



Nordic Superintendent Leadership Cross-National Comparisons

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Project Rational

- ◆ Prior research shows significant context-bound variation in superintendent leadership
- ◆ *“The superintendency is so very different from district to district that making generalizations is hazardous. .. Often they are more unlike than like each other”* (Glass et al., 2000)
- ◆ We ask how superintendents’ leadership may be expressed given the varying national contexts of the Nordic countries
- ◆ Is there a common “Nordic” superintendent role, and what characterizes its properties?
- ◆ Comparable superintendent surveys undertaken in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark in 2009

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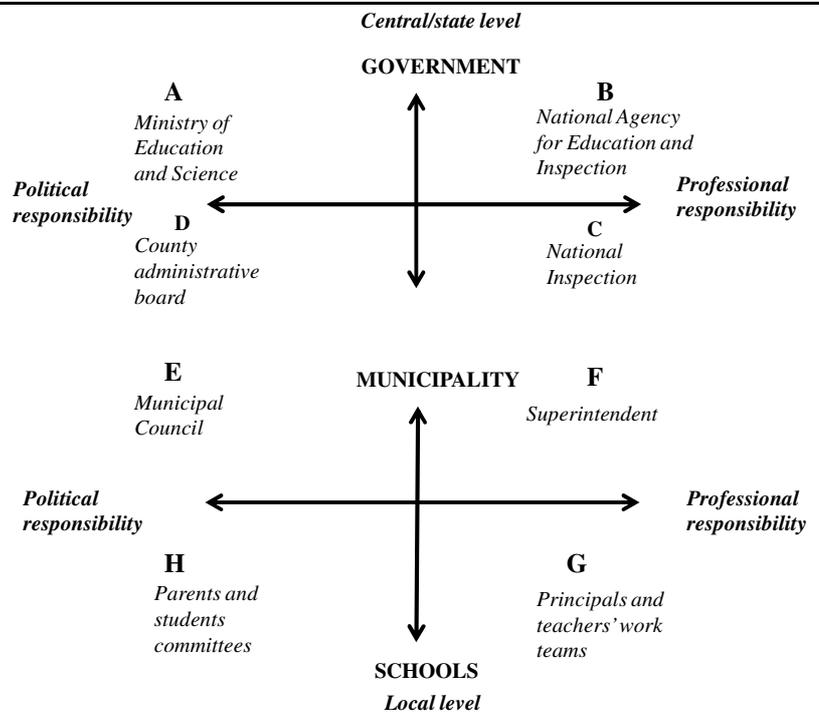


School Districts and Superintendents

- ◆ Municipalities – the “entrepreneurial level” of the Nordic welfare states: Daycare, schooling, elderly care and coordination of healthcare services
 - ◆ Norway: 430
 - ◆ Finland: 345
 - ◆ Sweden: 290
 - ◆ Denmark: 96
- ◆ “The school superintendent is the holder of a position in the municipality’s administrative hierarchy between the chief executive officer (CEO) of the whole municipality and the school principals” (Johansson et al, forthcoming)
- ◆ Directly subordinate to a political committee or board
- ◆ Responsible for education within the entire municipality, and head of the school principals



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The governance system in the Nordic countries

- ◆ A “mix mode” of local autonomy and indirect control and steering from the state’s side
- ① A general move to decentralization of powers and authorities from the state to the municipalities
 - ◆ and in many cases further on to school level
- ② A massive growth of more subtle and indirect state-based steering instruments (except Finland)
 - ◆ Evaluation, inspection, coupling of resource allocation to assessments, public performance data
- ③ This shift contextualizes superintendent leadership in the “crossfire” between state accountability and quality control versus local government priorities
 - ◆ Sweden, Denmark & Norway

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Superintendents’ career path and knowledge basis

- ◆ Professional knowledge basis and work experience portrays a typical “educationalist”
- ◆ Career path is entirely bound to the school sector, - in many cases within the same municipality
- ◆ From teacher – to school principal – and then municipal (district) superintendent
- ◆ Interesting observation on the backdrop of two decades of NPM rhetoric of “generalist” management

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Ranked tasks and responsibilities

- ◆ Ranked tasks (expected, prioritized and judged as interesting)
 - ◆ Budgeting and financial management
 - ◆ Planning and goal setting
 - ◆ Facilitating school development in general
 - ◆ Quality assurance (Denmark)
 - ◆ Linking policy goals to school development
 - ◆ Pedagogical leadership
 - ◆ Knowledge management
 - ◆ Change management
- ◆ External oriented tasks, such as evaluation of student achievements, external collaboration and community relationships are systematic low-scores

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Leadership for Learning Issues



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Preferred areas in relation to school principals

- ▶ Coaching – to strengthen and support principals (Sweden)
- ▶ Agenda setting and discussion of goals, quality and school results (Finland & Sweden)
- ▶ Working on the quality report and dialogue with school leaders along this line (Denmark)
- ▶ School development in general (Sweden & Denmark)
- ▶ Budget issues - both in purpose of control and as a set of enabling conditions (Finland, Norway & Sweden)



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Preferred areas in relation to school principals

- ▶ Clarification of local policies and school vision (Finland & Norway)
- ▶ Conveying high expectations for staff and students (Norway)
- ▶ Supporting school principals individually (Norway)
- ▶ Promoting principals' professional development (Finland)
- ▶ Making municipal policies for schools and giving advice to the political board (Denmark)



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Relationships to the learners

- ▶ Enhancing issues of democracy, values and pupil influence (Sweden)
- ▶ Work active with special matters for the learners and fighting marginalization (Sweden & Finland)
- ▶ Give a lot of value to the parents' and students' opinions and see their participation in developing educational services as important (Finland)
- ▶ Helping parents with their problems with their children (Finland)
- ▶ Ensuring school safety (Finland)



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Future research agendas



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Promising paths for further research

- ❶ The relationship between the municipal superintendents and their respective school principals
 - ▶ School principal questionnaire 2010 (Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway)
 - ▶ Interview-based school principal study 2011 (Finland)
- ❷ Follow-up interviews of the superintendent study in 2009 for in-depth investigation of themes exposed (Finland, Sweden and Norway)
- ❸ Similar superintendent questionnaire as in 2009 in 2011 (Norway) and 2012 (Sweden)

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The first research paper will be published as:

- Johansson, O; Moos, L; Nihlfors, E; Paulsen, J.M & Risku, M: *"The Nordic superintendents' leadership roles: cross-national comparisons"*.
- In: John MacBeath & Tony Townsend (Eds.): *International Handbook on Leadership for Learning*.
- Forthcoming in 2011.

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