Leadership for Learning
- A Study of How Teachers Perceive Their Professional Role

Ledarskap för lärande
- en studie av lärares syn på sin yrkesroll

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Alexandra Taawo
Abstract


This study aims at looking deeper into school-based leadership and teacher leadership in particular. The starting point of any line of thought is to be found in the claim that there is a positive correlation between teacher leadership and student academic performance. When searching the curriculum for the non-compulsory school system in Sweden, Lpf94, for its position on school-based leadership, the only item that is found on the subject refers to principal leadership. I therefore chose to perform interviews with a number of high-school teachers, to attain a complementary image of how they perceive that they, as teachers, practice leadership on a daily basis. The results show that they all feel that their professional role entails a leader role, but the analysis shows that how they practice leadership can be recognized in slightly different ways.

Keywords: leader, pedagogical leadership, teacher, student academic performance, relationships.

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1 Introduction

One of the major challenges in educational reform is for teachers—who see themselves as working in service to the young—to see themselves also as leaders in service to our schools and society. By embracing a larger leadership role, teachers would not dilute but deepen their commitment to children and youth. (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2007: 149).

Literature on school and leadership has a tendency to focus to a high degree on the leadership of school principals. Teacher leadership also appears to be regarded as less significant, compared to the esteem that follows leadership roles that are found within other professions. Likewise, no official leadership training is part of the curriculum during my teacher training education. Nonetheless, it is a fact that being a teacher entails being the leader of several large groups of students – every day. Research has shown that there is “a correlation between teacher leadership and educational success” (Andrews & Crowther, 2002: 154). Recent Swedish political debate suggests that there is a need to increase teachers’ professional status. Stressing the significance of the leadership aspects of teaching may therefore also promote an increase of the status that seems to have been lost.

1.1 Background

When I first started my internship as a teacher student, the knowledge I had to rely on, besides having consulted some basic pedagogical literature, consisted in my personal school-experiences as a student. Therefore, when I contemplated my opinion on the scope of teaching, it became clear that, to me, the ultimate purpose of teaching is to promote my students’ acquisition of knowledge and democratic values. Although I strongly felt that this was my task as a teacher, I still knew little about how to make it happen. Since that initial period of my internship, I have realized that the art of teaching entails a vast variety of competencies. In order to form a good learning environment for my students, it is essential not only that to know my subjects, pedagogy and didactics well - I also need
to possess skills that concern social-, democratic-, structural- and several other matters. These are merely some examples of the many areas of attention to include in the teacher role. However, the fact that such wide-ranged competence is required of a teacher is probably why it, initially, was difficult for me to understand what was expected of me. Through further teaching experience, I have acquired more insight into the profession. It has thus become clear that as part of my teacher role, it is essential to provide the students with the proper leadership, in order for their school and classroom experience to be conducive to their learning outcomes. This led me to consider the importance that a teacher not only needs to possess the adequate academic and social skills, but also the ability to be the pedagogical leader of a class.

1.2 Thesis Statement

Teacher leadership is to be seen as imperative to the quality of students’ academic performance and leader skills are therefore essential to the profession. It may also be helpful to the debate on teachers’ professional status to highlight this fact. The aim of this paper is to analyse how the notions of teaching and leadership can be interrelated, according to the accounts of a few teachers. The purpose of this is to shed light on the significance of teacher leadership for student academic performance. To do this, I will look further into aspects of school-based leadership, based upon the assumption that leadership is crucial to the teaching profession and to student academic performance. Furthermore, I will also provide an analysis of how teacher leadership can be practiced on a daily basis.

1.3 Research Question

- How is teacher leadership practiced in teachers’ daily work?
1.4 Limitations of the Study

In the attempt to portray teacher leadership in practice, I will conduct qualitative interviews with high-school teachers in Sweden. Their professional roles will be discussed in relation to leadership, with special attention to how they themselves perceive leadership to be part of their daily work. The results of these interviews will then be presented, followed by an analysis and a discussion, based upon that material. Due to restrictions of the length of this study, the number of interviews is limited to five. Therefore, no claims will be made as to the generalization value of the results from these. For the same reason, the study will deal with pedagogical leadership from the principal and teacher perspectives and thus leave out the view-point that depicts how students perceive that their teachers practice leadership.
2 Leadership Theory

This chapter will deal with the notions of leadership and school and how they can be interrelated, according to some branches of literature. Aspects that concern school principals and school management and administration easily come to mind when mentioning these two notions. Typically, educational literature also focuses on the leadership aspects of school principals. However, the focus of this paper is on teacher leadership.

First, a clarification of the notion of leadership will be attempted. Secondly, an overview of some aspects of school- and pedagogical leadership, pertinent to this paper will follow. After this, an account of leadership on teacher level will be presented, and lastly, the significance of teacher leadership to student academic performance will be looked further into.

2.1 What is Leadership?

What does the notion of leadership mean? Well, it is claimed that there are over 1,500 various definitions of leadership (Gill, 2006: 9). There is also a quotation that says “[b]ecoming a leader is synonymous with becoming yourself. It’s precisely that simple, and it’s also that difficult” (Crowther et al, 2009: 65). Therefore, it is not a surprise that it is not always easy to provide a strict definition of it. It has even been stated that “[l]eadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (Gill, 2006: 3). An early twentieth century definition of leadership defined it as a leader demanding the respect, loyalty and obedience of those led in order to achieve goals of personal interest (Gill, 2006: 7). Toward the close of that century, Howard Gardner meant that “leaders are those who by word and/or personal example, markedly influence the behaviors, thoughts, and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings” (Gill, 2006: 9). The latter, more modern perspective shows that, throughout the twentieth century, there was a change towards a less authoritarian view on leadership. Nowadays, commanding respect and compliance would probably not be features
attractive in a leader, as the society of today is different, in several aspects, from the society of 100 years ago.

A basic premise when interpreting leadership is to appreciate that it is always context bound (Foster, 1989: 42), for “it [leadership] does not reside in an individual but in the relationship between individuals” (Foster, 1989: 46). In other words, each situation is unique and leadership therefore needs to adapt accordingly. This also highlights that leadership is practiced in a social context.

2.1.1 Four Dimensions of Leadership

Although leadership is not so easily defined, it describes a certain relationship between people. Therefore, it can be claimed to encompass the following four dimensions - it must be: critical; transformative; educative and ethical (Foster, 1989: 50). As seen above, the notion of leadership evolved through the course of the twentieth century, from initially being including domineering qualities to eventually describe a much less authoritarian relationship. This progression illustrates that there have been critical voices that enabled new approaches to leadership to develop. Hence, along with societal changes comes the need to re-evaluate matters. In turn, it makes a critical ability essential to any kind of leadership, so that it does not sustain anachronistic features. The transformative nature of leadership alludes to the aspects of the change that occurs when people interact (Foster, 1989: 50-53). In other words: “leadership without change is management of the status quo” (MacNeill et al. 2003: 6).

A critical and transformative leadership enables it to become educative, in the sense that such leadership then holds the ability to analyse particular circumstances and visualise the change needed in order to reach development. Lastly, the ethical dimension of leadership addresses the power relationship that automatically follows a leader role. The early twentieth century autocratic leadership mentioned above is an example of unethical leadership. There, the best interest of those led was disregarded, and the leaders attempted to achieve their own personal goals and objectives by mistreating people. The ethical aspect of leadership means to respect and safeguard democratic values, to protect the rights of all individuals within a certain context (Foster, 1989: 53-56).
2.1.2 Leader versus Manager

As seen, leadership is not easily defined in a few sentences and because it is context bound, it also needs to be flexible. This difficulty to circle a clear cut definition is best explained in the quote: “[a]s complexity rises, precise statements lose meaning and meaningful statements lose precision” (Leithwood et al., 1998: 5). The closer leadership is studied, the harder it becomes to define it. To get a somewhat clearer perspective on what it illustrates, it may be helpful to look at some of the skills that are generally expected to follow leadership roles. When doing so, it is necessary to be aware of the difference between the two ways of practicing leadership: “leading through relationships and people” and “leading through progressing tasks” (Robinson, 2007: 8), or - leadership and management.

Leadership and management both involve similar components; however there is a slight variation in the nature of them. The most striking difference is that management involves a more task-oriented capacity than leadership, which, in turn, is generally of a more inspirational and visionary nature. The table below provides a rough overview of the slightly different operative focuses of leadership and management.

**Table 1: Leadership versus management skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Innovates</td>
<td>• Administers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develops</td>
<td>• Maintains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focuses on people</td>
<td>• Focuses on systems and structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inspires trust</td>
<td>• Focuses on control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Asks what and why</td>
<td>• Asks how and when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does the right thing</td>
<td>• Does things right</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Gill, 2006: 27)

Management and leadership skills are, however, interrelated and are not to be seen as entirely separated from each other. They can be seen as two sides of the same coin; they both involve working with people, inspiring change and achieving goals (Rickets, 2009: 2-3). Nonetheless, taking into consideration some variations between leadership- and management related capacities may make help understanding the aspects that leadership can entail in practice.
2. 2 Educational Leadership in Schools

The basic qualities of any type of leadership were presented in the previous section. As was also mentioned there, it is always context bound. What are then the characteristic of leadership within the realm of education? The following paragraphs will look further into how school-based leadership can be described.

2. 2. 1 Pedagogical Leadership

The term pedagogical derives from the Greek word paidagógos, which in ancient Greece was the slave who accompanied a child to and from school (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, 1986). Pedagogical leadership differs from other types of organisational and entrepreneurial leadership because its main focus is not on developing financial capital or material value; it aims at increasing human capital. This means practicing leadership as a form of pedagogy to enhance school effectiveness and student performance. This generates tasks that require the leader to distinguish social and motivational issues; manage and explain; solve problems and to be enabling, to mention a few areas of responsibility (Sergiovanni, 1998: 38; 42).

The curriculum for the non-compulsory school system in Sweden, Lpf94, does not mention leadership as a term at all. However, pedagogical leader and leader are both found in a single sentence (Lpf94:18). In Lpf94, the school principal is recognized as the pedagogical leader and the responsibilities mentioned to follow that role refer to their obligations as school head. Below are some of the responsibilities that concern their direct influence on students’ academic performance:

Table 2: Principal responsibilities according to Lpf94

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The schoolhead [sic ] is responsible for the school’s results and thus has, within certain limits, special responsibility for ensuring that:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• education is organised so that to the greatest extent possible, it is based on the wishes of pupils and their choice of course so that inappropriate choices are avoided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• the design and structure of the education, its contents and working structures are adjusted to the varying needs and circumstances of pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• pupils receive information prior to the start of studies, obtain a well designed introduction to their studies in their subject/course and receive help in formulating goals for their studies (cont.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 continued

- every pupil in a dialogue with the school draws up an individual study plan and revises this, if necessary, on different occasions during the education
- education, pupils’ welfare and student guidance activities are designed so that pupils needing special support and help receive it. (Lpf94: 18).

These listed duties describe a relationship to the students where the pedagogical leader focuses on more managerial aspects (cfr table 1). Thus, it can be inferred that principals have major administrative responsibilities regarding the aspects of their students’ education.

Educational literature has, traditionally, shown a tendency to portray leadership from the principal perspective. One reason why research is so vastly centred on principal leadership matters can be due to the traditional view on educational administration¹ that claims that “managers are both more important and more variable than workers, and their behaviour is therefore more worthy of study and intervention” (Watkins: 9). Does this mean that pedagogical leadership demands focus to be on more managerial tasks and is therefore only found amongst school principals? The following quote provides a straightforward theory, extending the notion of pedagogical leadership to include teachers as well:

Teachers practice pedagogical leadership directly since in schools they stand first and closest in a caring relationship to children. They have the major responsibility for guiding children academically, socially and spiritually through the world of childhood to adulthood. Principals practice pedagogical leadership by facilitating this process. (Sergiovanni, 1998: 42).

Pedagogical leadership means dealing with a vast variety of matters concerning education, which requires the role as manager and the role as leader to overlap each other and to fuse into an overall leader role. The leadership of the head of schools is not to be underestimated; however, as stated in the quote above, it does not mean that teachers are to be excluded from the equation. Principals should not be viewed as the sole

¹ Educational administration “facilitates the development of goals and basic policies to teaching and learning, stimulating the development of appropriate programmes for teaching – learning, procuring, managing personnel and materials to implement teaching and learning” (Verma, 2005:5).
practitioners of pedagogical leadership, even though their role carries with it greater general managerial responsibilities. Therefore, when discussing pedagogical leadership, it is imperative not to forget about those who “stand first and closest…to the children” (Sergiovanni, 1998: 42) – the teachers.

2.2.2 Teacher Leadership

Within the framework of the Lpf94 curriculum, no explicit reference is made to teachers as leaders by using either the term of (pedagogical) leader or (pedagogical) leadership. Nevertheless, certain principles upon which teachers shall base the work that directly affects their students’ academic performance are stated. Their total number is eleven, and below, a few of the most conspicuous ones are mentioned.

Table 3 Teacher responsibilities according to Lpf94

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The teacher shall:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• take as the starting point each individual pupil’s needs, preconditions, experience and thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reinforce the pupils’ self-confidence as well as their willingness and ability to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• stimulate, guide and support pupils and provide special support to pupils with difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the education create a balance between theoretical and practical knowledge that supports the learning of pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• organise and carry out the work so that the pupils:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– develop in accordance with their own preconditions and at the same time are stimulated into using and developing all their ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– experience that knowledge is meaningful and that their own learning is progressing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– receive support in their language and communicative development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– gradually receive more and increasingly independent tasks to perform as well as increasing responsibility. (Lpf94: 13).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When comparing table 3 with the previous, table 2, it is clear that whilst principals are overall responsible for “draw[ing] up an individual study plan” for the students, the teachers are depicted as the ones to “organise and carry out the work so that…” it will benefit the students’ learning and communicative development directly. Furthermore, table 2 shows that principals are to make sure that “the design and structure of the education, its contents and working structures are adjusted to the varying needs and circumstances of pupils”, whereas teachers are the ones who are to “reinforce the pupils’
self-confidence as well as their willingness and ability to learn” and “stimulate, guide and support pupils and provide special support to pupils with difficulties”. Moreover, it is also the task of each teacher to find the balance between theoretical and practical knowledge that is conducive to their students’ learning.

What can be inferred when confronting the difference in the nature of the tasks in table 2 and table 3 is that in relation to their students, principals appear to take on a more explicitly managerial/administrative role. The teachers, on the other hand are expected to focus less on structure and more on the person and how to develop and inspire their students’ learning processes. It thus becomes clear what Sergiovanni implies, when he describes teachers as those who work “on the front line” with the children/students. In rough terms, teachers are responsible for executing that which, on principal level, has been settled regarding students’ education. It is difficult to imagine that such responsibilities should not require leadership on the behalf of the teachers as well. By looking at the following definition of teacher leadership, it becomes clear that it is, in fact, important to any teacher role:

Teacher leadership is behaviour that facilitates principled pedagogical action toward whole-school success. It derives from the distinct power of teaching to shape meaning for children, youths and adults. It contributes to enhanced quality of community life in the long term. (Andrews & Crowther, 2002: 154).

As seen in section 2.1, leadership has traditionally been somewhat associated with authoritative control. If this perception has lingered, so as to charge the notion of leadership unjustified negative connotations, this may well be one out of several reasons as to why the subject of teachers as leaders has not enjoyed the intense discussion that it merits. For, it is not desirable to relate someone who works in direct contact with children and adolescents to leadership that evokes authoritarian associations. This is where pedagogical leadership becomes an important term in relation to the teacher role. Such leadership is not selfish, in the sense that it is not concerned with generating financial profit or satisfying a leader’s own personal interests; it is the kind of leadership that focuses on helping individuals grow and develop their academic capital through education. For this reason, teacher leadership should be acknowledged as a crucial form of pedagogical leadership, and also as central in educational literary discussions.
2.3 Teacher Leadership and Student Academic Performance

It was mentioned in the introduction that research indicates that teacher leadership indeed is a major factor that influences how students perform academically. In fact, leadership has proven to be essential to learning, group processes and the students’ working environment (Wikberg, 1998: 22). Already in ancient China, it was claimed in the literary work of The Art of War that “even the most brilliant strategy requires effective leadership to be successful” (Gill, 2006: 12). Likewise, Crowther et al. endorse the statement that “[t]eacher leadership is vital to the improvement of student achievement” (2009: 37).

Although the value of principal leadership is not to be underestimated, it can be understood from the previous sections that their work focuses more on “leading through progressing tasks” and less on teaching - their impact on student learning is therefore secondary. Instead, the teacher has primary responsibility for cultivating student learning (MacNeill et al, 2003: 9). The American Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), even go as far as to claim that “[n]o single principle...is more valid or durable than the maxim that student learning depends first, last, and always on the quality of the teachers” (2001: 1).

Already in ancient Greece, Socrates suggested that successful leadership is context based (Gill, 2006: 2). Therefore, it is not easy to account precisely for how teacher leadership influences student outcomes positively. Nonetheless, there are some noteworthy aspects of how students benefit from it. Crowther et al. (2009) list what teacher leader tasks entail, and these include matters that concern encouraging a positive development in the students (see appendix 1 for complete list). This is done through education, for instance, by being attentive to students’ various needs and interests; by encouraging them to cultivate self-respect, confidence and responsibility and by clearly handling the equity, fairness and justice matters that arise. This means that the teacher holds a complex leader role that necessitates mastering both pedagogical and social skills. Precisely this combination of skills is said to be that which makes it possible to be an influence of the degree of commitment that students feel towards their schooling (3-4).

Students can also benefit from a more indirect type of teacher leadership, which is practiced outside of the four walls of a classroom. This means that, for instance, when teachers take on responsibilities and engage in work that extends beyond the classroom - they promote general school improvement. Ultimately, this has positive effects on the
teaching and learning of students throughout the whole school (ibid). *Parallel leadership* is the term that suggests that, because teachers are essential complements to principals; their leadership is to be understood as equally important and indispensable to overall school success (Andrews & Crowther, 2002: 153). Likewise, Australian research on schools that are successful in maintaining high levels of student achievement shows that these schools share a common factor, namely, that “leadership functions and responsibilities are distributed, with teachers exercising pedagogical leadership and principals exercising strategic leadership” (ibid). This conclusion supports the idea that good principal leadership alone is not enough to benefit the level of student outcomes. Rather, parallel leadership will augment the total amount of school leadership, and this is found to correlate with the levels of student academic performance (ibid).

Teachers who are aware of the leadership that follows their role can thus actively support and empower students, in- and outside of the classroom, so as to help them to acquire knowledge and to progress in their academic development. To actively engage in creating the environment that will benefit students learning processes and to provide the structure that can help them to maintain their focus on their individual endeavours is part of how teachers can guide their students right (Gill, 2006: 10). Consequently, teacher leadership is important to student academic performance in order to sustain and lead the students during their schooling.
3 Methods of Data Collection

The teacher interviews that form the basis for the coming analysis serve as a means of studying the ways in which a few teachers experience and perceive one and the same phenomenon. In this case, that is if they feel that there is any leadership included in their professional role and if so, how they describe that it is part of their daily work. The idea is to portray their accounts to acquire more insight into similarities and/or variations in the accounts. This can, hopefully, provide a fuller image of what the teacher role entails according to these specific teachers.

3.1 Participants

The five interviewees were selected based upon only two criteria: first, they had to currently be working as high-school teachers. Second, they were not to have the relationship to me that in any way made them depend on me privately or professionally, as this could be an inhibiting factor to them during the interviews. Consequently, the participants were people with whom I have no work-related or private relationship at present. The reason for having only these criteria is because their narrations are not intended to engender generally applicable data; rather, they are meant to serve as a complement to literary theory. As mentioned earlier, these teachers provide a unique perspective on school-based leadership that is not found in literature on leadership theory alone.

3.1.1 Ethical Considerations

Each participant received an introductory letter upon agreeing to the interview, which stated who I was and the purpose of the interviews. It also informed them that I would make voice-recordings of the interviews, but that they would be guaranteed anonymity and that the material from the interviews would be made confidential (with the exception of my tutor’s reserved right to access the material). The purpose of this was to follow the
principal of attaining the interviewees’ informed consent, which means giving them time to read, consider and agree to the information pertinent to their participation in the interviews (Bell, 2005: 45).

There were some ethical aspects concerning this: first, anonymity as a notion needed to be clearly defined, in order to avoid the risk that the interviewee had a different idea of what that entailed. Second, the materials from the interviews (taped recordings and transcriptions) were guaranteed confidentiality and for the same reason, the meaning of this also needed to be clearly defined in the letter. Prior to starting each interview, the participant was asked to sign a consent form (see appendix 2). This form repeated the purpose of the interview and the definitions of anonymity and confidentiality, as previously stated in the introductory letter. By giving their consent, they confirmed that they understood that they agreed to perform the interview based upon these specific premises. Moreover, it also ensured them their anonymity and that the material would remain confidential, as it meant that these agreed upon conditions could not be altered by me after the interviews had been made.

3.2 Conducting the Interviews

The data was gathered by means of qualitative interviews that had a low degree of structure and standardization. The main focus of the interviews was on their experiences and what was central to them, concerning their work as teachers. The participants therefore needed to have the possibility to speak freely and to say what came into mind, hence the lower degree of standardization. Nonetheless, the purpose of the interviews required a certain degree of focus around the topic of teacher leadership. In practice, this meant that I had a number of questions to ask (see appendix 3). These questions were formulated in the attempt not to be: too long, negative, double, starting with why, leading or presupposing (Patel & Davidson, 2003: 74). However, question number six “do you view your role as a teacher as a leadership role?” was necessary to pose, had the interviewee not already mentioned leadership themself, so as not to finish the interview without having touched upon the subject at all. There was no initial idea behind the formulating of the questions, as this was done during the early stages of this study. They were simply questions that felt pertinent to the interviews as such, as they focus on the
interviewees’ reflections upon their teacher role and leadership. Moreover, the order in which they were posed was not fixed. As the interviewees were given the possibility to associate freely when responding to a question, the sequence became highly context bound. For this reason, the low degree of structure of the interview was deemed necessary (Patel & Davidson, 2003:78).

The five interviews were conducted at each participant’s work place (four different schools) and in the privacy of rooms where there was no risk of being distracted, disturbed or refrained in the conversation due to the presence of others. Prior to commencing the tape-recording, the consent form was handed out for the participant to sign (they had been informed about this procedure beforehand). Sometimes, it seemed difficult for some to verbalize their thoughts and ideas. However, most of them seemed to find it enjoyable to be conversing about their job. They all candidly shared their experiences, despite the fact that switching on the tape recorder tended to somewhat slightly alter their voices and even the posture of their bodies (including myself actually). Nonetheless, the response was positive and they all communicated that they hoped that their accounts would be able to contribute to the study.

3.3 Validity and Reliability

To achieve the purpose of the interviews as mentioned above, the gathered data is analysed by referring to the interviewees’ various accounts and with the aim to convey these voices as clearly as possible.

Because of the nature of qualitative interviews, it is possible to ask the same participants the same questions again and find that there may be discrepancies in the responses from time to time. Therefore, the question of reliability is not clear cut. Here, the reliability lies in the uniqueness of each interview, which will show in the variety of replies that the interviewees provide to each question posed (Patel & Davidson, 2003: 103).
4 Statement of Results

The interviews will be presented individually, to facilitate the reading and interpretation of each of them. The presentations are based upon the replies to the interviewing questions. However, each interview is unique, and so is therefore also the structure of each of the accounts. To ensure that the vow of anonymity is held, each interviewee will receive an alias and is from hereon referred to as either teacher A, B, C, D or E. In addition, their genders have also been manipulated with. Therefore, some descriptions may correspond to the interviewee’s actual gender, while others do not. For the same reason, it will only be stated if they have been working as a teacher for either more than ten years or less than so. The duration of their teaching career is trivial information and not essential to the analysis, however, it allows the reader to get a little closer to each participant despite their anonymity.

After listening to each interview very attentively several times, the answers to the questions, along with other narrations of interest here, were documented on the same sheets of paper as found in appendix 3. These narrations were then put into coherent accounts. Found in the following paragraphs is thus portrayals of the interviewees’ accounts, combined with direct quotations (in the following sections, all text in bold face is part of a quote) from their various accounts (carefully translated from Swedish to English by me). This has been done with the aim of making them easy to read. The inserts found in some of the quotations, made within square brackets that are not written in bold face, have been added afterwards to help to clarify meaning.

Teacher A

A has been a teacher for more than ten years. In a few words, A describes himself as a capable communicator, attentive to student voices, just and knowledgeable. He perceives the core essence of his professional role to be the teacher-student relationship and also the fact that it is important to be sensitive to the students’ voices and to adapt one’s teaching accordingly. Moreover, he feels that being a teacher sometimes necessitates maintaining a rather strict and firm approach towards students and to be clear about what is expected
of them. A asserts that, to simply ignore students who lack in motivation means giving up on them. He says that it in such situations is crucial that he as a teacher does not renounce his leader role …for, it is in fact a sort of leadership. I think that, by ignoring students who are not doing what they are supposed to, or who are messing about, or whatever they may be doing, you, as a teacher, are giving up. However, it varies; in some groups you need to be very pedagogical and present things so that they are clear to everyone; in other groups it is about being clear and say that ‘these are the assignments that you are to do and when you have finished them, you may go’…In other groups it is about getting them to sit down and be quiet and try to learn something. So, it varies, and that is somewhat what makes it [the job] both though and fun. To manage this A feels that as a teacher you need to be attentive to what students you are working with; you need to know a little bit who they are and I must be prepared to adapt, as a teacher - I need to be the teacher that the particular situation requires. When asked the question “do you view your professional role as a leader role?” A replies: yes, you could say that, because I do lead the students’ work. I am the one making sure that there is something to do and I decide what that is. [...] I have decided beforehand what we will be doing and I am the one leading that work, so I absolutely think that you can say that teachers have a leader role. [...] I plan my work on my own, I have no superior telling me to make lesson plans for the coming day and that they should look like this and like that – I am my own supervisor. In a more direct relationship to the students, the leadership becomes apparent in the recurring need for A to take initiatives and decisions, and that is also something a leader does, he says. He describes the development in his leadership as a, nowadays, more refined ability to be attentive to the students and their needs compared to when first starting to work as a teacher.

A stresses the importance of good teacher – student and student - student relationships, when it comes to influencing student academic performance positively. When a group functions, it is mostly due to functioning relationships. If you have a good relationship to the students…then, they will listen to you. [...] If you can obtain a personal relationship to your students, the teaching and learning will mostly work too. They will listen because they trust you and know who you are; they know what you represent. ...[I]f they do not know what kind of a person you are, they feel more easily that: ‘this does not concern me, I do not care the least about this, why do I need to learn this?’. [...] The better the
relationships to the students are, the better the lessons will be, and that is my experience from my years as a teacher.

When students lack in motivation, A feels that it is important to maintain a good relationship to these students, to talk to them about their situation and not give up on them – *I think that, not to acknowledge the students is one of the worst things you can do…the risk is…that they will retain a negative attitude to the subject. It is never an option to just ignore it. Something has to be done and I feel that that is your responsibility as a teacher. This is where the leadership becomes quite obvious– you need to show that you are in charge… you need to show that it is not ok to do nothing.*

When excluding all leadership features from the teacher role, A does not feel that there is much left than possible administrative tasks provided from a school management level.

**Teacher B**

Teacher B has been working as teacher for a little less than ten years. With a few single adjectives, she describes herself as a teacher who is just, firm and giving. The inspirational role is describes by her as the most important aspect of the teacher role; *it is something inevitable,* B says. The teaching profession is described as complex, because of its predominantly relationship-based nature. She also mentions the importance of the teacher as a motivating and encouraging factor: *even if they [the students] are the ones who have to do the reading and studying, the way in which they do so is because of me.* [*…* The teacher is very important for motivating the search for knowledge…and maybe even so when working to create a favourable working environment in the classroom.]

However, she asserts that there are indeed several other aspects that influence student achievement.

It is central to B to encourage the students to study and to make them see that it, mostly, affects their outcomes positively. She means that, when the students are lacking in motivation *it is my responsibility, when a student has done what is in her or his power. If they have consulted all the material, and me as tutor, and still do not understand, it is my job to explain to them. However, it is also partly the student’s responsibility.* Regarding motivating them study-wise, B says that she has acquired a more refined ability to read the students and to adjust accordingly since first starting to teach. This
enables her to seize moments that can be pivotal to the direction of her students’ motivation. She also says that the group constellation is central. I have to present things differently. In some groups where everyone is on the same level when it comes to the will to learn, I can have a more traditionally, theoretic lesson, whereas, if I am to go over the same thing in a different group where there is less will to learn, I will give it a little twist to try to get them interested. Moreover, [my] perception of a successful class is something I find that I have in the groups where we have established good relationships. It does not have to be on an individual level…it is something collective that clicks.

B feels that a teacher leader role is evident in the stages of planning lessons. Besides that, I feel that the traditional leadership of leading a group or leading a working process - the students do that so much on their own. Nonetheless, other perspectives are unveiled: Perhaps amongst the first-year students who need to be disciplined and concentrate and to understand the importance of studying, for instance Italian, requires leadership on my behalf. […] There is leadership that concerns the subject and leadership that concerns establishing relationships – I do play a part there. I practice leadership concerning both [student] achievement and getting them to function as a group. I am there to lay the foundations for a path that will lead them [the students] right, but then it is up to them. As far as principals are concerned, their job is to make sure that we [the staff] are doing well as a team and that is indeed my task when it comes to the students. So, my leadership is more important socially, than what it is with regards to the academic aspects, for the academic aspects are the students’ own responsibility. […] Of course, they constantly need to receive the input that tells them to get back to work, to focus on the studies, to always become better. The question is if that is leadership, academically speaking? Leadership feels like…yes, so it is indeed – it is coaching. I am constantly pushing them and in my presence they actually do their work.

When excluding all leadership features from her teacher role, B feels that there are mostly administrative tasks left such as, for instance, supplying students with school material.
Teacher C

Teacher C has been working as a teacher for less than ten years. In a couple of words, C describes himself as a serious and committed teacher. He feels that his professional role is characterised by the great responsibility that teachers take on, which lies in the ability to actually have an influence on a large number of students. The job is also described as necessitating a great deal of clarity in the communication with the students, so that they understand what is required of them and the purpose of what they are doing. C would describe his teacher role as a leader role and he indicates that there are various ways in which he as a teacher can work with leadership: it is, after all, about the fact that I, as a teacher, am in charge in the classroom in the sense that...I wish to enable reflection somehow and I do have the overall responsibility of what happens in the classroom, so, yes, leadership – I would indeed describe it as being that. [...] I think that, as a teacher you automatically become some kind of leader and the students mostly expect that too. If the group gets out of control and turbulent, they may feel that 'you need to take charge here'. But that is also a way in which I let them practice their leadership. They need to be able to handle minor groups of four and to instruct, or in a simple way lead a simple warm up program and so forth. However, the core of his leadership lies in communicating with clarity and in trying to find the right motivation for the students and …that requires that you acknowledge everyone in some way. The leadership is therefore described as context based; C says that I think that with different students, you need different leadership roles. With some, it is fine to say 'get started on this' and then there are others who may question the purpose more and they need you to motivate them in a different way. [...] You have to act differently in different situations - according to the situation that arises. Sometimes this requires that I be more authoritarian, for instance, in a situation where two students are on the verge of having a conflict, and then in some situations I can be a democratic leader and allow them [the students] to decide and outline their own lesson. The way in which a student is met and situations are handled, he says, can entail either positive or negative consequences for the student’s outcomes. Be it a student that has forgotten his or her sneakers or that did not bring their maths book...again, you need to take into consideration who that person is. Relationships are here described as significant when successfully dealing with a situation.
When excluding all leadership features from C’s teacher role, he feels that what is left is the role as a member of the team of fellow teachers, to support them, come with ideas and suggestions at their meetings. Planning interesting lessons is another task mentioned. Social issues and the teacher-parent relationship are also brought up, but I think that also entails a type of leadership. The fact that the parents see that I am a committed teacher also proves that I am a leader that they, and their sons and daughters can rely on.

Teacher D

D has been working as a teacher for less than ten years and with a few words she describes herself as someone who is structured, attentive to student voices and who communicates with clarity. Besides motivating students in their studies, she feels that her professional role entails juggling several tasks simultaneously: you are a pedagogue, of course, as you are there to teach your subjects. However, at the same time if feels like you are also a mother and a psychologist and guidance counsellor and all sorts of things. As a teacher, it is important for D to show enthusiasm, in order to inspire and motivate the students: To show, yourself, that it is interesting...why it can be useful and important to learn – you just have to convey this to the students. To vary the teaching methods as much as possible is also a way of trying to appeal to their motivation and as a teacher; she needs to make such pedagogical and didactic decisions. On Monday afternoons I teach Spanish, step four [...] there, you really have to try to vary. [...] The other lesson, on Wednesdays, is in the morning and there you may have to go over the more advanced things, perhaps a grammar run-through and the things that really require that they are concentrated. On Mondays you could perhaps practice speaking or listen to songs or so.

D also perceives her role as a teacher to include leadership. It is a lot about the fact that students are to seek information on their own. At the same time, you are very limited from having a course curriculum that states that they need to know this and that. In many cases, they are unfortunately not mature enough to make decisions themselves, so you have to guide them right. It sounds terrible, as if I decide everything, but you do need to lead them right. Furthermore, I will give them grades, so you are superior in the sense that you will give them grades. So, I am indeed a leader, but it is hard to say just how.
D’s own type of leadership is, however, described by her as fairly controlling, in the sense that she needs to make plenty of decisions on the students’ behalf: You would wish that it was more their responsibility to come med and ask for information and that I would help them to seek the answers. Now, it is more like ‘this is what we will be working with, this is what we will be doing’. Further, she describes leadership as demanding focus on what she is doing as a teacher, even though having so many tasks to juggle all at once. You need to have the ability to be adaptable and to change things, I am thinking about in the classroom...if you get students working and notice that ‘this is not going so well’ [...] then you have to take command and really make decisions and lead. Also, when students have diverging wills about things, you need to be the one who takes control, so that the situation generates the best pedagogical value possible at the end. This is, she asserts, because the purpose of any task a teacher performs, it is done to ultimately help benefit the students’ schooling. When they [the students] finish, they should feel that they have done the best they could and that they have acquired the most knowledge possible during their time in school.

When excluding all leadership features from the teacher role, D feels that planning lessons is one task left to do, but she then recognises that there can be leadership in that too. Planning lessons is not about pedagogical leadership...or in a way it could be, because I do decide what my classes will contain and that leads to me being a leader there. So besides that, D says that there is much administrative work left to do: just to check the e-mails every day takes a whole hour.

Teacher E

E has been working as a teacher for more than ten years. He describes himself as a teacher who is structured, permissive and humoristic and who encourages his students to learn more. Regarding the teacher role, E says that my job is to ensure that my students are given the chance to develop certain capacities and qualities within the fields of study and to try to find the ways leading there. He perceives leadership to be part of his teacher role. I am not so sure that my students perceive of me as a leader [...] they would say ‘E is too confused’. Although, he does take charge of situations when needed: I can show that I take control of a situation and that, ultimately, I am the one in charge. It has to be
like that; even if I let the students be part of the decision making, I am the one who brings it up. [...] I am the one who starts it and I am the one who, eventually, brings it to an end. I am there as a tutor when they need me, even if they are working on their own. I do tell them this and I am clear about it. E makes it is clear that by term leader, he does not refer to a fundamental authority figure. Nonetheless, you sometimes do need to display some sort of authority as a teacher: I think that I need to show it and that they need to know it, but it does not necessarily fill the entire air of the classroom.

The leader role can have varying influence on groups of students, according to E. He thus needs to adjust according to each context. Varying group constellations require varying teaching methods and the foundation for any classroom situation therefore depends much on the teacher-student interaction. It is about giving and taking – it is not just about you [as a teacher]. What he feels helps to form a conducive learning environment is to vary the teaching methods, because [i]t varies; some prefer one way [of working], others prefer a different one and for some, nothing seems to be of preference and then I don not know what to else do. E expresses uncertainty to whether having a personal relationship to the student is a factor that will impact student outcomes positively. However, they are of importance to him – it is more inspiring to me if I feel that there is a personal contact as well. Nonetheless, he does refer to relationships as a help when trying to motivate learning and says: I somehow believe that, if there is a sense of humour and warmth, it is also possible to find something even slightly enjoyable for a little while… That might be my only trick. He would not say that his own leadership has altered much since first starting to teach: I had more energy back then...but my attitude towards the people that I meet in a classroom is the same.

When excluding all leadership features from E’s teacher role, he feels that the tasks that are left are such as: planning and correcting and absence reporting...there is a lot of e-mailing, updating on information. It can be staff meetings of teachers of the same subject (but it is not too often, although it happens), we have staff meetings with teachers of the same team once a week. It is mostly about planning and correcting. And parent contact...
5 Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the interviews is based upon looking for how pedagogical teacher leadership is evident in the participants’ narrations of their everyday work as teachers. They are all explicit about the belief that there is leadership involved in their roles as teachers. Nonetheless, there are both similarities and variations in their respective accounts of how this is evident and what it entails to be a teacher leader.

As seen in 2.1.1, leadership meets the four criteria of being “critical, transformative, educative and ethical”. These will now serve to identify if the participants actually do practice such leadership. Firstly, by participating in an interview about leadership, they show that they are willing to analyse their own role and to expose themselves to potential criticism, as they had no insight into the interviewing questions that would be posed. This meets the first leadership criterion of allowing for critical discussions of the leadership role. It was also stated in 2.1.1 that “leadership without change is management of the status quo”. Here, there is a variety of the ways in which this is accounted for. A means that it is not an option to give up on a student who finds it hard to become motivated in his or her studies and that focusing on good relationships is a way that he feels works to help them in their pursuits for knowledge. B describes that she lays the appropriate foundation for the students, so that they then will be able to search for knowledge more independently. C says that his core responsibility regarding the students is to enable new thoughts and ideas to be born within them. D says that her job as a teacher ultimately is about the students acquiring knowledge. Lastly, E says that his job is to make sure that the students develop within the fields of his subjects. What these various accounts have in common is, that they depict how they all conduct their work with them aim that their students will develop through the acquisition of knowledge.

The educative criterion entails the ability to visualise changes needed to accomplish development. This can be found within the context based leadership, the essence of which is about adjusting according to what each situation requires. A says that I must be prepared to adapt, as a teacher - I need to be the teacher that the particular situation requires. What he is expressing is the need for context based teaching. The other teachers also unanimously recognise this to be necessary. The fourth criterion entails the leader’s
focus on what is in the best interest of those led. A means that it is his responsibility to help his students to find the right motivation that will make them want to learn more. B says that she has an inspirational role in her students search for knowledge and C, D and E refer to their roles as motivational roles. Thus, it can be claimed that they all conduct their work with the best interest of their students in mind. These accounts show that, with the support of leadership literature, it is fair to say that they, as teachers, do practice pedagogical leadership.

The participants’ accounts all circle around relationships as they offer examples of how they interact with their students on a daily basis to help them to grow and develop their academic skills. Nonetheless, this does not exclude discrepancies in how the teachers perceive that they work with such leadership in practice. To A, his leader role is evident in the stages of planning the classes and also in the need for him to be the initiative taker and decision maker in relation to his students. He points out that it is his duty to focus on how to be a helping hand to students that experience some sort of hindrance in their academic development. He perceives his role to be about cultivating functioning relationships and, furthermore, is also crucial that he be a leader who can take control of situations. B says that the students at her school are expected to take on a great deal of responsibility for their own learning themselves. However, her leader role is apparent to her when planning classes. She also feels that the leader role shows as she needs to coach her students and help to maintain their discipline. She perceives her leadership to be important to student learning, as it provides them with the structure necessary as they eventually learn to take on more responsibility on their own.

C is explicit when expressing that his leader role is centred on dealing with relationships and that he, as a leader, has the responsibility to motivate his students, so as to help them to develop further through the acquisition of new knowledge. He perceives cultivating good relationships to be central to his job as a leader. This will enable a more successful way of helping students who find themselves in troublesome situations. Sometimes, it requires that he be more controlling, although he does challenge his students’ development by occasionally giving them some of that control. Nevertheless, he feels that he is still the one who is ultimately in charge of his students. The leadership that D describes is one that requires that she functions as a guide in her students’ search for knowledge and as their leader she feels that she is required to take a fair amount of control. She is not describing authoritarian control, but she feels that the students often
need her to lead them right. Sometimes she finds herself giving students guidance as if she were their mother, guidance counsellor or even their psychologist. In her opinion, the job necessitates the ability to handle several things simultaneously and this also entails taking on several other roles except for the role as pedagogical leader. At the same time being a motivational source to her students, demands that she is capable of focusing on what needs to be done in each unique situation. E is not sure that his leadership is evident to his students at all times, but nonetheless, he perceives himself as a leader. It is his responsibility to motivate his students and to ensure that they are given the chance to develop certain skills and qualities within his subject domain. He means that, even if the students are working on their own and he is there as a tutor, he still has the overall responsibility for what is being done in the classroom. He is the one to starts it and he is also the one who puts an end to it. Despite allowing his students to occasionally take part in decision makings, he knows when and how to show who is ultimately in charge. This requires that he is able to communicate clearly with his students. When analysing the five accounts above against a background of leadership versus management-related duties, it is fair to claim that their leader roles are obviously leadership-oriented. They are “leading through relationships and people” (Robinson, 2007:8). In comparison to principal tasks, it becomes clear that the latter practices the type of pedagogic leadership that appears to be more management oriented than that of teachers.

With one exception, a surprising coherency was found in the answers to question number eight: “what aspects of your work are left if removing all leadership matters?” Here, B and D feel that administrative tasks are left such as, for instance, to supply students with material and they does not seem to see such work as part of their leader functions. C and E express the same perception, although somewhat more precisely. They feel that they then also need serve as members of the school’s team of fellow teachers, plan lessons, handle social matters involving students and partake in meetings with the schools’ team of colleagues. E adds further administrative duties such as correcting student work, e-mailing and reporting student absence. This means that those tasks are not perceived as related to their roles as leaders. A feels that there is not much left except possibly various administrative tasks assigned from the school management, which means that she sees the other administrative tasks that she has as included in her duties as a leader.
6 Conclusion

The reason for discussing leadership and education has been to acquire deeper knowledge and understanding of factors that can help students to develop their individual academic skills during their time in school. It is humbling to consider how the teachers in the interviews perceive that the core of the leadership that lies embedded in their professional roles entails taking responsibility for that process - their students’ acquisition of knowledge. The teachers’ individual perceptions of the ways in which they provide guidance vary, as do the contexts within which each of them works. For most of them, the leader role is highly connected to working in direct contact with their students. One of them describes the leadership to permeate most parts of her daily tasks, including that which takes place outside of the classroom. The teachers in this study provide a sneak peek into a world that is worthy of attention and study, as such accounts open up for the exchange of practical experiences and insights from the teaching profession.

To emphasize the significance of teachers as pedagogical leaders of students does in no way minimize the value of the school principal leader role. However, it means ascribing teachers the status that they are entitled as leaders of the pedagogical and, to some extent also, the social work that takes place every day in schools. It also means highlighting the need to assess how to distribute the leader roles within schools, through parallel leadership, so as to augment the total amount of leadership which will consequently affect student academic performance positively.

By being sources of inspiration, motivation and creative thinking and by working on building positive and functioning relationships in the school environment, teachers lead their students learning processes on a daily basis. Such pedagogical leadership can be depicted in many ways and has proven hard to describe and to define precisely. Nevertheless, it deserves to be discussed further, and in greater depth, within educational literature, so as not to overlook any factor that can be a positive influence on student academic performance.
7 References


Electronic references:


Journals:


Appendix 1

**Teacher leaders…**

*Convey convictions about a better world by*
- articulating a positive future for all students
- contributing to an image of teaching as a profession that makes a difference

*Facilitate communities of learning by*
- encouraging a shared, schoolwide approach to core pedagogical processes
- approaching professional learning as consciousness-raising about complex issues
- synthesizing new ideas out of colleagues’ professional discourse and reflective activities

*Strive for pedagogical excellence by*
- showing genuine interest in students’ needs and well-being
- continuously developing and refining personal teaching gifts and talents
- seeking deep understanding of significant pedagogical practices

*Confront barriers in the school’s culture and structures by*
- standing up for children, especially disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups
- working with administrators to find solutions to issues of equity, fairness and justice
- encouraging student “voice” in ways that are sensitive to students’ developmental stages and circumstances

*Translate ideas into sustainable systems of action by*
- working with the principal, administrator, and other teachers to manage projects that heighten alignment between the school’s vision, values pedagogical practices, and professional learning activities
- building alliances and nurturing external networks of support

*Nurture a culture of success by*
- acting on opportunities to emphasize accomplishments and high expectations
- encouraging collective responsibility in addressing schoolwide challenges
- encouraging self-respect and confidence in students’ communities
Mitt namn är Alexandra Taawo och jag läser sista terminen på lärarprogrammet vid Malmö Högskola, med sikte på att bli gymnasielärare i engelska och italienska. Jag har nyligen påbörjat mitt examensarbete om skola och ledarskap.

**Syfte:** Arbetet ämnar belysa den betydelse som lärarledarskapet har visat sig ha för elevers studieframgång. Litteraturen kring ledarskap och skola relaterar dock oftast enbart till rektors betydelse som ledare. Därför hamnar lärares pedagogiska ledarskap tyvärr i skymundan. Intervjuerna syftar därför till att skildra hur lärares dagliga arbete präglas av ledarskap.

**Varför:** Att åskådliggöra vikten av ledarskap inom läraryrket utgör, enligt min mening, ett betydelsefullt inslag i den samtida politiska debatten kring att höja läraryrkets status.

**Anonymitet:** Ditt namn, arbetsplats/skola och stad kommer att av-identifieras. Det kan dock vara av intresse för analysen att återge vilka ämnen du undervisar i.

**Konfidentialitet:** Intervjuerna bandas, men endast min handledare (Anna Henningsson-Yuosif) på Malmö Högskola kommer ha rätt att ta del av det bandade intervju materialet och transkriptionen. Uppsatsen kommer att publiceras i Malmö Högskolas publiceringsdatabas (MUEP).

**Tid:** Ca 45-60 minuter.

Jag ger härmed samtycke till intervjun, utifrån ovan beskrivna förutsättningar.
Appendix 3

Interviewing questions

1. How long have you been working as a teacher and what subjects do you teach?

2. How would you describe yourself as a pedagogue, using three-four words?

3. How would you describe your professional role – what are its characteristics?

4. What do you feel works when students need to become motivated in their studies?

5. In your opinion, what aspects of your work have effect on students’ academic performance?

6. Do you view your role as a teacher as a leadership role?

7. How would you describe leadership to be part of your daily work?

8. What aspects of your work are left if removing all leadership matters?
9. Hur tycker du att ditt ledarskap påverkar din klass/grupp?

   How do you feel that your leadership affects your class/group?

10. Vilka effekter medför ledarskapet för ditt vardagliga arbete?

    What are the effects of your leadership on your everyday work?

11. Har ditt ledarskap förändrats sedan du började som lärare – (om ja), kan du beskriva hur?

    Has your leadership altered since you first started teaching – (if yes), could you describe in what way?

12. Vilka förändrings/utvecklingsbehov upplever du att det finns på din arbetsplats/skola, i arbetet med ledarskap?

    What is your opinion on any possible needs for change/development in the work with leadership matters at your work place/school?

13 Finns det något som du skulle vilja tillägga som inte har tagits upp under intervjun?

    Is there anything that you would like to add, that has not been brought up during this interview?