Often, positions within these councils and unions are highly sought after, and there is competition among students to fill them. In some cases, students have to promote themselves through various campaigns to become elected, and they need support from other students. Such campaigns include motivation, debating and knowledge about how communicate to others, which sometimes leads to a very competitive environment.

> I joined many associations – as most of us do. Then I had very much hope of joining the Student Union. [I] worked very actively with a friend and lost on the last day. Not really happy about it yet, still a bit bitter. I think it may have to do with a conflict of interest or what to say, between me and the sitting Student Union. But that's when I joined the debate team. [Student]

To a certain degree, the student councils and unions have power to represent the whole student group. They meet with principals and deliberate questions and organise several events during the school year.

The middle sphere as a place of interaction and development, however, is not always equally open for all students. Since there are many processes at stake, there are also a range of social boundaries that separate students with different origins. This means that it is easier for students with larger cultural assets to succeed, whether it concerns being able to communicate in a certain way, use knowledge about specific topics, or being aware of the social codes. One consequence of this, including the language skills used to deliberate topics, is that some students do not

necessarily want to participate in discussions. They can feel out of place in relation to students with larger cultural assets. This does not mean that the latter always have more knowledge, but that they are recognised as skilful due to having a broader repertoire of experience and references.

4.3.3   The Middle Sphere as a Place to Gather Credentials

Speaking to parents, engaging in activities or organising an event builds recognition, character, and experience, confidence and social skills. Therefore, students in our schools know that they can do similar things in the future without support from parents, teachers or school leaders. Yet, the middle sphere is not only a place for raising awareness and interest, or interaction. It is also a place to gather credentials that cannot be rewarded within the formal school setting of the inner sphere. Partaking in activities or having leading roles in events improves the student's CV. These credentials function as a currency and can be used to compete for internships and employment, or for applications to prestigious universities (Bourdieu 1989; Brown et al. 2011). As one student put it, "So, it is just kind of a community you get and then it is like one thing to write on the CV of course. […] There's a lot that can happen and you don't want to miss out on it."

Thus, students are often conscious that they have the privilege of being provided with what Bourdieu (1986) called 'scarce resources'. An important part in the accumulation of these recognised symbolic assets and credentials is that students at other schools have fewer possibilities to receive them. While the latter students might find it more important to gain experience in, for example, management, construction or childcare, in our schools, the possibility to work and study abroad is regarded as more interesting. This is a difference that relies on the nurturing of a specific kind of school environment. It is connected to the interaction between students with comparable social origins, ambitions and skills within a limited physical space.

4.3.4   The Middle Sphere as a Place of Action and Competition

The students attending the schools featured in this study are often well-organised. The same organisational skills reflect their engagement in activities that go beyond the inner sphere. In some cases, they lead like adults, though they lack the understanding of adult responsibilities. This tension makes the middle sphere interesting to analyse since it is an important part of adolescence. As we have shown in the previous examples, it provides room for negotiation and developing skills, as well as taking responsibility. It is a place of struggle, engagement and becoming, while also providing a place to relax and have fun.

The activities, events and engagement within the middle sphere are part of a holistic approach to education, which many prestigious schools around the world attempt to encapsulate (Cookson and Hodges Persell 1985). It includes the idea that

students need to know more than what formal education can offer, and become cultivated, multi-skilled citizens with character. At the same time, prestigious schools can postulate such ambitions due to the social and academic composition of their students. Numerous students we met come from middle-class, upper middle-class and upper-class backgrounds and are interested in becoming part of a global society. Hence, their vision of the world and ambitions are tied to a more holistic approach of education and not just being well educated. They know that there is a continuous struggle for positions (Brown et al. 2011) and that there is a need to stay ahead and not relax.

In summary, the middle sphere needs to be seen primarily as a place of action and competition. It is a place of action since it includes activities that are organised by students. It is competitive since it is unevenly accessed by students with different backgrounds and since all schools do not enjoy the benefit of a vibrant middle sphere.

5   Study Environments – A Leadership Practice or a Fundamental But 'Forgotten' Dimension?

The aim of this chapter is to explore the character of what we identify as the whole body of the study environment of schools and discuss the consequences for principals. In the previous section we explored the complexity of the study environment through the use of space as an analytical concept. To uncover the multiple spheres, we went beyond the classroom to better understand the multiple hierarchies and complexities of social processes within schools. To more thoroughly understand a school from the perspective of the learner, we used four concepts: physical space, relative space, social space and symbolic space. Through a combination of these concepts, it is possible to understand not only how the physical aspect of the spheres matters for what kind of learning the school makes possible, but also how aspects like socio-economic background are intertwined with other spatial aspects. We identified three different spheres: the inner (the core), the middle and the outer sphere. While the first is equivalent to the formal sphere of education, the two others also include informal activities. We showed that, for the students, the three are intertwined through multiple combinations of important aspects, which is also why we pointed to the importance of relationality. What happens in the inner sphere is related to what happens in the other two, and therefore schools must be understood as a whole. In this final section, we will further discuss the consequences for principals.

It can easily be argued that these high-performing schools can be seen as the result of ultimate instructional leadership, but only if we see high-quality teaching and excellent student performance as results of leadership. This is where the focus on results runs the risk of mistaking what counts and why. Instead, we ask: what is the role of the principal in a school with only high-performing teachers and

students? After working with one of the schools over a three-year period, we can now uncover fundamental but forgotten aspects of leadership.

The background to the project was that the principals had identified that students, in their narrow ambition to receive As, showed an instrumental way of learning, and that several students were very stressed. The project was called 'sustainable learning' and aimed for 'sustainable knowledge and sustainable people', i.e., teachers explored how sustainability in both senses could be reached through teaching. It was the intention that highly developed teaching practices could be used to make a difference. The teachers explored a lot of aspects, such as how to develop sustainable assessment and what we call 'health-preventing assessment practices' (Mickwitz and Skott 2020). In this chapter, we have identified the extreme difficulty of getting beyond the students' fixation on getting As. Many of the students have never failed academically in their lives. 'Only the sky is the limit' and 'failure is not an option' are phrases they live by. Hence, no matter how the teachers try to develop their teaching, there is still a struggle to change what can be understood as the doxa of the high-performing school. This in turn leads to the question: what does a school leader need to consider, beyond performance? In the following we will problematise the previously identified leadership practices from the empirical findings.

The first important leadership practice is *creating high-performance expectations*. But what if it is exactly these expectations that are at the core of the schools' problems? Secondly, what does it mean to stimulate *growth in the professional capacities of staff* when the teachers are excellent, but don't know how to go beyond the instrumentality of the students. Thirdly, what does *building productive relationships with families and communities* mean when one of the challenges is the high-performance pressure from parents? And finally, how should *buffer staff from distractions to their instructional work* be understood when we see that it is the relationality between different spheres that matters most, not the complete focus on the core?

The questions above lead to the overall question of whether the multiple spheres can uncover fundamental but 'forgotten' leadership practices. We start by asking if there are invisible 'whats' that a principal should consider, that run the risk of remaining in the shadows because of a repeated research focus on the same outcome variable, i.e., results. We finish by stating that this is most definitely so. Awareness and knowledge of the whole study environment is crucial. When we interviewed principals and teachers over time, a recurring comment was that student stress could be reduced if they didn't participate in all the side activities in the school. But from what we have shown, this wholeness is what makes the school attractive and special. The students learn a lot and receive more than only curriculum-based education, which means that the important middle and outer spheres should not be side-lined. Rather, they are important to understand the doxa and how to work with change.

It can be questioned, however, whether study environments are a forgotten dimension of all the leadership practices or if it is worth considering a practice in itself. As several other practices are repeated within different domains, we argue for both. *By focusing on study environments as a practice in itself*, principals can perform better analysis of what schools are all about, and what matters and why. In the

schools we have analysed, it is obvious that parents need to be involved and agree on the importance of the health-preventing aspect of being a high performer. Getting As is considered as making the future possible. But if stress leads to mental illness or burnouts, the high grades are not of any worth. This is why it is important that the students, like the knowledge they develop, are sustainable over time. By leading the multiple spheres and not strictly being instructional, leaders' principals do not only lead to learning through teaching, but to learning through a wider understanding of education. Even if this conclusion is built on data from high-performing schools, it is evident that all schools have middle spheres, albeit different in character. By working on the middle and outer spheres, schools can actively work to handle the challenges of the socioeconomic and contextual factors in the school environment. We can see that in other projects on low-performing schools as well. The characters of the spheres and student groups, however, are of course different.

By using the insights of the multiple spheres as a dimension to be present in other leadership practices, the socioeconomic and equity aspects would not end up as a peripheral, but main aspects of leadership. Recognising the middle sphere as an important leadership concern can widen the instructional leadership paradigm. Leaders and teachers need to understand more about the multiple hierarchies and complexities of social processes to be able to change the invisible aspects of schools. It could even be that middle spheres are important arenas for distributed leadership and involve more stakeholders in analysing problems and identifying solutions. The students are not only the objects of teaching, but fully capable of leading change. If students are capable of fundraising for a better world, they can also be the co-leaders for their own changes of behaviour. This is also the main reason why we argue that student environments, as part of the complexity of the local school context, should be recognised as a fundamental leadership concern.

References

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. Westport: Greenwood.

Bourdieu, P. (1989). Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological Theory, 7*(1), 14–25.

Bourdieu, P. (1996). *Physical space, social space and habitus* (Rapport 10:1996). Oslo: Institutt for sosiologi og samfunnsgeografi, Universitetet i Oslo.

Bourdieu, P. (2018). Social space and the genesis of appropriated physical space. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 106–114. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12534.

Bourdieu, P., & Eagleton, T. (1992). Doxa and common life. *New Left Review, 191*, 111–121.

Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Cambridge: Polity.

Brown, P., Lauder, H., & Ashton, D. (2011). *The global auction: The broken promises of education, jobs and incomes*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cookson, P. W., & Hodges Persell, C. (1985). *Preparing for power: American elite boarding schools*. New York: Basic Books.

Day, C., Sammons, P., Stobart, G., Kington, A., & Gu, Q. (2007). *Teachers matter: Connecting work, lives and effectiveness*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Day, C., Gu, Q., & Simmons, P. (2016). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: How successful school leaders use transformational and instructional strategies to make a difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 52*(2), 221–258.

Domina, T., Pharris- Ciurej, B., Penner, A., Penner, E., Brummet, Q., Porter, S., & Sanabria, T. (2018). Is free and reduced-price lunch a valid measure of educational disadvantage? *Educational Researcher, 47*(9), 539–555.

Goodall, J. (2018). A toolkit for parental engagement: From project to process. *School Leadership and Management, 38*(2), 222–238.

Gumus, S., Bellibas, M. S., Esen, M., & Gumus, E. (2018). A systematic Review of Studies in Leadership Models in Educational Reasearch from 1980 to 2014. *In Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 46*(1), 25–48.

Gunter, H., & Thomson, P. (2009). The makeover: A new logic in leadership development in England. *Educational Review, 61*(*4*), *469–483*.

Hallinger, P. (2003). School Leadership development in the Asia Pacific Region: Trends and directions for future research and development. In J. P. Keeves & R. Watanabe (Eds.), *The handbook of educational research in the Asia Pacific Region*. New York: Kluwer Academic Press.

Hallinger, P. (2010). Developing instructional leadership. In B. Davies & M. Brundrett (Eds.), *Developing successful leadership. Studies in educational leadership* (Vol. 11). Dordrecht: Springer.

Hallinger, P. (2015). *Assessing instructional Leadership with the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale*. Berlin: Springer.

Hallinger, P. (2018). Bringing context out of the shadows of leadership. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 46*(1), 5–24.

Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2006). *Sustainable leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Harvey, D. (1970). Social processes and spatial form: An analysis of the conceptual problems of urban planning. *Papers of the Regional Science Association, 25*, 46–69.

Harvey, D. (1990). Between space and time: Reflections on the geographical imagination. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 80*(9), 418–343.

Harvey, D. (2004). *Space as a key word*. Paper for Marx and Philosophy conference, 29 May 2004. Institute of Education, London, pp. 1–16.

Ishimaru, A., & Galloway, M. (2014). Beyond individual effectiveness: Conceptualizing organizational leadership for equity. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 13*(1), 93–146.

Jeynes, W. (2011). *Parental involvement and academic success*. New York: Routledge.

Larsson, E. (2019). *Innerstadsgymnasierna. En studie av tre elitpräglade gymnasieskolor i Stockholm och deras position på utbildningsmarknaden* [The inner-city schools. A study concerning three elite schools in Stockholm, positioning and marketization]. Stockholm: Stockholms Universitet.

Leithwood, K., & Riehl, C. (2003). *What we know about successful school leadership*. Philadelphia: Laboratory for Student Success, Temple University.

Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership & Management, 28*(1), 27–42.

Leithwood, K., Seashore Lewis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2012). *How leadership influences student learning*. New York: The Wallace Foundation.

Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2019). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *In School Leadership & Management*. https://doi.org/10.1080/1363243 4.2019.1596077.

Mickwitz, L., & Skott, P. (2020, forthcoming). Hållbart lärande genom hälsofrämjande bedömningspraktiker. Lärdomar från högpresterande skolor. I Å. Hirsch & C. Lundahl (red.), *Hållbar bedömning* [Sustainable learning through health preventing assessment practices. What can be learned from high performing schools. Sustainable assessment]. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur.

Nordin, A., & Sundberg, D. (2016). Travelling concepts in national curriculum policy making: The example of competencies. *European Educational Research Journal, 15*(3), 314–328.

Pashiardis, P., & Johansson, O. (Eds.). (2016). *Successful school leadership: International perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Robertson, S. (2010). 'Spatializing' the sociology of education. Stand-points, entry-points, vantage-points. In M. W. Apple, S. J. Ball, & L. A. Gandin (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of the sociology of education*. London: Routledge.

Robinson, V. M. J. (2006). Putting education back into educational leadership. *Leading & Managing, 12*(1), 62–75.

Robinsson, V., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2009). *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why best evidence synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

Rönnström, N., & Skott, P. (2019). Managing contexts, mastering complexity. In L. M. Herrera, M. Teräs, & P. Gougoulakis (Eds.), *Facets and aspects of research on vocational education and training at Stockholm University* (Vol. 4).

Sivesind, K., & Wahlström, N. (2016). Curriculum on the European Policy Agenda: Global transitions and learning outcomes from transnational and national points of view. *European Educational Research Journal, 15*(3), 271–278.

Supovitz, J. A., D'Auria, J., & Spillane, J. P. (2019). *Meaningful & sustainable school improvement with distributed leadership*. CPRE Research Reports.

Taylor, C. (2009). Towards a geography of education. *Oxford Review of Education, 35*(5), 651–669.

The Swedish National Agency for Education. (2014). *Grundskolan i internationella kunskapsmätningar – kunskap, skolmiljö och attityder till lärande* [The secondary school in international knowledge comparisons – Knowledge, school environments and attitudes towards education]. Stockholm: The Swedish National Agency for Education.

Eric Larsson is PhD in education and currently works as a JSPS/STINT short-term postdoctoral fellow at The Graduate School of Education, The University of Tokyo. He received his PhD from Stockholm University and is interested in the field of sociology of education. More specifically the intersection between social class, elites, education and the geographies of schooling.

Pia Skott is an associate professor, at the Department of Education, Stockholm University. She is also the director of the National School Leadership Training Program. Her research focus on different aspects of school leadership, including governing systems, leadership in local contexts and leading for health and wellbeing. She is also interested in principal's professional learning and development.