

Chapter 5

Norway: Researching Norwegian Principals

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The purpose of this paper is to provide a review of research on principals' roles, work, and leadership conducted in a Norwegian context and how these studies may offer insight into the work of school principals more broadly.

Research on school leadership is recent in Norway, with the first studies on educational leadership taking place in the 1990s. However, the research interest intensified after the new millennium when new governance structures affected the roles and responsibilities of school principals.

Among the unique contributions of the many studies included in this review is a greater sensitivity to variations in organizational context and a greater focus on the identity and role of leadership. Most studies have qualitative designs that add to the knowledge base, but the studies are often guided by perspectives that are not revisited in subsequent studies, and as such, to some degree the research tends to be less cumulative. The international literature is, however, used to inform the research on school leadership in Norway, to create the warrant for the study in question, and to identify the contribution that the study will make.

So far, the empirical evidence of different forms of leadership remains limited, and a few studies have explored the effects of leadership on school and student outcomes and applied a quantitative approach. In addition, relatively few case studies are part of a bigger international research design or include mixed methods approaches.

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Introduction

School leadership became a key issue in the public debate when Norway was listed among the “lower-performing” countries according to “Programme for International Student Assessment” (PISA) and other international tests at the beginning of the new millennium. It was argued that each school needed ambitious and professional principals with positive attitudes toward change. Leadership was the vehicle for the modernization project in education, and leadership became the new panacea for school improvement (Møller 2009; Møller and Skedsmo 2013).

Although a distributed perspective on leadership is gaining ground in research (Spillane 2006), the international leadership literature has to a large degree been centered on the principal and may be criticized for focusing too much on personal capacities and, hence, obscuring the reality that a principal’s work is embedded in wider social structures of power. The position as a school principal is a formal role, and that role is learned and fits into a larger social order with its own constructions (Møller 2012).

Research on school leadership in Norway dates from the 1990s but since 2000, there has been increasing interest and investment in research on educational leadership and management. Although small in number compared to the international community, and in particular compared to Anglo-Saxon research, Norwegian research studies on leadership may make a distinctive contribution. Norway has, for instance, during the last 10–15 years, invested in quite a few doctoral projects on school leadership. In these doctoral projects, the researchers define their own agenda, so the approach tends to be pluralistic and includes studies both for and about professional practice. Notably, this provides conditions that allow for drawing upon multiple theoretical frameworks, receiving inspiration from sociology, political sciences, critical theories, anthropology, and cross-disciplinary approaches to research on leadership. This is in contrast to England, where a research agenda for rather than about policy making seems dominant.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of research about principals’ roles, work, and leadership conducted in the Norwegian context during the twenty-first century. Attention is paid to what we know and do not know about leadership in Norwegian schools and how these studies may offer insight into the work of school principals more broadly. The individual leader is seldom the only unit of analysis in these studies; instead, the schools are conceptualized as interconnected organizations. To familiarize the readers with the Norwegian context, the paper starts by describing the country’s school system and current challenges, as well as the role of the principal in the present school system. The next section outlines the parameters for the review and gives a sense of the volume of the research included in the review. Then, a thematic analysis of the research is provided, and I conclude the paper with recommendations for future research.

The Norwegian School System and Current Challenges

The Norwegian education system is predominantly public, which means that state authorities run most schools and universities. Education is free at all levels. There is no streaming according to ability, gender, or other factors, and more than 95 % of Norwegian students are enrolled in regular classes. This is based on the ideology that all children, irrespective of physical or mental disabilities or learning difficulties, should be integrated as much as possible into the ordinary school system. The population is dispersed, and many of the schools are quite small. In 2011, almost half of the students in compulsory education (46 %) went to schools with fewer than 300 students, but that percentage is decreasing every year, and many small schools have been closed during the last 5 years (The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training 2011).

The structure of the school system entails 10 years of compulsory primary and lower secondary education and 3 years of optional upper secondary education. Children start attending school at age 6, and 90 % of all students stay in school until at least age 18. Findings based on a national representative survey, which included Norwegian headmasters' perceptions of student background and attainment, showed that the principals rated 78.1 % of their students' socioeconomic backgrounds as medium (middle class) and noted that 69.5 % had a supportive home educational environment. Only 9.1 % of the students were characterized as having a low socioeconomic background (Møller et al. 2006).

Due to recent migration, the student population in Norwegian schools is changing and becoming more multicultural and multilingual. The immigrant population is a heterogeneous group, including immigration from 208 different nations. Almost half of all immigrants come from Asia, Africa, or Latin America. The primary reasons for immigration are work, family reunion, or seeking refuge. In primary and lower secondary education, the term *students from language minorities* is used. This term refers to students who, for the short or the long term, need personalized instruction in Norwegian to participate in regular classes.

Equity has been recognized as one of the distinguishing features of the Norwegian education model. This ideology gave rise to the comprehensive education system, as well as to a public welfare system designed to guarantee help in difficult phases of life (e.g., illness, disablement, or temporary unemployment). There has also been a strong ideological tradition in Norway of emphasizing the role of educational institutions in creating civic society. In addition to preparing children to become able employees, schools should prepare children to play constructive roles in a democratic society. This implies that one of the main responsibilities of the school principal, the teachers, and all who work in schools is to focus on promoting equity and social justice in school as well as in the wider community (Møller 2006; Møller and Skedsmo 2013).

Since the end of the 1980s, the Norwegian education system has gone through a major reform, influenced largely by new managerialist ideas. Strategies to renew the public sector were promoted as new public management (NPM). The national quality assessment system (NQAS), which was introduced in 2006 in concert with the latest national curriculum reform, the knowledge promotion (K06), implies increased central regulation since it enables national authorities to retain some control over the output through measuring and evaluating educational outcomes. This can be described as a shift in the Norwegian education policy from the use of input-oriented policy instruments toward a more output-oriented policy. Information provided by NQAS offers a foundation for central policy development, coordination, and management (Skedsmo 2009).

However, in most municipalities, teachers still enjoy considerable trust and autonomy, and the relationships between leaders and teachers are not very hierarchical in practice. Resilient unions have played important roles in negotiating work conditions for teachers. Recently, new constructions of teacher professionalism have been produced by both the government and the teachers' union, indicating contested ideas in a context of increasing technical accountability. Policy documents emphasize the need to control teachers' competence and results. In contrast, the teacher union highlights teachers' adoption of responsibility for the quality of education in schools. Although the union addresses aspects of teacher professionalism, it is not specific concerning alternatives to external control mechanisms. (Mausethagen and Granlund 2012)

The Principal and His/Her Role in Relation to Current National Policy

Norway has a long history of framing school leadership as *first among equals*. The term has been used to refer to the most senior member of a group of equals (peers). For many years, there was no specific training for principals, but only sporadic courses offered for in-service education. Therefore, school leadership was interpreted as dependent upon the inherent organizational talent of each individual person.

Since the early 1970s, national and regional authorities have encouraged in-service training for principals. From 1980 to 2000, broad national in-service programs supported such efforts. During that period, the dominant teacher unions strongly contested the need for formal, university-based preparation programs for school leaders. According to the unions, earlier experience as a teacher was a sufficient and substantial qualification for a position as principal. Furthermore, the unions argued for keeping this as a career path option for teachers. At the start of the new millennium, however, the situation changed completely, and the unions began to argue for formal education programs in leadership and management. In addition, several universities and colleges began to offer master's degree programs incorporating educational leadership (Møller and Ottesen 2011). This change is closely related to the debates following the launch of the first PISA reports. In policy docu-

ments, it was argued that teachers and school leaders needed to do better than before and be more able and willing (Møller 2007). Leadership and accountability became the dominant themes in Norwegian education. This trend intersects noticeably with policy agendas put forward by the OECD through the international *Improving School Leadership* project which highlighted the significance of school leadership in improving students' learning.

In 2009, the Norwegian Minister of Education and Research, influenced by the OECD project, launched a national education program for newly appointed principals. However, the program is not a mandatory requirement, and the local municipalities still play a key role in providing in-service training for teachers and school leaders.¹ Leadership responsibility at the municipal and county levels is shared between professional administrators and elected politicians. Through this bond, education is connected to broader community affairs. Today, municipalities are portrayed as the *owners* of the majority of schools; they finance schools and employ teachers.

Parameters for the Review of the Research

The studies for the review come from the following key sources. First, I have collected information on all Ph.D. dissertations on school leadership during the twenty-first century in Norway. I have identified 11 approved dissertations that illustrate school leadership as a phenomenon in different ways. The dissertations are concerned with the understanding of school leaders' experiences and practices, multicultural issues, middle management in upper secondary education, teachers' perceptions of leadership and accountability, and implications of new governance on leadership at the local school. One study was designed as an intervention study that aimed to investigate what happens when experts/researchers support schools and their school leaders in developing their practice. The majority of these studies have a qualitative approach, only one has a quantitative approach, and eight are written in Norwegian.²

Second, I searched the Norwegian research and publication links on the websites of organizations at the forefront of work with school leadership in Norway. Six universities and a couple of university colleges have profiled research on school

¹The 430 municipalities in Norway are responsible for the 10 years of compulsory education at the primary and lower secondary school levels. The municipalities vary in size as well as in the level of welfare.

²Currently, there are 15 ongoing Ph.D. projects that will be finalized within the next couple of years, all written in English. They are all within the format of an article-based dissertation, a format that has become more common during the last 5 years. It is argued that Ph.D. students should be encouraged to publish their findings in peer-reviewed journals as a strategy for increased internationalization of research conducted in the Norwegian context. An extended abstract will summarize and create unity based on the articles in the thesis. Five published papers that are rooted in these projects are included in this review.

leadership on their websites. The third source of literature comes from searches on the University of Oslo Library's databases for academic articles and books on principals and school leadership published between 2000 and 2012. I also used a version of snowball sampling, following colleagues' suggestions and citations (cf. Neumerksi 2013).

The actual search was guided by keywords and possible combinations of these keywords in Norwegian and in English to retrieve as many relevant studies as required, starting with obvious keywords such as "leadership," "principals," "power," "leadership practice," and "leadership roles." Since research on school leadership is a fairly young tradition in Norway and often linked to research on school development and governing more broadly, the keywords also included "school improvement," "school culture," "school context," "professional development," "professionalization," "educational reform," "governance," "accountability," "school audit," and "educational policy." As such, it was possible also to include studies in which principals have been studied more indirectly. In particular, I searched for studies that addressed how leadership was conducted and considered only primary and secondary schools.

This search, although not exhaustive, produced, in addition to the 11 dissertations, six monographs, a number of academic articles published in eight edited collections, and one special issue of a peer-reviewed journal focusing on educational leadership. The majority of these sources were published in Norwegian. In selecting material for this literature review, I have limited the inclusion of sources to published academic articles, books, or book chapters that include *empirical studies* on school leadership. Reports based on commissioned research funded by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training³ or by the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) have not been included unless the findings have been published in peer-reviewed books or journals. Research quality has been the main basis for selecting work for this review, and even though the volume of research is small, the contribution to the field is significant.

In total, the review in this chapter covers 26 sources, of which 11 are approved doctoral dissertations. The studies are mainly funded by the Research Council of Norway or by the universities. With the exception of the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP), Leadership for Learning, and the Life History of School Principals, few studies contain comparative elements or close collaboration with colleagues from other countries. However, the Achieving School Accountability in Practice (ASAP) research project, funded by the Research Council of Norway, was wide ranging in its multilevel approach to understanding accountability in the Norwegian context and included many researchers. Although it may be challenging

³There are commissioned reports that are of importance to understanding how Norwegian principals perceive and frame their roles. The Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation (NIFU) has, for example, been commissioned by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training during the last 4 years to map school leaders' opinions of specific themes where evidence can support the formulation and monitoring of policy (Vibe and Hovdhaugen 2012). However, even though these reports indicate some trends in principals' understanding of responsibilities and challenges, they are mainly descriptive statistics and do not include more theoretical analysis of the findings.

to compare the effect of a lone Ph.D. project to that of an international project, the Norwegian Ph.D. projects are well funded and very competitive, allow for longitudinal observation studies, and provide excellent conditions for independent and peer-reviewed contribution to the field, not least when it comes to theorizing in the field of educational leadership and administration.

The next task was to identify patterns and trends in the selected studies in terms of thematic focus, research design, data sources, and study sites. Thematic focus embraces (a) the social construction of the position of school principals; (b) leadership, teaching, and learning; (c) identifying successful leadership; and (d) governing, leadership, and accountability. Due to the increasing diversity of student enrolment in the larger cities, leadership in multicultural schools has emerged as a subtheme. The majority of the studies are based on qualitative data sources. Compared with the framework developed by Gunter and Ribbins for conceptualizing the field in relation of knowledge claims (Gunter and Ribbins 2002; Gunter 2005), the focus and research design emphasize research for understanding meaning and experiences. Although all studies have mentioned implications for policy making based on the findings, this has not been defined as the main aim and purpose of the studies included in this review. The next section will present the findings. The relationship between leadership practice and context has been elaborated on and discussed in most of the studies, but in this article, I have chosen to categorize according to the theme that was at the forefront in the selected studies.

Research on Principals' Role, Work and Leadership During the Twenty-First Century

Social Constructions of the Position of School Principal

Three qualitative studies have elaborated on the social constructions of school leadership in a Norwegian context. They cover historical analysis of the shaping of the elementary school over a period of 250 years, life histories of school principals at different stages of career (veteran, mid-career, and newly appointed), and teachers' expectations of their school principals.

Homme's (2008) dissertation makes an important contribution to developing a broader understanding of the interplay of factors shaping the local school over time in Norway. The historical analysis is mainly based on written secondary sources, but the richness of the material drawing on research from several disciplines on both the history of the Norwegian school and of local government allows her to provide a fairly nuanced picture of the different twists and turns in the development of the local school in the interplay between local and national interests. In addition, she interviewed 41 informants, school principals included, working in the educational sector in four different Norwegian municipalities. She demonstrates that the principals occupy a key position in balancing professional and political governing and

how they construct their role differently. A main argument is that both national and local actors have been essential in the shaping of the elementary school and that school leaders' identities are shaped both by their institutional belonging to the school and the local community, by their identities as teachers, and by their more formal instructions as school principals.

A comparative study that aimed to investigate how principals framed their professional identities within different local and national contexts in Norway, Denmark, the UK, and Ireland was carried out at the beginning of the new millennium (Sugrue 2005). In this study, a life history approach was chosen, and 12 principals (early, mid-, and late career) from each country were interviewed about their career history. The findings across all four countries demonstrated that identities as school leaders are multiple, subjectively constructed, and change with context. Both the male and female principals in the study indicated that leadership, as a social practice, is an emotional practice, not just an intellectual rehearsal. Purpose and commitment are vital. The Norwegian principals within this study find great latitude for pursuing their visions and ideas. Their core knowledge base is to some degree rooted in teacher education, but it is based mainly on their local experiences. Comparing different stages of career, the veterans, in contrast to newly appointed heads, appeared less influenced by external accountability. It looked like their basic beliefs drove their actions despite the turmoil of what was going on other places. It could be framed as "keeping in touch with the kids." The mid-career and early-career principals, on the other hand, told stories about establishing professional accountability, but they, too, wanted to retain the kind of psychological rewards they received as teachers. This study showed that the discourses of leadership and accountability at the municipal level have changed, guided by global trends, but at the school level, external accountability has more the status of "anticipated future" (Møller 2004).

The social construction of Norwegian leadership may also be illuminated by exploring the expectations of teachers for their school principal, the principals' responses to these expectations, and how these expectations are related to changing conditions around schools at the macro level. This is the theme of Myhre's (2010) Ph.D. project. The data in this project were gathered through case studies of three schools. Core methods include the observation of interaction between principals and teachers and interviews with principals and teachers. The study showed that the teachers' expectations first and foremost are rooted in a collective autonomy. As a result of the complex society surrounding schools today, the teachers seem less able to sort external pressures on their own. Therefore, they want leaders who are able to help them interpret the external demands placed upon the school and may help them prioritize. The teachers expect the principal to be both a link to the environment and a coordinator of a single school. A main argument is that the principal gains legitimacy if the teachers also get the opportunity to both discuss and transform the external impulses and demands in relation to their own context.

Leadership, Teaching, and Learning

Currently, there is great interest in the links between leadership, teaching, and student learning. It has been argued that the more leaders focus on their relationships and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence is on student outcomes (Robinson et al. 2008). Twelve studies have been included in this category, and the majority includes elements of intervention or action research design. Three studies are positioned within cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), and two studies are exclusively based on quantitative approaches.

An international action research project, Leadership for Learning, involved researchers from seven countries. The focus of the project was on the role of school leadership in creating a stimulating learning environment (MacBeath and Dempster 2009). Three schools in each country participated in the project, which was concerned with inquiring into and supporting the development of leadership and learning practices. In this sense, the project was an extended exercise in school development as well as a research undertaking. A centerpiece of the collaboration with the schools was mutual reflection on actions. The analysis across the three Norwegian schools that participated in the project revealed a close connection between the school culture, the understanding and manifestation of leadership, and the scope of actions for both principals and teachers (Møller 2008). The principals tried to balance the varying expectations of leadership held by the teachers, the students, and the families with whom they worked. Obviously, they had different social and cultural conditions to deal with in their local community, but they also had diverse ways of dealing with disagreement and conflict. As such, the study provides an example of how principals have the power to set the tone and the agenda for school development even though leadership practice is an interactive process involving many people. A main argument is that in constructing stories about leadership for learning, the principals are also negotiating who they are for others as well as for themselves. Their stories are embedded in a cultural notion of the school as a hierarchical organization in which leadership is thought of as crucial and associated with role and authority (Møller 2009).

Leadership for learning and the development of professional communities among school leaders and teachers were also themes of a Ph.D. project published in 2009 (Aas 2009). The study aimed to investigate what happened when reading experts/researchers supported seven schools and school leaders in developing reading education for students. The participants were introduced to new methods and ideas through seminars and school conversations. The theoretical framework was cultural-historical activity theory. By following the collective discourses from the seminars to schools, Aas examined how and why the talk established the foundation for action. The findings demonstrated how tensions and contradictions provided potential as well as obstacles in developmental processes and how “everything was connected to everything.” It implied that developing reading education for students meant developing the entire school organization. Aas argued that leading for learning is a challenging mission for school principals. School leaders are expected to handle conflict and disagreement in such a way that expansive learning will be the

result. Mutual trust and respect seem to be at the core to establish legitimacy for improvement strategies; it creates the necessary conditions and mobilizes people to action and collaboration.

In a small-scale follow-up study of a research and development work project with school leaders and teachers in a lower secondary school, the purpose was to understand how the practitioners framed their learning during the project and how they experienced the situation with regard to development work about 2 years after the project had ended (Postholm 2011). The analysis was based on interviews with the principal, deputies, and a team of teachers. In addition, data were collected by asking the teachers to fill out a questionnaire. The study showed that teachers wanted to observe each other's practice directed by a common focus and to use the observed practice to reflect on and improve their teaching practice. Also, it was demonstrated that teachers preferred continuity with regard to the focus in development work.

The empirical setting for another intervention study was a medium-sized upper secondary school just outside Oslo. Helstad's Ph.D. study examined processes of knowledge creation among an interdisciplinary group of teachers who collaborated with university experts over 2 years to develop professional knowledge about writing in and across school subjects. Leadership as relational work is traced in interactions between a principal and the teachers operating within the context of the school improvement project (Helstad 2013). The analysis was mainly based on observations of meetings, and a sociocultural perspective was applied in the analysis. Special attention was paid to how the teachers and leaders made use of the resources and how the participants positioned themselves and others through negotiations of content and conditions in meetings. The study revealed the dynamic relations surrounding the division of labor and authority in schools and the various coping strategies of professionals as they handled emerging tensions related to leadership. The importance of dedicated and visible leadership that is both supportive and challenging of teachers' practice was well documented in the material. It has been argued that even though principals have the formal right to interfere in teachers' work and principals are vested with power that includes means of compulsion and reward, indirect strategies, such as building trust over time and searching for productive ways to collaborate, may turn out to be more effective in achieving goals in the long run (Helstad and Møller 2013).

Jensen's (2014) Ph.D. study sought to examine leadership development in an interprofessional school improvement team. The project was designed as a qualitative study stretched over 2 years where the empirical setting was a local school improvement project in a municipality that included collaboration between researchers and practitioners. It rested partly on ethnographic fieldwork, with a focus on the work of the project team, and partly on interaction analyses of specific events in these meetings. Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) framed the analysis. The overall findings suggested that collaboration between leaders in interprofessional settings did not necessarily foster work on shared objects. In contrast, the launch of such collaborative work was characterized as a struggle with ill-defined objects. However, the introduction and use of tools such as video clips of teaching practices

mediated and structured the processes of learning over time and influenced the boundary work in the team. It seems fair to assume that the result of the engagement is that the principals developed an increased collective awareness of questions related to pedagogical questions (Jensen and Møller 2013).

Schools and school leaders do not operate in a void, and leadership is embedded in organizational activities. This was a point of departure in a study (Vennebo and Ottesen 2012) that focused on the ways in which leadership works as a dynamic interplay between actors, the tools in use, and expectations and values embedded in the organizational setting. The study analyzed the proceedings of a team of school leaders in a lower secondary school as it strove to transform the school's assessment practices by implementing digital portfolios. Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) framed the analysis. The study demonstrated how leadership is an emergent property, played out as complex chains of actions. The principal cannot rely on formal position; it is the outcome of the interactions that determine the trajectory of an activity, even if the principal makes the final decision.

Talk is a key tool for leadership in schools, and this was the focus of a small-scale project which aimed to explore how ICT was used in the development of teaching and learning practices (Ottesen 2011). The empirical context for the article was school development projects in two schools. The analysis showed how the project, its aims, and work processes were redefined through the talk in the project team as initiatives and agency fluctuated among participants and how the group shaped and reshaped its understanding of the school's practices and the project's development. The different perspectives and contributions of the principals and teachers generated a dynamic project trajectory when resistance, power, and influence were at play. Ottesen argued that school leaders have a moral responsibility both to be responsive to the voices of others and to reformulate the "landscape" that constitutes and gives form and direction to development work.

The main purpose of Paulsen's (2008) Ph.D. thesis was to illuminate how adaptive learning was managed in an educational context characterized by strong dependency on external environments. Paulsen chose a case study-oriented research strategy, and the study built on the premise of school organizations as loosely coupled systems. Empirical cases were drawn from the field of vocational upper secondary schools in Norway. The findings show that vocational training institutions operate in fragmented external environments. Fragmentation means that school professionals depend on and must relate to several different domains in their environments: local working life, the state directorate, regional governance, and stakeholders of the teacher professions. The study demonstrates how middle managers play a crucial role as mediators between the schools' technical cores and external stakeholders. They also function as brokers between loosely coupled internal subunits.

Another Ph.D. study, based on an analysis of interview data and policy documents, aimed to explore leadership and multicultural issues in two upper secondary schools (Andersen and Ottesen 2011). Intercultural education and inclusive leadership provided theoretical lenses for investigating how certain values and presuppositions were normalized within the schools and how they manifested in visions, plans, and practice. The results from this study indicated a monocultural approach

to teaching and learning. Although the school leaders expressed concern for students from linguistic and ethnic minority groups, this did not translate into explicit strategies for inclusion. To a large extent, access depended on the students' proficiency in Norwegian. It was argued that the school and the senior management team seemed to lack the competence and experience that would enable them to recognize and address the specific challenges of students from linguistic and ethnic minority groups.

Many of the research projects financed through the PRAKSISFOU national research program have chosen action research as their research design. The Learning and Leading in Communities of Practice project explored how leaders within the educational sector may develop new knowledge through dialogue conferences and networks. A dialogue conference is a form of communicative space where people can hold structured discussions with the aim of understanding and developing their respective fields. In this project, more than 130 heads of schools and kindergartens participated in such dialogue conferences. The project showed that these types of conferences create a good structure for managing reform work in schools and kindergartens. Collective knowledge is developed when school leaders contribute with their individual interpretations of and approaches to reform work. The project also shows that these conferences may contribute to the development of schools and kindergartens through municipal and regional collaborations by providing structures for knowledge development across schools and institutions (Lund et al. 2010).

Research on how teachers view principals' roles, work, or leadership may also offer insight into principalship in a Norwegian context. Some studies have mapped teachers' perception of what their principal is doing, while others have focused on teachers' expectations or on the relationship between teachers' motivation and school leadership. Imsen (2004) explored the extent to which the principal intervenes in the schools' inner life. A survey of teachers and classroom observations were the basis for the analysis. The study showed a strong correlation between leadership and the schools' orientation toward development and change and concludes that the principal has a great influence on the school culture. The researcher also identified a significant correlation between the quality of leadership and the school's way of organizing teaching and learning activities. Traditional schedules divided by subject were the most common one in schools with weak leadership, whereas open forms of schedules were used more in schools with strong leadership. However, regarding the relation between the teachers' activities in the classroom and the leaders' role, the attitude may be described as accepted zones of influence (i.e., principals do not interfere with teaching and teachers do not interfere with administration).

Another approach to mapping teachers' perceptions of relationships in schools was adopted by Elstad et al. (2011) who used social exchange theory as a theoretical explanation for organizational citizenship behavior, defined as teachers' motivation to go above and beyond their formal responsibilities. The study was based on the assumption that the teachers' perception of social and economic exchange may mediate the relationship between the leaders and organizational citizenship behavior; hence, it was vital to examine the nature of exchanges in the organization. Two

hundred and thirty-four secondary teachers responded to a cross-sectional survey that tested a model rooted in a combination of Bryk and Schneider's theory on trust and literature on employee-organization relationships. A main argument is that this kind of behavior is a key factor in school improvement because there seems to be a strong relationship between teachers' motivation to work hard, smart, and responsibly on the one hand and higher learning outcomes for students on the other hand. Since relational trust between heads and teachers culminates in social exchanges within the principal-teacher role set, mapping teachers' perceptions in this way captured important dimension in principals' work. The study provided strong support for the importance of principal-teacher trust for social exchange and indirectly for organizational citizenship behaviors and concluded that the quality of human relationships between teachers and principals is an important resource in school improvement work.

During the last 10 years, there has been increased awareness of bullying in schools. A study that evaluated a school-based social competence program on the promotion of social skills and the prevention of bullying suggested that the principals are crucial to the success of the improvement program (Larsen 2005). The findings were based on interviews with four principals and 17 teachers at four primary schools. The results suggested that the principals needed to use leadership and management strategies, addressing teachers' predisposing factors, securing the alignment of their staff, articulating a direction for the future, and monitoring teachers' use of the program.

Identifying Successful Leadership

The International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP), which aimed at identifying the qualities and the characteristics of successful leadership practice in elementary and secondary schools (Day and Leithwood 2007) and in which 12 Norwegian schools participated, provided extensive data about principals' experiences and practices (Møller et al. 2007). Six researchers and two Ph.D. students collaborated in the Norwegian part of the study. The methodological approach was the multisite case study method. In addition, a survey, in which the themes were derived from the case studies, was conducted in 2005 (Møller et al. 2006; Skedsmo 2009). The Norwegian team selected schools that had received public recognition by the Ministry of Education and Research based on the schools' efforts to improve the learning environment.⁴ The findings demonstrated that leadership in the Norwegian schools was almost entirely characterized by collaboration and team efforts. Second, the learning-centered approach was the focal point for the schools' philosophy as well as for their practice. The teacher-student relationship was characterized by mutual respect, and the fostering of a stimulating learning environment

⁴The Norwegian team could not select schools based on their academic performance and had to use a different set of criteria for selecting the cases because there were no public test results or inspection reports to base choices of successful principals when this project started in 2003.

was a main concern in the schools. Respect for the individual student and colleague in building professional communities of practice seemed to be a basic value and a guiding norm of conduct. Both the leadership team and the teachers were working hard to fulfill a mission based on democratic values.

Two Ph.D. projects were part of the ISSPP in Norway (Presthus 2010; Vedøy 2008). This allowed for more extensive observation data and added a lot to the analyses of the Norwegian data, and these projects also made a significant contribution to the international project as a whole. Presthus (2010) chose to shadow three of these successful school principals over 5 weeks at each site to understand how they framed their experiences, how they negotiated the culture of schooling, and how they tried to meet institutional expectations. In addition to shadowing, interviews with these principals were conducted, asking them to comment on what had been observed. The Ph.D. thesis demonstrated that the daily work of the principals was characterized by busy activities and that the principals invested both their intellect and their emotions in their daily work. At first, their activities seemed very fragmented, ad hoc oriented, and characterized by brevity and discontinuity, but over time, it was possible to identify well-defined intentions behind their work. Overall, the analysis showed four main dimensions that constituted their leadership of educational activities: a structural dimension, a personal dimension, an ethical dimension, and a deliberative dimension.

Vedøy (2008) explored how leadership was practiced in multicultural schools and how this practice could be understood in light of a democratic perspective on leadership. In the first part of the study, formal leaders in eight compulsory schools, recognized as successful by authorities, were interviewed, both as teams and individually. The interviews were analyzed to explore which discourses formal leaders chose in discussions of minority pupils' education. The study indicated that three discourses were in play: a formal, a compensatory, and a participatory discourse. The principals also placed themselves within three different discourses concerning ethical rationality for leadership of education: an administrative discourse, a discourse of care, and a discourse of justice. In the second part, two of the schools from the interview sessions were chosen for a case study that in addition to group interviews with teachers, minority students, and their parents included observations in the classroom and shadowing of the leaders for 5 weeks. The interaction and management practices were analyzed from a critical theory angle. The dissertation pointed to which social dilemmas may appear in proportion to the leadership and values in a multicultural school. A main argument was that the principal seemed to play a pivotal role in including all stakeholders in work toward democratic schooling. A caring approach through a focus on possibilities and respect, not on deficits, is crucial (Vedøy and Møller 2007).

In revisiting three of these successful schools, of which one was multicultural (Møller et al. 2009), the main findings demonstrated, despite the new expectations raised for schools in society, a situation of continuity at the local school. Their work was characterized by a blend of human, professional, and civic concerns, and their intentions have been and still are to cultivate an environment for learning that is humanly fulfilling and socially responsible. In these schools, the learning-centered

approach we identified earlier was sustained during the 5 years, and all principals focused on multiple ways of influencing staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions. The continuity of success is reflected in the principals' capacity to promote good relationships among the staff members, and the moral imperative of developing the whole child was still at the forefront. A common characteristic was equity and social justice as a personal commitment, an ethic of care, and a concern for the common good. All three principals presented themselves as persistent, resilient, and optimistic. They were not dictated by the shifting political contexts in which they worked, but they demonstrated to some degree responsiveness to this context. However, they reported on their struggle to sustain and promote equity and social justice in an age of increasing competition and managerial accountability.

The Relationship Between Governing, Leadership, and Accountability

Recently, there has been increased awareness of the roles of municipalities as "school owners" and as political agents in education. There is also evidence that extended tasks and responsibilities at the municipal and county levels have been delegated to the principals and that leaders at the school level experience increased pressure to perform bureaucratic tasks, such as reporting (Engeland et al. 2008). Accountability has become an important concept, if not the most important concept of school policy in many places around the world. Less than 10 years ago, the supervision of Norwegian schools was based on extensive central planning (directing the input) and less focus on results (the output). This stands in clear contrast to the USA, which has a long tradition of measuring performance in schools. The Achieving School Accountability in Practice (ASAP) research project, funded by the Research Council of Norway, took a closer look at what happened in Norwegian schools when they had more freedom to supervise the input themselves, while school performance on the other hand was subject to rigorous control (Langfeldt et al. 2008). ASAP implied collaboration across four Norwegian universities and colleges, and many researchers have been involved. In addition, a number of different methodological approaches were used: textual analysis of policy documents, curricula, etc.; interviews with senior management at the national and municipal levels, as well as with school principals, teachers, and students; and observation, questionnaires, and mapping. Two of the subprojects are included in this review.

Since Norway introduced tests and other types of measurements, the press, with a negative bias, has placed the spotlight on those schools that have performed badly in attainment measurements. The press has reconstructed from public sources "league tables" of aggregated student achievement, but at present, the official position opposes the public ranking of schools. Elstad (2009) published a study showing that, with the exception of Oslo, there are almost no controls at present that have direct consequences for school leaders, and it is also difficult to identify tough consequences at the local level. It is the counties and municipalities that are legally responsible for quality, but the extent to which assessment systems are in place varies from one school governing body to another. However, the media continues to

blame poorly performing schools, and this spotlight brings with it heightened levels of stress inside the schools.

Roald's (2010) dissertation was connected to the ASAP project, and his study focused on how schools and school owners collaborated on questions of quality assurance in a national system based on management by objectives, performance management, and accountability. The main findings showed a marked division between unsystematic, systematic, and systemic features of quality work. Schools and municipalities that emphasized the systemic approach developed larger organizational learning capacities than those choosing an unsystematic or systematic approach to quality assessment. Additionally, the study showed that the assessment work seems to function productively when an assessment culture is created from below throughout the municipal school system. Roald pointed out that the assessment information in itself does not lead to new understanding or active development work. Unless data are presented in ways that provide collective insight and commitment, increased availability of information can actually be counterproductive.

Skedsmo's (2009) dissertation explored how national school authorities have developed new tools to regulate and renew comprehensive education and the linkage between the national evaluation policy and principals' perceptions of evaluation tools and new accountability forms. The approach applied in this thesis included text analysis of policy documents during the last 20 years and quantitative analysis of data from a national survey conducted among school principals in Norway. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the survey data. One of the main elements in the new toolkit is NQAS which was introduced in 2006. This system consists of various evaluation tools, such as standardized tests, diagnostic tests, which create new expectations for schools and principals. The question is how and to what extent governing structures and processes have developed and transformed through the introduction of NQAS in Norwegian education. The increased focus on outcomes in education policies since 2006 was reflected to a certain degree in principals' perceptions. However, how the principals conceptualized the purposes of different tools and functions of evaluation showed a more nuanced picture. According to the principals' perceptions, certain tools introduced as part of NQAS represent an administrative-oriented evaluation system that is only loosely connected to tools used in classroom practices to improve student learning. A main argument is that advanced evaluation tools and techniques can never replace professional judgments. Professional perspectives are essential in the processes of analyzing and interpreting evaluation results as well as judgments related to implications for policy and practice.

Building on the findings of Skedsmo's doctoral thesis, a more recent study investigated how ideas connected to NPM reforms have been introduced and interpreted in the Norwegian education sector (Møller and Skedsmo 2013). Based on studies of selected policy documents from the last two decades, three areas of discursive struggle were identified. The first one was linked to ideologies and the national history of schooling, the second to contested issues of teacher professionalism, and the third with strategies for modernizing and improving education. While NPM reforms aim at reducing bureaucracy and making governing more effective and efficient, those

who work in the education sector, at both the school and the municipal levels, have experienced an increase in bureaucracy.

Another research project explored how accountability and transparency reforms affected teacher autonomy in Norway and Sweden (Helgøy and Homme 2007). The study was based on interviews with teachers and principals in two large municipalities in Norway and Sweden. Approximately 70 teachers and principals at seven schools were interviewed over a 1-year period from spring 2005 to spring 2006. While both Norway and Sweden have decentralized and devolved school governance to the local level, Sweden has done so to a larger degree than Norway. The authors argued that the strong central regulations in Norway have limited individual teacher autonomy. However, even with weakened individual autonomy, Norwegian teachers, in contrast to Swedish teachers, still have a strong influence on national policy processes. This means that Norwegian teachers still are quite autonomous at the collective level.

A dissertation on how teachers construct and negotiate professionalism under increasing accountability (Mausethagen 2013) is also relevant for understanding the work of school leaders, though in a more indirect way because it highlights how teacher professionalism is reconstructed in national policy and how teachers respond to accountability policies. Such responses will probably influence the principal's room to maneuver. The empirical data consists of white papers, policy documents from the union, participant observation of teacher meetings, focus group interviews, and individual interviews with teachers. The study documented shifts in the discourse of teacher professionalism among policy-makers and the teachers' union. Both the union and the teachers locally engage in forms of resistance toward external control, such as national testing. On the one hand, teachers have become more concerned with evidence and justifying practice. On the other hand, they are more resistant in terms of the tools that are implemented to enhance outcomes. The study suggested possible interpretations of why teachers resist external accountability.

Sivesind and Bachmann (2011) in their recent research examined national inspection in education and the relationship between rule governing and professional judgment. The analysis was based on official documents and interviews with eight people at a state agency who conducted inspection in Norway in 2008. The study contributed with new knowledge on the changing interrelationship between state authorities and schools as a result of school auditing systems introduced in Norway in 2006. It also showed how state inspection raises different expectations to school principals in Norway and Sweden in the late 2000s. The authors argue that principals in both cases are expected to know the law and regulations to pursue their role as civil servants but cannot handle their professional leadership tasks without educational knowledge.

A small-scale study explored experiences with a new policy on work-time agreement (Irgens 2010). His study was based on interviews with school administrators and shop stewards at six schools. The regulation of working hours became the responsibility of the local school, and the agreement emphasized that teachers' work not only includes individual work, teaching, and time spent with the students but should also include time set aside for cooperation with colleagues, development

of individual competency, and cooperation with parents and external authorities. The study showed that the individual practice and the day-to-day running of the school were prioritized by teachers as well as the school principals, even though the locally regulated working time arrangements were supposed to give room for development work and cooperation. Irgens suggested that individual autonomy among teachers has a very strong position in Norwegian schools.

How schools use their mandated school-based evaluations and the role of the principal in determining the degree and type of use was the theme of a Ph.D. thesis by Emstad (2012). The primary source of data for the study was in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, and students at six primary schools. The study found no evidence of conflict between the external accountability and improvement purposes of the evaluation process. Rather, the school leadership had considerable discretion to shape the evaluation to suit their own purposes. A main argument was that leadership priority and type of facilitation were important determinants of how evaluation findings were used (Emstad and Robinson 2011).

In a 5-year study on the role of administration and institutions in the implementation of the latest educational reform in Norway, the role of school leadership was analyzed in particular. A comprehensive set of sources and data provided the basis: content analysis of key policy documents, interviews with key actors at different levels in the education system, national surveys sent out to the same target groups, and ten schools were selected for qualitative in-depth studies (Møller et al. 2013).⁵ The findings demonstrated many tensions and ambiguities in governing processes, and the data indicated the multi-layered character of autonomy and control in school leadership. It is not a simple either/or position. For instance, the intended empowerment of teachers seemed to be undermined by lack of opportunities for in-service training, and the principals contributed only to a small degree to organizational support for capacity building. Lack of time for systematic reflection was highlighted as a major problem. On the one hand, the schools have found that their role is defined to carry out strategies and solutions defined by central authorities. Particularly in areas such as outcome-based accountability, the coordinating principle was characterized by top-down governing. On the other hand, they experienced ambiguous and weak governing when it comes to implementing basic skills in all subject areas. As such, there is leeway for professional agency in certain areas. The findings also demonstrated that reflection on experiences is the principals' preference to leadership training, and "best practice" was held as a basic principle.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Interest in research about and for leaders, engaging in leading, and exercising leadership grew rapidly in Norway at the turn of the century, not least because new governance structures affected the roles and responsibilities of school leaders. In

⁵The data was collected for two periods, from 2007 to 2008 and 2010–2011.

this process, the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have played powerful roles in driving the educational policy. Teachers and school principals have become subject to pressure from governments to improve national rankings in mathematics, science, and reading, and the Research Council of Norway has provided funding for research.

Mapping and labeling the research field is challenging and is essentially an act of interpretation. In addition, as a reviewer, I have selected which literature to include and which to exclude based upon the guiding parameters for the review, and those decisions have shaped the conclusions from the review. When looking across all studies included in the review, four major themes emerged:

- The social construction of the position as school principals
- Leadership, teaching, and learning
- Identifying successful leadership
- Governing, leadership, and accountability

The researchers position their studies mainly within a category that may be labeled research for understanding (cf. Gunter 2005) through which historical work can explain the past and ethnographic work can examine culture as a context for leadership and principals' experiences (cf. Homme 2008; Møller 2005; Presthus 2010). Some of these studies have focused explicitly on understanding leadership in multicultural environments (Andersen and Ottesen 2011; Vedøy 2008). Closely related and partly overlapping is research on structure and processes through which functions and roles can be understood, and Norwegian studies include studies on the engagement of the principal in school evaluation (Emstad 2012), leadership as relational and distributed work (Helstad and Møller 2013), and the importance of social exchanges within the principal-teacher role set (Elstad et al. 2011). Increasingly, CHAT has been applied as a perspective to capture the complexity of leadership in school (Jensen and Møller 2013; Jensen 2014; Vennebo and Ottesen 2012; Aas 2009).

Other studies may be categorized as more policy-related research, where evidence can support the formulation and monitoring of policy, even though this was not the main aim of the study (Elstad 2009; Helgøy and Homme 2007; Langfeldt et al. 2008; Roald 2010; Sivesind and Bachmann 2011; Skedsmo 2009; Møller et al. 2013), or evaluative research where researchers focus on measuring the impact of principals on outcomes and undertake comparative analyses (Imsen 2004; Larsen 2005).

A few studies have highlighted that, even though the municipal organization and governance of schools have become framed within the discourse of new public management (NPM), with a focus on managerial accountability, effectiveness, and competition, there has been and still is a strong norm of noninterference in the teacher's classroom activities. Trust in teachers' work has long been a tacit dimension in principals' approach to leadership, establishing accepted zones of influence. In addition, schools are not, perhaps with the exception of schools in Oslo (Elstad 2009), under threat of sanction if exams' scores are low (Møller and Skedsmo 2013;

Skedsmo 2009). However, accountability policies also influence principals and teachers' work in a low-stake context such as the Norwegian (Mausethagen 2013).

Looking across the studies in this review, it is possible to identify some changes in how the work of school principals is portrayed. While principals 10 years ago had the option of paying little attention to managerial accountability (Møller 2005), the shift from the use of input-oriented policy instruments toward a more output-oriented policy is increasingly changing what may be referred to as dominant discourses around school leadership. The new constructions highlight the principal as a person with primary concern for pupil outcomes, excellence, and effectiveness, although the caring and democracy orientation is still part of the construction. Therefore, new elements have been added but also put at the forefront. At the same time, stable aspects of leadership, such as relational work and attending to the broader aims of education, are prominent in the findings across the different studies.

Research on leadership in the Norwegian context is very much influenced by leadership research undertaken in the English-speaking world. In particular, studies by Day, Fullan, Hallinger, Hargreaves, Leithwood, Robinson, Seashore Louis, Spillane, and Timperley have been frequently cited in the reported studies. The international literature is used to inform the research on school leadership in Norway and to create the warrant for the study in question and identify the contribution the study will make. Many international leadership studies in education focus on a single institutional role, and most often, there is a focus on the principals' role. This is also the case for some of the studies included in this review, but, in addition, the Norwegian studies also drew attention to how leadership evolves in school settings or how the dynamic between leadership and teaching plays out in context. A unique contribution of the many studies included in this review is greater sensitivity to variations in organizational context and a greater focus on leadership identity and leadership as the outcome of interactions. Quite a few studies have included extensive observation of leadership meetings, classroom practices, and the shadowing of principals. More often, there has been an awareness of the dynamics between district-level leadership and leadership provided by school leaders and the many sources of leadership in the education system. Thus, the studies have considered the web of interactions created by these sources and contributed to a more balanced understanding of the interplay between structure and agency. Emphasis on the enabling and constraining factors for enacting leadership in schools is crucial for pushing our understanding of school leadership influence further. As such, the reported studies have added to the international knowledge of leadership by putting such factors at the forefront. Increasingly, Norwegian studies on school leadership are also being published in recognized international journals, and some of them are connected to large international research projects (such as ISSPP).

So far, a few studies on school leadership conducted within a Norwegian context have added the element of student achievement data to their results. This implies that studies with a focus on the relationship between leadership and student outcomes have mainly been based on interview data about achievement. An exception might be a project at the Center for Economic Research at Norwegian University of

Science and Technology (NTNU), which has examined the relationship between governance, management, and performance in the Norwegian educational system. It started in 2009 and has utilized existing data to analyze whether governance systems are systematically related to local factors such as income, education, and political preferences. In addition, they have investigated whether and how governance systems have affected student performance using data from national tests and exams. The study draws upon principal-agent theory, and as such, it represents a different approach to understanding principalship compared to the studies included in this review. Up to now, the few publications based on this project have focused more broadly on the correlation between different forms of governance and student performance, not on the effect of principals' work.

In general, there is a need for more knowledge about the connections between school leadership, organization, resource use, and learning outcomes and about which administrative forms produce good results at the various levels within the educational system. In Norway, a few studies on school leadership have applied quantitative or mixed-method approaches to measure the correspondence between the work of school leaders and student outcomes. Further research should draw broadly from various methodologies to document both the construction of principalship and how principals, in collaboration with his or her leadership teams, can support and promote teaching and learning. At the same time, it is crucial to look for a diversity of learning outcomes rather than to focus only on achievement test scores in mathematics, science, and reading.

In addition, research on issues related to the legal aspects of education, i.e., the relationship between school leadership and the students' right to adequate learning conditions and the employees' rights to a safe and sound working environment, is limited. Welstad's (2011) study on how principals used school legislation to ensure the students' right to adequate learning is an exception.⁶ This may also entail the legal aspects of the public administration of education and the consequences of international developments that Norway must take into account due to its membership of multinational organizations such as the EU.

Finally, I will underscore the need for more cross-national comparative research on principalship which is vital for extending the frontier of knowledge in the field of educational leadership and administration.

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⁶A project funded by the Research Council of Norway, focusing on legal standards and the professional judgment of school leaders (2012–2016), will add to this knowledge base in the future.

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