Professional norms in school leadership. Change efforts in implementation of education for sustainable development

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Abstract

This study identifies and analyses professional norms as a means of illuminating school cultures and how norms are distributed in the system. Of special interest is the role of school leaders and how they lead, organize and realise school development. The study research question is: What *professional norms* do school leaders highlight in change efforts? We are also interested in identifying the support mechanisms and obstacles to implementation and norm setting exhibited by school organisations. The case we used explores change processes in the implementation of education for sustainable development at three upper secondary schools in Sweden. It was conducted in three phases, starting with a questionnaire for all teachers and principals. In the second phase, each of the principals was interviewed individually. The third phase used focus groups consisting of the principals that made up the leadership groups. Our results indicate that professional norms are set when principals and teachers experience expectations from each other, from students and from policy documents. There is also a need for well-functioning communication in the organisation to set and disseminate norms. The school principal plays a crucial role in these norm setting processes. By becoming more aware of existing norms in the organisations, and how norms can be changed, this knowledge can support principals in change efforts.

Keywords: Change efforts, Education for sustainable development, Professional norms, Principals, Leadership

Introduction – purpose and background

This study identifies and analyses professional norms as a means of illuminating school cultures and how norms are distributed in the system. We have a special interest in the role of school leaders and how they lead, organise and realise school development.. The study research question is: What *professional norms* do school leaders highlight in change efforts?

We present a case that explores change processes in the implementation of education for sustainable development (ESD) in a Swedish context. We examine *why* schools want to have a special profile for sustainable development, *what* sustainable development means to them, and *how* they address these questions.

We are also interested in identifying the support mechanisms and obstacles to implementation and norm setting that the organisations exhibit.

This study is a part of a research project, the overall purpose of which is to examine the implementation of education for sustainable development. The project, supported by the Swedish Research Council (2009-2011), has followed and examined the implementation from various perspectives at three Swedish upper secondary schools. This study elaborates on the school level. The use of professional norms as a means to describe the school culture and change efforts is our contribution to the field of educational change. Another study in the research project by Öhman and Öhman (2012 a,b) examined a participatory approach and meaning-making in upper secondary school classes. They focused on what is happening in the classrooms in the teaching and learning processes.

Legal norms as a starting point

The responsibility of Swedish principals is regulated in the *Curriculum for the Non-compulsory School System Lpf 94*:

> As both pedagogical leader of the school and leader of the teachers and other staff in the school, the schoolhead has overall responsibility for making sure that the activity of the school as a whole is focused on attaining the national goals" (2.6 Responsibility of the Schoolhead, p. 18).

The legal regulation of the environmental efforts pursuant to a 1990 amendment to the Education Act (Swedish Code of Statutes 1985:1100) provides a useful point of departure: "Each and every person active in the school system shall promote respect for the intrinsic value of every human being and for our common environment" (Chapter 1, Section 2).

The term "sustainable development" was added to the *Curriculum for the Non-compulsory School System Lpf 94*, which states under *The School's Task*:

> An environmental perspective in education provides students with insights so that they can not only contribute to preventing harmful environmental effects, but also develop a personal position to major global environmental issues. Education *should* illuminate how the functions of society and our ways of living and working can best be adapted to create the conditions for sustainable development (pp. 4-5) (authors' italics).

An interesting change has taken place, though. The new Education Act (Swedish Code of Statutes 2010:800) omits the environmental amendment, and the *Curriculum for the Upper Secondary School 2011* has more stringent requirements, replacing the word *should* in the above cited sentence with *shall*.

This means that implementing education for sustainable development has become a legal norm and a national goal that education professionals are required to interpret and put into action. The link between the legal norm and the actions are the professional norms. We are interested in uncovering that link.

Organisations as cultures

We used the image of organisations as cultures (Morgan 2006; Alvesson 2002) as a theoretical approach to support our efforts to identify and analyse professional norms in the three schools examined. Cultures are generally described as development patterns of an organisation in terms of knowledge, values, rituals, ideologies, actions, laws and norms (Morgan 2006; Alvesson 2002). Hemmelgarn refers to organisational culture as the shared norms, beliefs, and behavioural expectations that drive behaviour and communicate what is valued in organisations; organisational culture is often described as the "way things are done around here" (Hemmelgarn et al. 2006). Hoy and Miskel (2008) provide a general definition of organisational culture as a "system of shared orientations that hold the unit together and give it a distinctive identity*"* (Hoy and Miskel 2008, p. 177).

In this study, the focus is on the *professional* norms that guide education for sustainable development in the schools. Professional norms are a part of the larger concept of social norms and are generated in a professional system. The professional norms of teachers are reproduced in teacher training programmes, in texts for teachers, in meetings with other teachers and so on. Norms are generated in a similar way for school principals through their training, mentoring and in discussion with other principals.

Culture as shared norms

According to Alvesson, "Culture is a tricky concept as it is easily used to cover everything and consequently nothing" (Alvesson 2002, p. 13)*.* He states that culture often refers to surface phenomena rather than exploring the meanings and ideas behind them. In this study we focus on the norms in school cultures.

The influence culture has on members of an organisation varies, and there are often several sub-cultures in an organisation. A problem with studying organisational culture and its norms is that norms and culture often are unconscious and covert (Elster 1992; Rommetveit 1955). Norms play an important role in human interaction. They reduce uncertainty about how to act in different situations, and they set standards and specify appropriate behaviour. Different

expectations are placed on different people (students, teachers and principals) in an organisation (Giddens 1989, p. 31). Norms are usually unwritten; they are affected by informal expectations and they directly influence behaviour. Norms determine, for example, the way people talk in the organisation, the way participants respond to authority, conflict or pressure and how they balance self-interest with organisational interest (Hoy and Miskel 2008 p. 78).

Our position is that the norms of a work group define a large part of the culture of the organisation and that it is important to be aware of the social and professional norms that influence the organisation. There is an intertwined relation between culture and norms as they are stated as functions of culture according to Robbins (1998) and as functions of norms according to Elster (1992), Alvesson (2002), and Baier and Svensson (2009). The conclusion is that both culture *and* norms provide standards of behaviour, create distinctions among organisations, provide the organisation with a sense of identity, enhance stability in the social system, and function as social glue that binds the organisation together. Both strong cultures (Hoy and Miskel 2008) and strong norm systems (Elster 1992) can promote or impede development and change processes.

One problem with the term "norm" is that it is used in so many different ways, both scientifically and in everyday parlance. In response, we proceeded from a line of reasoning concerning the ontology of norms and what norms are. We use the following sociology of law based definition of the concept of norms, a definition that can meet the needs of both the social and legal sciences (Hydén and Svensson 2008).

- *Norms are action instructions.* Norms are imperatives and thus direct actions, which is the essence of norms.
- *Norms are socially reproduced.* Elster describes it as follows: "For norms to be social, they must be shared by other people" (Elster 1992, p. 99). The norms that are interesting to sociology of law are the ones that occur in a social context. They have social connections, social impacts and are communicated in a social community (Wickenberg 1999). The direction for action must then be communicated and disseminated in a social community to live up to this essential attribute. In our case, the professional norms are reproduced in the school context.
- *Norms represent the individual's perception of the expectations surrounding his or her own behaviour.* "Social norms do co-ordinate expectations" (Elster 1992, p. 97), and this is a widespread sociological starting point, also expressed as a social pressure on individuals (Durkheim 1895; Rommetveit 1955).

According to the sociologist Therborn, we may follow a norm out of our *identification* with its source and its values (Therborn 2002, p. 869). Ellickson uses the term "change agents" for the people who first transmit new norms (Hechter and Opp 2001, p. 35). Bringing about change at schools so that new norms are set requires enthusiasts, movers or change agents who challenge old norms, who want to stake out new paths and establish new norms. What is

the role that principals play in building norm supporting structures? Can principals also serve as change agents with whom others can identify so that new norms are established?

Leadership in change efforts

A number of researchers have stressed the role of principals in educational development and classroom learning (Pont et al. 2008; Hattie 2008; Leithwood and Day 2008). The study presented here focuses on the role of principals as "change agents" (Ellikson in Hechter and Opp 2001) and "culture builders" in educational development (Hallinger 2005, p. 223). Other common ingredients include the role of fundamental, guiding values that principals articulate, and the significance of the principal's purpose for the change effort (Fullan 2001; Leithwood and Jantzi 2002; Starrat 2004; Day 2007)**.** According to UNESCO's report to the United Nations (UNESCO 2004), education is to be based on underlying values that can be examined, debated, tested and applied. Education for sustainable development could be used by teachers and principals as a means of doing so by linking value-based discussions with environmental, social and economic issues. There are several value-based conflicts connected to ESD. Is it possible to sustain and develop at the same time?

Hargreaves and Fink define sustainable educational leadership based on the same principles as those that apply to sustainable development:

> Sustainable educational leadership and improvement preserves and develops deep learning for all that spreads and lasts, in ways that do no harm to and indeed create positive benefit for others around us, now and in the future (Hargreaves and Fink 2006, p. 17).

Such leadership, which has a clear purpose and objective, proceeds from the primary task of the schools in accordance with the Education Act (Swedish Code of Statutes 1985:1100 and 2010:800) and the national curricula. A long-term approach is required by which leadership and responsibility percolate throughout the organisation. This is also defined as *distributed* leadership, which involves participation and influence on the part of teachers and students (Hargreaves and Fink 2006; Harris 2004, 2011). Fullan defines *educational sustainability* as ''the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose'' (Fullan 2005, p. 114). Thus, a key ingredient of leadership is the ability to handle complexity and constant change as moulded by differing values. The principal has a role to play here as well. One conclusion is that principals need to develop their own value-based visions for the change effort, as well as manage conflicts of values that emerge in their organisations.

Education for sustainable development

The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro identified *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)* as one of the most important

challenges faced by the schools. The Brundtland Commission, appointed by the UN, defined sustainable development as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, p. 1). The concept is based on a holistic view of the needs, situations and problems of people and their societies. The principle is that the three dimensions of *economic*, *social* and *environmental* conditions and processes are to be integrated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing. In subsequent years, which have seen the environmental amendment to the Education Act (Swedish Code of Statutes 1985:1100) and the inclusion of an environmental perspective and sustainable development in the *Curriculum for the Non-compulsory School System Lpf 94*, many Swedish schools have focused on sustainable development in their environmental education (Breiting and Wickenberg 2010). At the same time, researchers have been critically questioning the concept of education for sustainable development. They have found this concept problematic pointing at the risk of it becoming a political instrument that supports a certain ideology, and that education for sustainable development will consequently lose its deliberating and critical potential (see Jickling and Spork 1998; Jickling 2003; Jickling and Wals 2008; Öhman and Öhman, 2012 a,b).

According to Öhman, *environmental education* has shifted during this period from its foundation in a fact-based tradition to a normative tradition in which students were to learn necessary and desirable norms and values in a pluralistic tradition that affirms differing perspectives and values (Öhman 2008). The change may also be expressed as a shift in perspective from education that strives to modify behaviour to a participatory approach that includes independent, critical thinking and encourages students to develop skills for taking action (Jensen and Schnack 1997; Mogensen and Schnack 2010). This study on norms brings a new perspective to the field of ESD research. ESD *could* be a way for principals and teachers to use a participatory approach for interdisciplinary work, for pluralism and democracy. The research already cited describes changes in classroom instruction. It suggests that the structure and culture of schools have evolved and that new norms have been established; but there is a lack of studies, like this one, on the school level that examine the role of the school leaders in ESD.

This study searches for norms as a means of exploring change processes and the ways that schools have implemented education for sustainable development. In the past few decades, theories and methods for studying norms and norm supporting structures at the individual and organisational level have been developed in the discipline of sociology of law at Lund University (Hydén 2002; Wickenberg 1999; Svensson 2008; Leo 2010). We argue that sociology of law, given its focus on legal and other norms, offers a somewhat different perspective in studies that seek to explore, interpret and understand changes in the education system.

Method

Description of the three schools included in the study

The three Swedish upper secondary schools selected for the study are located in big cities. They were chosen as examples of schools with the ambition to offer education for sustainable development as a special profile for the whole school. All the principals considered the choice to be not only a matter of adapting to the national goals in the curriculum, but to also have a special school profile that promotes ESD. The principals and teachers described the schools as "popular" with a large number of applicants and high admissions scores. To reflect the degree to which ESD had actually been established, we assigned the schools the following names: *Beginner School, Underway School* and *Green School.*

The principals at Beginner School and Underway School expressly stated that they wanted to implement education for sustainable development at their schools to a greater extent. Green School, however, was established from the beginning as an education for sustainable development school.

Beginner School had four principals and all expressly stated that they wanted to expand its sustainable development efforts to encompass a common, cohesive educational profile. The school has approximately 1,000 students and 70 full-time teachers. More than half of the teachers have upwards of 15 years' experience, and there are approximately an equal number of women and men on the faculty. Two of the four principals are women and two are men, one of whom has overall leadership responsibility.

Sustainable development has been an explicit, publicised profile at Underway School for more than four years. The student, teacher and leadership structure is very similar to that of Beginner School. It also has approximately 1,000 students and 70 full-time teachers, more than half of whom have upwards of 15 years' experience, and there are approximately an equal number of women and men on the faculty. Underway School also has four principals, two women and two men, one of whom has overall leadership responsibility.

Green School differs considerably from the other two. Since opening seven years ago, it has had a very clear and explicit profile when it comes to education for sustainable development. It has 500 students and approximately 35 full-time teachers. A clear majority of the teachers are women. The percentage of teachers with 1-5 years of experience is appreciably higher than at Beginner School or Underway School, and the percentage with more than 15 years of experience is considerably lower. The school co-operates closely with organisations that are associated with sustainable development efforts, such as the WWF.

One indication of the three schools' different stages in the implementation of sustainable development education is their external communication through their websites (as of 31 October 2012). At Beginner School, the concept of sustainable development does not appear on the home page, in the vision statement or educational concept. The logo on the home page of Underway School, at the bottom of the first page, indicates that sustainable development is its profile and links to additional information about the school's involvement. The home page of Green School has ESD as a prominent logo. It begins with the words "education for sustainable development," supplemented by information about the school's vision and involvement in the area, as well as a number of links to both internal and external efforts.

Three data collection phases

The study was conducted in three different phases, starting with a questionnaire sent to all teachers and principals at the three schools. The questionnaire consisted of seven questions. Five gathered information about the respondents' teaching experience and background. One question was open ended: "Please provide three motives as to why you as a teacher/principal work with sustainable development". The last item was a Likert scale question: "Where do the expectations come from that you as a teacher/principal should work with sustainable development?" The respondents were asked to rate how strongly they felt the expectations came from students, colleagues, principals, the school board, local policy documents, national policy documents, the media, friends and family on a six-point scale where 0 represented "no expectations" and 5, "strongest expectations".

The web-based questionnaire was distributed to all ten principals and eight answered (two were on leave). It was also distributed to 120 teachers in Beginner School and 47 teachers answered. The principals at Beginner School explained the low response as being due to the large number of part-time teachers who are responsible for less than 25% of the teaching, and that a majority of the 70 full-time teachers had answered the questionnaire. At Underway School, 71 teachers received the questionnaire and 37 answered. In Green School, 34 teachers received the questionnaire and 27 answered.

In the second phase, the ten principals were interviewed in person on an individual basis. The purpose was to expand upon and validate the results of the questionnaire, to explore why they wanted sustainable development to be a special profile, how sustainable development affected the way they ran their schools, and what approach they took to these questions. We went on to explore the support mechanisms and obstacles posed by their organisations by asking how the principals communicated, and how they viewed their roles as leaders in the implementation of education for sustainable development.

The third and final phase used focus groups to carry out an in-depth dialogue on one occasion about the preliminary results of the questionnaires and individual interviews. The groups were made up of the principals in the leadership groups at Beginner School and Underway School. The third, smaller Green School had one principal and one part-time vice principal and no leadership group, which is why no focus group meeting was conducted there.

Results: Identifying norms in the change process

The teachers' responses to the questionnaire item about motives for participating in ESD were presented to the principals in the individual interviews. Motives are reasons for acting in a particular manner and questions about people's motives can uncover patterns of action instructions that may suggest underlying norms. The responses revealed differing perspectives on the implementation of ESD.

Motives of the teachers

The questionnaire asked teachers to state three motives for their participation in ESD. The motives were broken down into five categories:

– Legal requirements – national policy documents that assign the school the task of teaching sustainable development.
– Social concerns – sustainable development involves problems related to equity, solidarity or the future.
– Environmental concerns – an emphasis on ecological or environmental dilemmas, such as the use of natural resources.
– Educational considerations – ESD as a means of encouraging an interdisciplinary approach and holistic thinking in classroom instruction
– Personal interest and involvement

The results indicate clear differences among the three schools. The principals at Beginner School wanted sustainable development to be a distinct profile, but none of the teachers indicated that they were motivated by such considerations or by local documents. Beginner School had the highest percentage of teachers (12 out of 41) whose responses were in the legal requirements category (i.e. that it was the task of the school through national curricula and syllabuses to teach sustainable development). The motives of more than half of the teachers at Beginner School were in the environmental concerns category. Their motives were least likely (4 teachers) to be in the educational considerations category. Taken as a whole, the responses present an ambiguous picture of *if* and *how* sustainable development education has been implemented at the school. The stated motives do not exhibit a definite pattern with respect to communication at the school about the role of sustainable development in classroom instruction. Motives in the environmental concerns category were strong at Beginner School, indicating a widespread personal interest in these issues among the teachers. None of the teachers indicated that the school had ESD as a profile or local policy documents for teaching sustainable development.

The responses at Underway School, where sustainable development had been a profile for more than four years, were evenly distributed among the five categories. Eight of the 34 teachers who responded stated that the *school's profile* was a motive. One motive emerged, however, that was completely missing in the answers from teachers at the other schools: four of the teachers demonstrated *resistance* and stated that their motives were shaped by the power of principals, arbitrarily exercised, to set the agenda. Underway School teachers generally responded with single words or short sentences. Our overall interpretation of the uniform distribution among the categories confirmed that the implementation effort had begun. This conclusion is supported by the fact that many teachers pointed to sustainable development as the school's profile. One question was the degree to which the school's profile had gained the support of the teachers, given that several felt it had been dictated by the principals.

The responses by teachers at Green School, where sustainable development had been a profile since opening in 2004, were limited to two categories. The motives of 22 out of the 24

teachers were in the social concerns category, while more than half stated motives that were in educational considerations category (opportunities for interdisciplinary instruction) were important: "Working with sustainable development represents a perspective of thinking that promotes co-operation between different subjects and a holistic approach to problems in society" (teacher, Green School).

The teachers at Green School often used multiple, long sentences to describe their motives, and the words and concepts they chose recurred in most of the responses. All in all, the teachers appeared to have communicated with each other and developed a common view with respect to what education for sustainable development meant. This result indicates the existence of widespread professional norms guiding ESD among the teachers in Green School.

Motives of the principals

The responses to the questionnaires, as well as the individual and focus group interviews with principals, suggest several different motives for having an ESD profile. Most principals mentioned their own commitment and interest in issues that concern society and the future as important motives. They referred to the environmental dimension of ESD, but first and foremost they referred to issues related to the social dimension of ESD: democracy, human rights, freedom of speech, the right to express views, etc. They spoke about what Hargreaves and Fink refer to as *depth*, the fundamental moral purpose of deep and broad learning (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006, p. 27). In our interpretation, this could indicate that the principals use ESD as a means to implement the value-based, democratic, pluralistic education they strive for.

The legal norms and the policy documents provide the principals with a level of legitimate power and this could lead to tension between the principals and the teachers. The principals referred to policy documents and the use of sustainable development as a concept for educational development and the encouragement of interdisciplinary instruction. This is the area in which the principals at Beginner School and Underway School most clearly indicated resistance among their teachers. The teachers at these schools were not organised in teams, and many of them wanted to stick to their own subjects so that they could fulfil the purpose of the course. Tension emerged between various policy documents and teacher interests. The principals tried to stress the environmental perspective of the fundamental values in the Education Act and the task of the school according to the national curriculum, while some teachers prioritised their own subject governed by the syllabus.

Moreover, the principals are actors in a competitive school market. A number of them stated the importance of having an appealing profile to attract students and said that the young people they wanted to reach were interested in issues about the future, the environment and global concerns.

Expectations to establish norms

Social pressure plays a major role in norm setting. Collective expectations influence individuals to engage in correct or culturally desirable behaviour (Rommetveit 1955; Durkheim 1982). According to the *theory of planned behaviour* the strength of norms can be measured by studying perceived social pressure that an individual experiences (Ajzen and Fischbein 1980; Ajzen 1991). Using the questionnaire, we explored the source of expectations that the principals should work with sustainable development, as well as their assessments of the strength of such expectations.

The principals at all three schools experienced very strong expectations from the other principals to be engaged in sustainable development issues. Thus, they received strong support from the other members of the leadership group. As a result, the principals may have been producing and reproducing special norms within their particular domain (_2010). An area for improvement that the principals stressed was that communication directed at students and teachers was clearer when the leadership group was united.

All of the principals experienced strong expectations from the students. They described it as a need to live up to and be spokespeople for the school's profile. One of the principals pointed out that they did not talk to all of the students and speculated that the students who were seen, heard and made contact with them were the most committed. The principals at Beginner School and Underway School experienced expectations from teachers as moderate, whereas the principals at Green School experienced expectations from teachers as strong. Thus, commitment to teaching sustainable development appears to be broader and more widespread among the teachers at Green School. Local and national policy documents strongly influenced the principals as well.

The overall results of the expectations that principals experienced from other principals, students and teachers suggest that there is a special norm for the principals of the three schools: They should give priority to teaching sustainable development.

An analysis of the results from the teachers' questionnaires in Beginner School and Underway School indicate that the strongest expectations came from national and local policy documents, and from the leadership group and principals. Neither the teachers at Beginner School nor at Underway School, where sustainable development had been a profile for a number of years, experienced strong expectations from students or other teachers. The results indicate that the implementation of ESD is a top-down process, proceeding from policy documents and principals. Beginner School and Underway School appear to be at the beginning of the implementation phase.

Social reproduction to set and disseminate norms

Interpersonal communication is vital to setting and disseminating norms. One of the principals reported that communication at the school was the most difficult challenge she faced, and the principals interviewed for the study did not offer a clear perspective on how

they used communication to attain particular objectives. Research shows that there is a lack of awareness among principals about what good communication involves (Törnsén 2009). According to Ärlestig (2008), "organisational communication blindness" interferes with the conversations in which principals engage. Our study confirmed Ärlestig's conclusion that the communication of principals is not uniformly distributed and is often in response to teacher initiatives. One problem we identified is that some schools lack defined concepts from which to proceed when talking about sustainable development, or as one teacher expressed it: "Sustainable development becomes an empty vessel that can be filled with whatever content you choose". The most important thing may not be finding a universal definition of sustainable development. A more useful objective would be for principals, teachers and students at each school, on a local basis and depending on the context in which they find themselves, to come up with their own definitions of the concepts on which they want classroom instruction to be based. Green School has defined its key concepts, and all indications are that the opportunity for in-depth dialogue has improved accordingly, thereby leading to more and stronger underlying professional norms for teaching sustainable development. A concrete method to stimulate broad discussions for defining concepts is that schools write their own local policy documents. Such an effort has been made at all three schools and attracted different degrees of participation. One conclusion is that principals need to be more aware of the ways that communication can improve, and the need for on-going dialogue aimed at defining key concepts such that the staff can engage in in-depth discussions about sustainable development.

Lack of common definitions

In our empirical material there is no single definition of education for sustainable development, which is problematic from the perspective of educational change. The only common denominator found was the definition from the Brundtland Commission, that the three dimensions of economic, social and environmental conditions and processes are to be integrated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). The focus groups of the principals at Beginner School made it clear that they did not have any common concepts from which to proceed:

> We haven't discussed what it means for us personally. We haven't got that far. What does it stand for? Do we have different perceptions? I don't know whether we are in agreement, but I haven't noticed that we disagree either. We haven't put words to what we are in agreement about (focus group, principal at Beginner School).

Education for sustainable development at Beginner School and Underway School consists of temporary projects, elective courses, theme days and other occasional events. They were described as lacking a shared "umbrella". Initiatives at Beginner School usually come from teachers or student groups and focus on environmental issues, such as government policy. The leadership group at Beginner School reported that they did not take their own initiatives but always supported those of teachers and students. The teachers in programme groups at Underway School take the initiative: In the natural sciences programme, the result is

specialisation in biology and environmental issues; in the social sciences programme, the result is specialisation in the social issues of ESD such as democracy, lifestyle and health. The principals have introduced the practices of classroom observation and mentorship to disseminate knowledge among teachers in order to reach a more holistic approach, integrating environmental, social and economic perspectives for all students.

The principals at Beginner School and Underway School thought it was difficult to maintain good communication with teachers and students. They looked for different approaches, often in the form of one-way communication on the intranet or at formal meetings. The principals also had spontaneous daily conversations with teachers and students through which they gained support for teaching sustainable development.

The principals at Green School stated that the entire school and its organisation were structured for working with sustainable development. The principals discussed a holistic approach to learning and said that dialogue proceeded from mutually defined key concepts. As a result, teachers worked in interdisciplinary teams with decentralised responsibility for content and scheduling. Delegated responsibility served as a means of providing students with meaningful influence on classroom instruction. As a result, interdisciplinary projects were a widespread, established working method at the school.

Conclusions: Creating a special school culture with professional norms

Green School differs from the other two schools in several ways. In some aspects it is an "ideal" school in regards to implementation of ESD. But each school is dependent on its context and its history. Green School is a new institution and the staff were and still are hired because the want to work with ESD and with an environmental, participatory approach in interdisciplinary work. The school's starting point is the common vision – that ESD is a special profile guiding all school work – and this has been a way to create a special *culture* with special *norms* guiding the actions in the school. The Green School principal and vice principal are very clear on this: There is a need for a common understanding of the different concepts linked to ESD. One stated: "It is not only a vision on paper; there has to be a follow up". He always includes the ESD vision as a topic in the individual performance appraisals with teachers.

When hiring new teachers, knowledge of ESD related topics are important and a willingness to have that perspective in the classroom is a must. This is not the case in Beginner School and Underway School. The common ESD profile at Green School is also a logo, guiding the culture of the school. Principals and *all* teachers relate to the three dimensions of ESD – environmental, social, and economical. There is a common understanding and supporting professional norms in the Green School culture that there is a need for holistic approaches in teaching and learning. The word "glocal"– think global and act local – is promoted by the principal and vice principal and commonly used as a way of pinpointing a holistic approach. However, principals in all three schools state that they want active students and a high level of

student participation, and that cross-curricular and project oriented teaching are ways to offer students more opportunities to influence the teaching and learning processes.

In Green School there is a clear *structure* promoting ESD and that also supports common professional norms among the teachers and principals. This is not visible in Beginner School or Underway School. Green School's timetables and schedules are set to promote cross-curricular activities and the organisation of the teachers in solid teams does the same. In all three schools budget is allocated to support ESD and in-service teacher training on topics related to ESD.

Implementation processes are complex, and a highly simplified approach to discussing improvement efforts at schools is to proceed from the concepts of initiation, implementation, institutionalisation and dissemination (Miles et al., 1987; Blossing 2008).

We begin by describing the stage Green School is in. Green School has focused on education for sustainable development ever since opening seven years ago. Thus, teachers were hired to concentrate on the school's profile and the initiation phase began immediately and for all teachers. During the initiation phase, the members of an organisation create a common understanding of what is new and experiment with different kinds of behaviour in accordance with our norm perspective – they communicate about what is and is not working, and expectations emerge. The meta-norm, "We should teach sustainable development at our school", was there from the very beginning. According to the principals, Green School has gone through an implementation phase during which the teachers and principals maintained a clear focus on the ESD profile and continually shared their experiences. We would argue that new professional norms, more concrete sub-norms, for teaching sustainable development were set during this phase. The behaviour of teachers and principals become patterns and *action instructions* – "I should act like this". Their behaviour is affected by the expectations that come from students, teachers and principals, and the individual action instructions become professional norms that are communicated and disseminated during the implementation phase. Some of the norms at Green School were there from the beginning: "We should take an interdisciplinary, project-oriented approach" and "We should give students a lot of influence over classroom instruction". Due to the perseverance of the teachers and principals, the implementation phase was described as short. Thus, some professional norms were in place from the beginning, some were established and have grown strong along the way. The final (dissemination) phase enables other schools to learn about the improvement effort: Green School has been the object of countless field trips from around the country in recent years. Groups of teachers from Beginner School and Underway School have visited Green School for inspiration and motivation. The principals of the two schools state that the aim is not to be like Green School, which is not possible because they have different contexts and challenges.

The phases of the development efforts often overlap and the process is far from linear. Beginner School and Underway School have longer histories than Green School and different well-established sub-cultures, with different professional norms among the teachers. The

principals of both schools feel there are more challenges and conflicts between different interests to work with.

Beginner School is in the initiation phase, but some groups of teachers have projects and courses that make it clear they are in the implementation phase. Groups of teachers at Underway School are also in the implementation phase and are trying out different working methods. One difference between Underway School and the others is that a number of teachers stress that it is the principals who are promoting the profile; their resistance indicates that the implementation phase, during which critical thinking and resistance are natural and important ingredients, has started. It would be very interesting to return to all three schools in several years and study how the development has proceeded.

Legal norms are distributed via professional norms

One task of upper secondary schools is that the "Education should illuminate how the functions of society and our ways of living and working can best be adapted to create the conditions for sustainable development" (*Curriculum for the Upper Secondary School 2011*, pp. 4-5). Measured against this statement, Green School has professional norms that have been disseminated and communicated among teachers and principals to guide actions in the classrooms to meet the sustainable development goals. In Beginner School and Underway School, the questionnaires and interviews results show that there are professional norms among the principals and *groups* of teachers and that the overarching norm is: "We should teach sustainable development at our school". This shows that the norm has been established and that implementation is under way but not necessarily that all the teachers have started to act on it.

According to Therborn, norms appear in hierarchical systems, from the highest overall principles to those that are applied in specific situations (Therborn 2002). To give an example, we start with an overarching norm, a meta-norm. Axelrod (1986), who studied norms in game theory, states that a meta-norm is an effective way of setting a norm and subsequently establishing other underlying norms (see also Persson 2010; _ 2010). In all three schools the overarching norm − "We should teach sustainable development at our school" – is a meta-norm that supports the establishment of new underlying norms. The overarching norm in this case does not provide much guidance for the actions of the teachers, thus underlying norms have to be established according to the local context of the school. According to the principals at Beginner School and Underway School, about 15-20 teachers out of 70 in the schools are following this norm and are teaching what they consider to be issues related to ESD. This indicates that the teaching of the majority of the teachers in these schools is *not* guided by the legal norms on sustainable development in the curriculum, *or* professional norms that guide teaching for ESD.

Principals' professional norms

Legal norms in the Education Act, national curriculum and syllabuses govern education for sustainable development, and change agents are required to interpret and establish them as new professional norms. The study shows that there are a number of enthusiasts and change agents at the three schools and that they are motivated by both internal and external factors. The principals at Underway School have taken the initiative to profile sustainable development, which has lent a top-down character to implementation. Green School has had the profile since opening and is thereby aware of the requirements and expectations to which it is subject. There are many enthusiasts among the teachers, as well as a structure that assigns responsibility for different aspects of the effort to individual teachers (_1999 p. 451). Underway School has many enthusiasts, but also outspoken resistance by a number of teachers who feel that the profile is a manifestation of "the power of the principals to set the agenda". Most, but not all, of the teachers state that teaching sustainable development is part of the school's task as defined by policy documents. One question is the extent to which various policy documents affect classroom instruction. One principal states that the course and subject syllabuses have the most impact, and that only in recent years has the more interdisciplinary assignment according to the curriculum (Curriculum for the Upper Secondary School, 2011) begun to filter down to all the teachers. We found that some principals and teachers refer to policy documents to establish legitimacy in implementation of education for sustainable development but only in general terms and not directly linked to an objective for the school or for a particular subject.

One of the most important tasks of a principal, as expressed in the interviews, is to provide teachers with the tools they need. The principals talk about supporting teachers through management of financial resources, scheduling and other structural matters. They also spoke of the importance of having a "vision that can be communicated" and that can always be referred to during the development effort. The strongest support by far that the principals of Beginner School and Underway School receive is from the other principals in the leadership group.

There is a rapid turnover of principals in Sweden. A 2007 study by the Swedish Association of School Principals and Directors of Education showed that approximately 70% of principals had left their positions in 2001-2007. Our study interviewed principals during the 2010/2011 academic year. By the time that the next academic year began, 6 of the 10 principals had left their positions – one had retired and five had moved to other positions. By the next semester, another principal had left – thus, only 3 of the original 10 principals at the three schools remained in January 2012. According to Hargreaves and Fink (2006), a change in leadership has a major impact that sustainable leadership must take into account. One component of sustainable leadership is to forge strong professional school cultures, which this article defines as professional norms. Another component that Hargreaves and Fink stress is distributed leadership (2006, p. 76, see Harris 2004, 2011; Day 2007). The principals who were interviewed for the study said that they wanted to facilitate the improvement efforts of the organisation, including assumption of responsibility by the teachers for scheduling, local

finances and other new areas. Their wishes are not easy to fulfil given that the teachers feel as though they are being saddled with additional tasks.

The principals state that they delegate responsibility but that it also involves delegating power since distributed leadership is a process that is not directly linked to a particular leader. According to Harris (2008), formal leaders (principals in this study) are gatekeepers for distributed leadership. In other words, principals provide the opportunity for distributed leadership, which should facilitate changes in leadership, given that it is not linked to particular people. In accordance with our norm perspective, strong professional norms are established as a result of distributed leadership.

This study has concentrated on professional norms as a means of illuminating school cultures, as well as exploring implementation of ESD. We have proceeded from a definition of norms according to which they are directions for action that are socially reproduced and that represent expectations on behaviour from the surroundings (Hydén and Svensson 2008; _2010). Based on the overarching meta-norm, "We should teach sustainable development at our school," new underlying norms can be established and these norms could also relate to other topics like democracy, ICT and so on. One example is the norm "We should teach interdisciplinary, cross curriculum". This norm is promoted by the principals and it is strongly related to the principals' motives for developing the teaching and learning processes in the school.

> It's like H says, these are the key issues, future issues affecting everything we work with. All we are working with needs to have that perspective. It's in the curriculum; this is what we *should* work with. It ties together. What is important is that young people get an overall view... (focus group principal at Underway School).

If teachers are guided by the norm of interdisciplinary teaching, they are working in teams and in projects with a holistic view of education. We conclude that principals use the concept of education for sustainable development as a means to make changes in the organisational culture and structure. They do this to improve the education as a whole and to improve teaching methods in the classrooms, in favour of students' participation with a democratic, pluralistic perspective of education (c.f. Öhman 2008). One example is the principal who stated they lacked a shared "umbrella" and in this case ESD was used by the principals as an umbrella to cover the whole school.

Some examples of the identified principals' professional norms that guide their leadership in change efforts. Principals should work with the *culture* of the school to:
- Create and continually point out the common vision of the school, in this case that ESD is a special profile guiding all school work.
- Create and support arenas for dialogue on a common understanding of the different concepts linked to the vision to be able to establish new professional norms.
- Distribute leadership to create a school culture with norms that support initiatives and influence from teachers *and* students.

- Promote a view of education based on the Education Act and the curriculum. Currently, many teachers mostly focus on the syllabus in their respective subjects.
- Ensure that there are local policy documents that interpret the tasks in the curriculum to support the change efforts and to set new norms.

Principals should work with the *structure* of the school to:
- Manage the resources to promote development in terms of arranging timetables and schedules to promote cross-curricular activities.
- Organise the teachers in different teams promoting cross-curricular activities.
- Allocate budget for in-service teacher training on topics related to the vision. In this case study visits and co-operation with external organisations.

The principals stated that the leadership group is their strongest support. We consider this group to be a forum that enables the creation of special professional norms for principals that guide their leadership. It is also clear that teachers working in teams support the creation of professional norms that guide teaching.

This study does not examine the hierarchy of norms in great depth. We conclude that the schools have differing *action instructions* and that differing norms are established in the various school cultures. We also conclude that the potential for *reproduction* of norms varies among the schools and that reproduction is a function of the arenas for communication that an organisation encompasses. Principals play a major role in this respect when it comes to building structures for encounters and dialogue and all principals in the study see this as a key problem. The two schools that are in the implementation phase do not have clear internal communication about why they want sustainable development to be a special profile, what sustainable development means or how sustainable development can be taught. According to the results of this study, a starting point to establish new norms in schools is to lead and support dialogue within the school on defining vital concepts in order to adapt them to the local school context. We argue that the *expectations* on behaviour from the surroundings affect norm setting and that the process also varies from school to school. Our results indicate that sustainable professional norms are established when principals and teachers experience expectations from each other, policy documents and – last but not least – students. If principals become more aware of existing norms in the organisations, and how norms can be changed, that knowledge could support them in change efforts.

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