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ABSTRACT

Educational reform in Norway has led to increasing decentralization and a redefinition of the role of the school principal. Action research is an approach enabling principals to clarify alternative actions, consider appropriate action, and become aware of the relationship between agency and structure. Systematic reflection is a tool for self-analysis that can be used effectively by school leaders. This reflective process consists of returning to experience, reflecting on the facilitators' questions and perspectives, attending to feelings, and re-evaluating the experience. Qualitative data were collected from 27 school leaders in 3 municipalities in Norway. The research questions addressed were: (1) meaning of educational leadership in the Norwegian context and how it is understood by principals; (2) what happens when principals establish inquiries into their own practice and how these inquiries can contribute to the development of a knowledge base in educational administration; and (3) cost and benefits of action research as an approach to the development of educational leadership. The 2-year study incorporated observation, counseling, peer review, journals, and reflection in a collaborative setting. The typically Norwegian dual role of principals as classroom teacher and administrator is also explored. The appendix contains a descriptive summary of the educational system in Norway. (Contains 41 references.) (JLS)

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# EDUCATING REFLECTIVE PRINCIPALS IN A CONTEXT OF RESTRUCTURING

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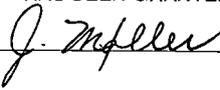
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## **Introduction:**

In schools principals experience a strong managerial imperative, even though most people agree to the importance of an educative mission (Cuban 1988). When asked, principals state their preference for addressing curriculum and instructional issues, but they feel imprisoned by a problematic working context (Høytrup & Kruchov 1990, Lotsberg 1992, Berg 1993). There is a conflict between demands and desires. Observations of principals show a job characterized by brevity, discontinuity, and housekeeping. Maintaining order is given significant weight (Stålhammar 1984, Lundgren 1986, Fullan 1991). Dilemma can be used as a concept to capture the alternative or contradictory orientations the leaders experienced (Møller 1994a & 1995).

This paper discusses action research as an approach to enable principals to clarify alternative actions, to consider what will be right and appropriate, and to become aware of the relationship between agency and structure (cf. Giddens 1984). The discussion is based upon qualitative data drawn from a project where 27 school leaders from three municipalities in Norway participated. The project aimed at improving and developing instructional aspects of leadership. Data were collected in a systematic way by means of participant observation, field notes from peer review and group meetings, journals, and interviews. The analyses were reported back to the participants successively. In the study the following research questions were addressed:

- \* What does educational leadership mean in the Norwegian context, and how is it understood by some principals?
- \* What happens when principals establish critical inquiries into their own practice, and how can their inquiries contribute to the development of the knowledge base of educational administration?
- \* What gain and strain derives from choosing action research as an approach to the development of educational leadership?

The paper focuses on the last question, but the discussion is related to the analysis of the first question which reported leadership as an institutionalized and routinized activity bounded in space and time, and guided by practical, often tacit, knowledge (Giddens 1984, Foster 1986).

## Background and Context

Major reforms on almost all levels in education are now taking place in Norway, as in most of the Western industrialized countries. (See appendix for a description of the educational system in Norway.) In the public debate, a key word in these reforms is decentralization, though parts of the reforms can be identified as centralization (Karlsen 1993). It depends on which changes you are focusing, from which perspective you analyze the changes, and how you understand the sum of efforts towards restructuring<sup>1</sup>.

In Parliamentary Report No. 37 (1990-91) "On Organization and Guidance in the Educational Sector" the policy statements towards restructuring of schools are outlined. Management by objectives, adjusted to the school as an organization, is said to be a central principle of governance. Thus the Ministry will continue decentralizing the regulation of education by rules and by giving the local authorities more autonomy and better possibilities to plan their economy. At the same time they will centralize the control of goals by means of a new national curriculum where the goals are more clearly articulated, and tied to a national evaluation program. The principal is given increased formal power and is placed in a key role in implementing the curriculum and evaluation program. The new role demands a more active participation on issues concerning classroom practices, demands more supervisory activities, and puts more emphasis on the employer role. In Norway, so far, we have had no teacher appraisal. According to tradition, the principal seldom interferes with what is going on in the classroom. Trust in teachers' work has for long been a tacit dimension in principals' work<sup>2</sup>.

This context is now changing due to an external pressure. In the media there is a complaint about the quality in schools. People outside schools require more control and more external evaluation. In policy documents "building learning organization", has become a "magic

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<sup>1</sup> Restructuring is used as a term which embraces major changes to the organization of teaching and learning, to decision-making structures, to the conditions of teaching, to the patterns of roles and power relationships in schools, and to the content of education (cf. Hargreaves 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Norwegian principals do not have to participate in a formal preparation program of school administration to become a school leader. Neither do we have a system of apprenticeship with an experienced and competent administrator. Three years of practice as a teacher is sufficient to apply for a leadership position. Having once secured the position, they are offered 6-12 days a year of in-service training.

concept". More professional and reflective practice among educators has been given as the answer to increase the quality in teaching and learning. In the learning organization everyone has a focus on collective as well as individual learning. If schools are to be the inquiring communities necessary for a democratic way of life, then the leadership within them will have to be more educative in various ways, rather than bureaucratic (Smyth 1989). This perspective could include educative leadership as "an act that enables others and allows them, in turn, to become enablers (Foster 1986:187). However, it is difficult to distinguish rhetoric from reality, because at the same time our Ministry of Education gives more attention to accountability and control of teaching. New constructs of educational leaders as school entrepreneurs, as chief executives or as managing directors, are growing in prominence and power.

In my collaboration with principals and teachers, I learned that the new role "mandated" from above, demanding a more active participation on issues concerning classroom practices, caused a lot of concern and uncertainty. Some principals and superintendents were willing to collaborate with me in an action research project in order to develop their own competence. Reflective activity was seen as a vital element in learning (Kolb 1976, Boud et. al. 1985), but how might reflection be facilitated? What kind of conditions facilitate or inhibit learning? The principals wanted to examine how they could turn their own experiences into learning, and how they could learn from criticism through informed feedback (Robinson 1991):

Ideological assumptions underlying the project comprise a conception of practice of school leaders as value-laden (Bates 1986 & 1992, Greenfield 1975 & 1991, Hodgkinson 1978), and that knowledge is produced as unintended and often unconscious outcome when people are doing their work. People develop a practical consciousness which consists of all the things which actors know tacitly about how to go on in the contexts of social life (Giddens 1984). Reflective inquiry was identified as an orientation to professional development, and practice as a school leader became the subject of inquiry (cf. Stevenson 1993). *How* knowledge of educational leadership is acquired, will probably influence the way principals understand their mission. Together we designed a project where we focused on actual problems of practice in a school setting and on school leaders as *learners*, in order to understand more about how to turn experiences into learning.

# Action Research as a Reflective Approach to Professional Development

## Some theoretical perspectives

Since it is possible to find a number of contradictory interpretations of action research in the literature, I will try to clarify my interpretation of the concept. As a departure I will use a definition given by Rapoport (1970):

Action research aims to contribute *both* to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework.

But the discussion which continually goes on about action research among the members of the research community demands some further comments. Elliott (1991) emphasizes for instance that the fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge, and he defines it as the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it. The purpose is improvement of one's practices, one's understanding of those practices and the situation in which those practices are carried out. Also Carr and Kemmis (1986) emphasize that we can only talk about genuine action research when the practitioners take upon themselves the joint responsibility for developing their practice. This means that the initiative must come from the people in an immediate problematic situation. A researcher who takes the initiative and establishes action research projects, will often create situations where the participants do not have control of the project development.

I will to a higher degree emphasize *the collaborative mode* where both practitioners and researchers offer significant and critical data and insights as a main characteristic of this type of research. It is a way to reduce the gap between research and practice where practitioners involve themselves with researchers in work that allows for a mutuality and sharing of two worlds of experience.

Donald Schön's (1984, 1987) ideas of the reflective practitioner, and Lawrence Stenhouse's (1975) arguments for building professional communities in schools represented important *inspirations* in designing the research project, though the reflective approach in this project emphasizes to a larger degree that organizational framework highly influences the leadership practice (Giddens 1984). Schön does not recognize the institutionalized character of

leadership, and he seems to be overestimating the possibilities of relevant feedback about student learning (Laursen 1995). Therefore Schön's analysis of the professional design process has to be modified before it is applied to the development of educational leadership.

Stephen Kemmis' (1985) analysis of the nature of reflection takes into account the relationship between the practice of leadership and the institutional setting. He emphasizes reflection as a social and political activity, action-oriented and historically embedded, and as a dialectical process. Reflection is shaped by ideology, and in turn, it shapes ideology. Kemmis distinguish three forms of reflection: Technical, practical and critical reflection. Reflection is political in each case in the sense that the self-interests of different people will be differentially served. *Technical reflection* means that we may choose between available means on the basis of the efficacy and efficiency of alternative courses of action. It aims at problemsolving. In *practical reflection* we must consider what will be right and appropriate. How to act is a moral question. It aims at wise action in a social context of judgement about what is right. *Critical reflection* seeks to discover how the form and content of thought has been given by history and culture, and how the cultural context itself will be shaped by the action and thought of individuals. It aims at examining the cultural context which shapes our ideas, institutions and modes of action, in order to reflect on the contributions of actions toward social justice in both schools and the larger society. What distinguishes these forms of reflection is the degree to which their political context is treated as problematic. According to Kemmis, only critical reflection treats the context as problematic.

In analysing the principals' and facilitators' reflections on action, I have applied Kemmis' framework for distinguishing forms of reflection. In understanding the pattern which emerged, I have turned to Anthony Giddens' (1984) structuration theory. Giddens underscores the relationship of agency to structure. Neither agency nor structure has primacy. They are defined and redefined in terms of each other. According to Giddens structure is not 'external' to individuals; as memory traces they are more 'internal' to their activities. Giddens argues that agency can only be understood if the continuity and location of experience are taken into account, and explanations must be situated in place and time. What agents know about what they do, and why they do it, is largely carried in *practical consciousness*. The knowledge members of a society possess is not incidental to the persistent patterning of social life, but

is integral to it. He underscores that structure is not to be equated with constraint. It is always both *constraining and enabling*.

A similar viewpoint is found in Bourdieu's sociological theory. Bourdieu uses the concept *habitus* to grasp the fact that we are to a large degree determined by our social and economical surroundings. The individual's habitus 'decides' the action and the way of understanding, and practioners will often be unable to see the constraints of the institutional settings on his or her professional practice. However, we are not totally determined (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1993).

## **How the Project was Initiated and Conducted**

### **A three-stage negotiation between researcher and participants:**

In preparing the study I cooperated with the School Director of a County<sup>3</sup>, and constructed a three-step negotiation with municipalities and schools to ensure clear agreement that the ideas were promising, and that the participants were willing to commit themselves to a collaborative project over a two-year period.

In a first step, I wrote about my ideas for a collaborative project, focusing on educational leadership and the context of restructuring, in a letter to all 23 superintendents in the county, inviting them to a voluntary meeting. The next step was the meeting where further details of the project were discussed with superintendents who had declared interest, potential gain and strain were emphasized; and the terms of participation were elaborated further. The terms included both time-release, commitment from the superintendent and the schools, and economy. The participation was limited to three municipalities, so I asked the superintendents to apply for participation after this meeting. Five superintendents applied for participation in the project.

After having selected three municipalities based on the superintendent's commitment to the project in the application, as far it was possible to understand and interpret it in a written

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix: The educational system in Norway.

statement, a third step required the principals and the vice-principals to confirm the agreement to participate. A meeting was organized in each of the three municipalities, and each of the participants were asked why they had chosen to participate. Again we discussed the terms of participation and possible gain and strain in participating in such a project, stressing it was still time to withdraw. I tried to be clear about what I thought could be the required time, but emphasized that it was very difficult to anticipate this in advance. This was a collaborative project where they had a voice. I also included my own interest in the project as a part of my career as an academic, and as part of a doctoral thesis.

Their decision to participate was a combination of an interest in exploring promising new ideas, expectations of professional growth, and getting a chance to work closely with peers from other schools and school-levels. Some also saw the project as important given the political situation in Norway with growing skepticism towards schools, and the plans for national evaluation. The project could represent a proactive action instead of a reactive action. But it became also clear that some were not sure what they had committed themselves to, and some of the principals had even felt forced into the project by their superintendent. Anyway, after having had an opportunity to discuss their own interest in a project, they were willing to give it a try.

We negotiated what was of practical concern to the principals and the superintendents, owing to the specific political context in Norway, and tried to sort out our sharing and separate interests, as far as it was possible to say in advance. We also agreed upon procedures for my publication of data based on fieldnotes, journalwritings, and interviews. One important principle was to include their response and critique to a preliminary interpretation of the data. I also saw reciprocal critique as a guard against imposing an idealized abstraction on the part of the researcher (Lather 1986). The meaning should be constructed through negotiation with the participants, and the release of data should also be negotiated (Simons 1987).

The negotiation procedure that took place before the project started, was perceived and articulated as important to hinder misunderstanding that otherwise could emerge later. However, throughout the project I learned this was not just a question of establishing the right technical procedures. It also became a moral issue (Møller 1994b).

## **Observation, Peer Review and Journals**

The main features of the project were connected to observation, counselling, peer review, journals and reflection amongst colleagues and facilitators. In the project we emphasized observing everyday situations; therefore the principals and the superintendents were asked not to stage special situations when an observer was present. This is of course difficult, because an observer will always have an impact on a situation. As participants in a collaborative project, we wished to investigate what kind of learning opportunities arose in the daily activity when one made use of systematic observation and reflection. We agreed upon eight observation-days at each school and each superintendent office. In addition seminars and group-meetings were organized where the participants reflected on their experiences with observation, journalwriting and peer-review.

The criteria for observation emerged out of a shared discussion of theory and practice, which were agreed upon in advance. The principals and superintendents were asked to explicate the "theory" of leadership implicit in their own practices. Together with two consultants from the School Director's Office, I worked as an external facilitator. As facilitators we tried to help them reflect about their practices in the light of theories they articulated. The discussion often centered around the question: What does it mean to exercise good leadership practice in this context? What did you do in this context that serves as an example of your "theory" of leadership? How can you explain it? Argyris and Schön's (1978) distinction between "espoused theory" and "theory-in-use" functioned as an analytical framework. We also tried to combine experiences with theory by providing analytic concepts which could be helpful in analyzing the practice.

## **The Practice of Principals as Subject of Reflective Inquiries**

Several questions arise from choosing reflective inquiries as an approach to professional development. Do the principals for instance manage to address curriculum and instructional issues in a better way than before, when involved in reflective inquiry? Are they better able to deal with contradictory expectations in the future? Do they deal with work intensification in a better way than before? Are principals by participating in such inquiries into their own practices, modeling reflective practice and thereby encouraging their teachers to engage in

reflective practice? To discuss these questions I will refer to three examples from the project.

The first example covers the principal's office hour at Flatland school which is a primary school with 220 students (7-13 yr. olds), 20 teachers, a principal, a vice-principal, a clerk and a caretaker. The school is localized in a middle class area close to Oslo. It was build in the middle of the seventies. The architecture is characterized by "open landscape", and team-teaching is part of the school's tradition. According to the principal the school has a good reputation in the district, and the collaboration with parents is good. The principal started as a teacher at this school when it was new. For the last eight years he has been the principal.

The second example gives a glimpse of the principal as a teacher in grade four (10-11 years) at Bygda school which is an old primary school at the countryside close to Oslo. The oldest building is from 1909. Today there are 200 students, 18 teachers, a principal, a vice-principal, a clerk and a caretaker working at the school. The school has an established teaching staff, and the principal has been in the leader position for 20 years. Recently they have organized the staff in teams, but teaching is to a large degree characterized by conservatism, individualism and presentism (cf. Lortie 1975). According to the principal, the parents are satisfied with the school. I have chosen this example because in Norway it is typical for a principal in primary school to teach students in addition to his administrative duties, (see appendix: "The educational system in Norway"). The participants in the project wanted to develop knowlegde about reflective inquiries related to classroom practice as well as more administrative practice. This was seen as important both in order to encourage their teachers to engage in reflective practice, and to learn more about their "theories-in-use" related to classroom activities.

The third example shows an abstract of a meeting where the principal of Borgen school, a teacher leader and an external facilitator, participated. I have chosen this example in order to show how different perspectives and understandings were brought into a discussion of a principle, but more like a *description* of different opinions than as critical reflection. The principal and a teacher leader wanted to discuss how they could fullfill the school's mission of "students' responsibility for their own learning". They wanted to plan for actions that could be initiated among the students, and to discuss how they could motivate the staff for new

actions. Borgen school is an old primary school, built in 1923, with 120 students and 12 teachers. The school is too small to have a vice principal, and the clerk is working only three days a week. The principal has been in the leader position for 4 years.

### **Example 1: Office Hour**

The description of the following situation is based on field notes where the principal of Flatland school was observed in his office. The observer was a consultant from the School Director's Office. Before the office hour the principal had told the observer that he planned to write a summary from the last meeting with elected parents. He did not think the elected secretary had understood that she was supposed to do it.

The office hour is characterized by discontinuity and several interruptions where the principal tries to respond to emergencies and housekeeping. The office door is open. First he meets with the caretaker of the school. They are discussing the economy in a building project. The principal wants work out the details of the economy, and he gives reasons why this is important. The caretaker is unclear about the economy, and it is difficult to understand how expensive the project is going to be. In a way they never end the discussion, and they do not make an appointment for a following-up meeting. [ *It seems to the observer that economy was not the real issue at hand. Rather, it was important for the two parties to confirm their relationship to each other.*] When they start the meeting, the principal shows interest in the caretaker's work, asking questions, and when their discussion comes to an end, the principal says: "It seems that you are very satisfied with working at this school". The caretaker confirmed it with a smile.

A teacher suddenly rushes into the office and begins talking about three students with whom she has serious problems. The principal accepts that the moment for discussing is convenient, even though he has an external observer listening to the conversation and even though the door to the hall is open. It takes time before the principal understands what the problem is and is able to give a few words of advice. They talk for approximately 20 minutes, and the teacher is standing beside the principal's desk.

Two men, unknown to the principal, are suddenly standing in the door. They want to discuss the alarm system with the principal. The principal starts discussing, but he seems a bit surprised and confused of their arrival. He says that there is a possibility that the school could be interested in buying a new system, but he needs to discuss this with his deputy head and suggests that they can arrange for a meeting later. It has now become clear that the visitors are selling alarm systems. The discussion continues. After 15 minutes the principal repeats, and this time it is clearly: "May we arrange for a meeting about this. Call me later!"

The school bell announced that the office hour had passed. No summary from the meeting with parents had been written. The next hour the principal was going to teach grade four (10-11 years) students. The principal told the observer that what she had

observed, was a typical office hour. He was always interrupted, and seldom was able to do what he had planned. (Author's translation)

This summary from observation field notes only gives a glimpse of the principal's job, but other field notes give a similar picture. In a working context filled with contradictory expectations, principals are strongly action oriented and seem to be constantly replying to the needs of the moment (Møller 1995).

### **Reflection on Action**

Later the same day the principal reflected on his way of taking care of his duties together with peers and an external facilitator. What had happened this day, was part of what the principal experienced as a pattern. In his reflection the principal focused on what he had managed to do. He thought it was right to listen to the angry teacher and help her to deal with her problem, but he was dissatisfied with giving so much time to the salesmen.

In the conversation the external facilitator encouraged the principal to reflect more on his own reconstruction of experiences and asked why he chose to do what he did. First it was difficult to articulate reasons. Then he argued that teachers always expected him to be available. Why he had been available to the salesmen in the same way, he could not give any explanations. It just happened. The tacit knowledge the principal had developed over time was identified as a norm of being available for everyone all the time. The principal understood that he in a tacit way allowed other people to decide the agenda of the day. He became aware that alternative courses of action were needed to fulfill the mission of the school. However, when it came to dealing with students' problems, the principal found it right and important to be available. An ethic of caring was dominant in his understanding of his mission. Reflecting more on this issue, the principal realized that he probably could be of better help for his teachers and students if he gave himself more time to analyse the situation before giving advice.

In this case the external facilitator contributed, through her questions, to another way of understanding the experiences. As a result the principal proclaimed that he wanted to organize his days in another way. He had not been aware of the way he always let other people decide

what to do. No wonder it was difficult to give priority to addressing curriculum issues. A *motivation* to change his actions emerged, but that does not mean he was better *able* to deal with contradictory expectations in the future.

In a journal writing two years later this principal wrote:

I have become more and more aware of how important reflective activities are. It is a way of developing one's competency. You can't be a supervisor to teachers without having competency. But to find time for systematic reflection in every-day practice is problematic. We always have too little time. (Author's translation)

### **Example 2: Teaching Students**

The description of the following situation is based on field notes where Mr. Hill, the principal of Bygda school, was teaching grade five (11-12 yr. olds) students. The subject is English. I was the external observer. In advance he had given me his schedule for the day and an outline for the lesson in grade five. As a focus for observation and reflection, he emphasized his good relationship with the students and how this provided a good learning environment.

The lesson started with a test of the children's memories of the new words. I noticed a couple of students who seemed to have problems writing down the words. The test was turned in to the principal, and the rest of the lesson was divided into a little time for reading and most of the time addressed to individual, written exercises. There were few interruptions during the lesson, and most of the students seemed to do what they were told, filling out answers in their exercisebook. The same students, who I had noticed in the beginning of the lesson, caught my attention owing to their obvious uneasiness. Very little work was done during the lesson, but they sat quietly at their desk with their hands lifted in order to get the principal's attention, and they did not disturb the rest of the class. Both were girls. [*As an observer it seemed to me that they were afraid of writing anything in their exercisebook before they had asked the principal.*] In the last five minutes of the lesson the principal published the score on the glossary test, giving the mean score of the class and asking them to take the test with them home and show their parents. [*This surprised me since I knew that the national curriculum for this subject emphasized oral training, encouraged students to speak instead of putting weight on writing-skills, and suggested that teachers should pay particular attention to the students' self esteem.*] (Author's translation)

### **Reflection on Action**

Later the same day Mr. Hill and I engaged in a reflection on what had happened when he had taught grade five students. The principal started by giving his own analysis and evaluation of

what had passed. He found classroom management satisfying. He had managed to do what he had planned, and the students had been working more seriously and more quietly than they were used to. According to Mr. Hill, their ways of behaving were probably influenced by having an external observer in the classroom.

I started by asking him to give reasons for the test he started the lesson with. He found it necessary to motivate the students for learning new words, and the students seemed to enjoy it. He really cared for all the kids in the class, and wanted to give them the best education he could offer. When I told him my observations and reflections of the way the two girls had been working, he felt uneasy and unhappy. He did not want students to feel insecure or afraid.

I went on asking him to reflect on questions concerning the goals of learning as stated in the national curriculum. It became clear that the principal was not familiar with the curriculum for this specific subject. The textbook was his guide for teaching<sup>4</sup>. He admitted that he had had too little time to prepare the lesson. When I confronted him with the fact that this hour had been driven more by written exercises than by oral exercises as suggested in the national curriculum, he defended his way of teaching. He feared a more chaotic classroom situation, given the conditions of teaching. Now he had control. Turning to a more inquiry-based teaching, as suggested in the national curriculum guidelines, would loosen his control, and could mean that many students in his class would not be able to get a proper education.

I had been to this school several times as an observer. Other observations I had made, had revealed how Mr. Hill saw education as a moral purpose, and how he tried to understand the students' perspective when he dealt with discipline issues and conflicts between other teachers and students. In his espoused theory of educational leadership he addressed curriculum issues, emphasizing "the principal leads the school towards the school's objectives, is an inspirator,

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<sup>4</sup> Textbooks have a strong standing in Norwegian schools. All textbooks in use must pass through a process of official approval. In this process, they are examined on several aspects, including their adherence to the national curriculum guidelines and for possible gender discrimination. The approval system has been under constant debate for both political and professional reasons, but has so far survived the attempts at being abandoned. To many teachers the textbooks are their curriculum guidelines. This means that they accept the interpretation of the national curriculum guidelines given by the author of the textbook.

organizes, offers support and encouragement", and "profiles what he/she stands for, has visions, thinks new thoughts."

Now he suddenly faced a situation where he had gotten another perspective on his "theories-in-use", and at the same time found it difficult to cope with the problem and change his practice. In fact, critical questions about his way of understanding his classroom practice made this principal unhappy, because he could not see how to cope with the demands set by the national curriculum. Learning this lesson was painful. As a facilitator, I contributed to another way of reconstructing the experience, but in this case it did not result in more enthusiasm and energy. On the contrary; his days felt even more demanding than before. What was earlier taken-for-granted, was now questioned. He told me that the teachers at Bygda school were better teachers than he was. According to him they showed a high degree of practical mastery in their classrooms. How could he be an educative leader to them? It was better to stick to administrative duties where he felt he could contribute.

### **Example 3: A meeting**

According to the national curriculum it is the school management's responsibility to provide conditions in which students learn to participate actively. Before the meeting at Borgen school, the principal had sent a description of the school's developmental program to the facilitator. It was stated in the pamphlet that they wanted to address "students' responsibility for their own learning". In the meeting the facilitator asked the principal and the teacher leader to clarify the concept:

*The teacher leader:* I relate this concept to the way I treat the students as subjects and human beings. You have to trust students, and believe that they can do the work without being controlled all the time. Students have to be given responsibility in order to learn.

*External facilitator:* Can you give some examples?

*The teacher leader:* When students are allowed to sit in the classroom in between lessons, we have rules for it. If they do not follow the rules, which we have agreed upon, they are not allowed to sit in the classroom. We also practice an ethic of caring, i.e. students are expected to take care of each other and of their school as a place to learn. One example is that each first grade student (7-8 yr. olds) has a special friend, "a tutor", in grade five (11-12 yr. olds) and grade six (12-13 yr. olds). Another example is that students must be responsible for their own behavior at school.

*Principal:* There are some aspects we want to emphasize. We want to develop the way

the students act and behave towards each other, how they take care of their own environment. The school participates in a multi-cultural project. It aims at bringing together minority groups and Norwegians for mutual cultural enrichment. Another aspect is that students should be given responsibility instead of being met with a lot of rules. The first thing I did, when I started as principal at Borgen school, was to abolish several rules and regulations on which the staff had decided. I know some of the teachers did not like this. They feared they were losing control, but we did it step by step, I think. We also try to take seriously suggestions from the student council. For instance this year we have altered the timetable because the class representatives in the student council suggested a longer break in the middle of the day.

*External facilitator:* Do the students take part in planning the work to be done in a subject or project over a certain period? Do they take part in setting the objectives and discussing the working methods and forms of assessment?

*Principal:* At Borgen school we have started to focus on how the students can contribute to an open and friendly atmosphere in schools, and how we can take care of each other. So far I have not thought of students' participation in planning the work to be done in a subject.

*External facilitator:* It seems like you do good work in promoting students gradually taking more responsible for their own learning environment. However, the national curriculum emphasizes that responsibility for one's own learning entails participation in all phases of a learning sequence from the first day at school. That means involvement in planning the work, carrying out the plan, assessing whether objectives have been achieved, and replanning. An involved student is prepared to take more responsibility both for his or her own work and for a good learning climate for everyone in the class. [...] How much do the teachers allow children to control their own time? How much do teachers control the starting point for activities and the duration of the activities? How much of the content is decided by the teacher? Are children allowed to control criteria for evaluation themselves?

*The teacher leader:* I have not thought of responsibility for one's own learning in that way. These thoughts are new to me.

*The principal:* I realize we have decided on a program of school development without analysing the idea underlying the concept. Maybe we took for-granted that we had the same opinion. (Author's translation)

The school bell announced that it was time for the staff meeting, so there was no more time to reflect on this matter.

### **Reflection on Action**

When I later read through my fieldnotes from this meeting, the lack of critical reflection struck me. In this case the external facilitator *described* the way she conceived "responsibility for one's own learning". The principal and the teacher leader commented on the fact that they had gotten some new ways of conceiving the concept, but there was no *discursive* reasoning of different understanding. For instance we did not ask any questions about *why* we usually

did not involve the students in all phases of the learning process. We did not scrutinize what influenced our way of thinking, and we did not address the structures of power in schools. Part of this may be explained by referring to time pressure, but it also has to do with a lack of capacity to treat one's own context as problematic. School culture is characterized by action and planning. Even as a facilitator it is very easy to become part of this culture. It is difficult to transcend constraints inherent in the epistemology of practice.

## Discussion

An underlying assumption in the project was that being a member of a specific occupation and organization represents a reservoir of practical knowledge we seldom discuss in an explicit way. Habits, routines and traditions of what is the correct way of solving problems and doing the work will be developed over time. Reflection on action is a way of articulating this taken-for-granted practical consciousness in order to examine if the work is for the benefit of students. The next step will be to clarify actions to improve practice.

The reflective process in this project consisted of returning to experience, reflecting on the facilitators' questions and perspectives, attending to feelings and re-evaluating the experience (cf. Boud, Keogh & Walker 1985). In addition there was another "re-evaluating the experience" when the analyses of the field-notes, treated as hypothetical, were reported back and discussed among the participants.

In analysing the field notes, I tried to distinguish forms of reflection. The three examples given in this paper, all show an internal focus. So did most of "the reflection on action" in the project. The reflection was action-oriented, discussed efficacy and efficiency of alternative courses of action, and consider what will be the right thing to do within a certain context. Using Kemmis (1985) framework, reflection on the "*Office Hour*" is characterized by a combination of technical and practical reflection. The principal focused on what he had managed to do, and he took the social context for granted. When reflecting on the facilitator's questions, he also judged the rightness of action. However, there was no discussion of how the norm of being available for everyone had developed. There was no critical discussion of the constraints of the institutional settings, why he conceived his leadership role the way he

did, and how criteria for 'good' leadership had come to be accepted. Neither the principal nor the facilitator managed to treat the political context as problematic. As an "outsider" the facilitator asked critical questions and held up a mirror to the principal, but they both focused on internal issues. One explanation may have to do with the fact that engaging in reflective inquires was a new experience both to the facilitator and the principal. They were both struggling to learn new skills of observation and peer review. To treat their own context as problematic seemed difficult in such a situation.

Later when this analysis was discussed among the participants, it was possible to reflect in a more critical way. We were able to discover how most daily practices were not directly motivated, how the routines were the predominant form of day-to-day social activity, and how they were psychologically linked to the minimizing of unconscious sources of anxiety (cf. Giddens 1984). Being a principal in Norwegian compulsory schools has historically been linked to housekeeping and maintaining order. The principal seldom interferes with what is going on in classrooms. Both parties are aware of their zones of influences. When principals and teachers discuss, they talk about ad hoc problems like student discipline or parental complaints, rather than curriculum policies or anything else related to instructional efforts. It is naive to assume that policy statements towards restructuring of schools will alter these relationships and these zones of influences in the short run.

To construct the event into *a text*, and to create a *distance* to the experience, seemed to be important for critical reflection to happen. Reflection on the text enabled the participants to articulate and enhance knowledge in ways that exposed the political aspects of schooling. But translating thoughts and ideas into action is not as straightforward a step as it might appear. We can desire to do something and believe it is possible, but still it is difficult to do. To make the tacit knowledge explicit, does not mean one will necessarily be more capable of "doing well" (cf. Zeichner 1993).

A similar conclusion can be given to the reflection on "*Teaching Students*". The principal's and the facilitator's reflections revealed the problem of classroom control and how to judge the rightness of action in a social context. The facilitator brought in a view which was conceived as challenging of practice, but the implementation of the curriculum was not treated

as problematic. The national curriculum guidelines were taken-for-granted. It was not until the written analyses were brought back later, that we were able to discuss why classroom control was so important seen from a teacher's perspective, and why it was so difficult to create classroom cultures in which disciplined inquiry thrived, as suggested in the national curriculum guidelines.

When a distance in time and space to this specific event had been created, we were able to treat the context as problematic. We focused on *why* teaching was characterized by conservatism, individualism and presentism (Lortie 1975), and why it was experienced as a risky enterprise. To turn classroom work into extensive student participation, enhanced teachers' dependence on students' collaborations, and would increase the uncertainty. The teachers would have to manage greater vulnerability to students than if they taught in a more closed and traditional manner. By introducing the "dilemma-language" of Berlak and Berlak (1981) as a theoretical framework, and Cohen & Barnes (1993) analyses of the relationship between pedagogy and policy, it became clear how reform policy underestimated the ability of principals and teachers to generate new forms of practices consistent with the reform ideology. The participants experienced the importance of theoretical concepts to analyse what was happening in every-day practice. Theoretical knowledge helped to enlighten their practice. Although theoretical knowledge can never tell exactly what to do in a specific situation, personal constructs cannot be discriminated from the concepts which are in use.

The example of "*Teaching Students*" also showed that our emotions and feelings could be significant sources of learning, as well as barriers. In an interview after several observations this principal stated:

It was easier to be a principal before. All this discussion has resulted in a feeling of frustration and discouragement. There are so many expectations, and I experience a lack of competency, which is not a good feeling. So much ought to be done, and time is a very critical factor. (Author's translation)

However, when I invited him to discuss my analyses two years later before publishing, his viewpoint had changed. He reported that he had managed to develop his own practice. He referred to feedback from his teachers and his students. In fact, this feedback had come as a surprise to him. The teachers had told him that he had become a better listener, and that he had, by being so frank about his own feelings and experiences related to the project,

encouraged them to participate in reflective inquiries. They had discovered a change in him, and believed he was willing to learn.

In example three, "*The Meeting*", we were not subject to a *coercion to act* in the same way as in the two other examples. We did not have to act on the spot in order to cope with an immediate situation, keep control and achieve objectives. We had space for reflection and mutual discussion with each other, at least for an hour. The 'coercion to act' phenomenon (Handal 1991) could not explain why we did not engage in critical reflection in the first place. School culture is not characterized by critical reflection, and even as an "outsider" one becomes influenced by this fact. To follow new rules is demanding. The discussion between the participants had to be written down, reported back and reflected on before we were able to discuss more critical perspectives.

In their own review, the principals emphasized that participating in action research resulted in a greater awareness of their responsibility as educators. They referred to situations where they managed to address curriculum and instructional issues in a better way than before. But sometimes the process of reflecting on what was happening in their practice, caused more frustrations than emancipatory feelings. Both journal writings, interviews and fieldnotes from peer review reveal this:

When you are engaged in daily work and routines, and a lot of things are happening, to find time for reflection becomes a burden. There are always tasks you must do. [...] In fact, I found writing in a journal very time-consuming. It is a burden. However, I have experienced some benefit out of it. Participating in this project has stimulated more reflection. Usually I never write down my reflection, but I do reflect on what is happening (From the interview with the principal at Bygda school). (Author's translation)

I give priority to be available for my staff. My door is always open. This means other tasks have to wait if teachers need to talk with me. Maybe that is a wrong priority? Maybe I should sometimes close my door in order to do some paperwork and more long-term planning? I always have to do paper work at home. I know I haven't managed to be an initiator of pedagogical change, even though I know the staff expect me to do it. I don't have enough time to do all of the tasks. In addition, I am not a very good ideological leader. Maybe I haven't realized how important it is. By participating in this project, I have discovered new aspects of leadership, and I think I have developed both my thinking and my skills. I am now motivated to take more education; I think I need it to become a real educator. But time is a problem. I am so dissatisfied by having so little time for administration and leadership (Fieldnotes from

Flatland school: vice principal reflecting on his actions). (Author's translation)

These reflections might have a connection with leaders' aspirations to be considered as professionals in a job where they felt they continually had to respond to daily emergencies. The leaders' descriptions could be a way of defending why they had not met expectations of being more reflective. The principals knew the "right" answers. They had "learned" that long term planning, having a vision for their school, and reflection on action were important to call oneself professional. Did this mean that engaging in reflective inquiries in fact resulted in an intensification of work? In addition to all other duties and demands, they were expected to plan for reflective inquiries. Maybe in the short run reflective inquiries meant an intensification of work, particularly because spaces and opportunities for critical reflection upon practice had been curtailed owing to the contemporary conditions of schooling. However, when discussing this issue with the principals five years after the project started, they emphasized how action research helped them to a greater awareness of their responsibility as educators.

In this discussion another point became clear: The municipal level represented an opportunity to enable or constrain reflective inquiries at the school level. In one of the three municipalities which participated in the project, the superintendent had chosen to play an important role in order to create time and spaces for reflective practice. He used his power position to influence the politicians in the municipality. Through this he encouraged and created opportunities both for principals and teachers to engage in reflective inquiries.

Somebody may say that "faith" in reflective activities is given too much weight in the discussion about professionalism in schools. But both principals and superintendents will be involved in a struggle for negotiating, maintaining and renegotiating their legitimacy in order to influence the change process in schools. In this process analytical competency and reflection on action among peers may become crucial.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I have discussed action research as an approach to the development of

educational leadership. As demonstrated in the paper, clarifying and reflecting on what was going on, had a focus on instrumental concerns and on ethical implications of the work. Little attention was given to broader issues and contexts that affected educational practice, and the political context was not treated as problematic. All participants dealt with internal issues using internal perspectives. Using Kemmis' (1985) framework for distinguishing forms of reflection, the reflection on action can be described as technical and practical reflection. When confronted with a *written* analysis of specific events which "insiders" and "outsiders" had experienced together in the project, the participants were able to discuss practice in a more critical way.

*Plurality in perspectives* seemed to be a prerequisite to ensure critical examination. This can be obtained through a collaboration between "insiders" and "outsiders", like the way we did in this project. The participants emphasized the need for an external and critical challenge in order for development to progress in a spiral form rather than a closed circle. In other words, action research as a critical examination of the ideological basis of practice, and as a problematization of routines, seemed to depend on an external perspective in the discourse. At least one of the persons, participating in the discourse, should belong to another working context than the practice which was analysed. Then an element of critique of the present understanding could be triggered off. However, the competency of the external facilitator seemed to be crucial in this process.

The school culture is characterized by coercion to act, and in a way the facilitators in this project became influenced by this fact when they visited the school. Time, rules and resources were necessary, but not sufficient conditions to establish reflective inquiries (cf. Handal 1991). It required *knowledge about analytical concepts*.

In this project both "insiders" and "outsiders" were collaborating in understanding the practice of leadership. They were both studying their own and each others practice, but in addition the facilitators *wrote* down what happened. Through reporting back their analyses, making them a subject of discussion, the external facilitators contributed to a richer reconstruction of experiences. However, it required both time and knowledge about theoretical concepts which could be used in these analyses. How the picture was seen, depended upon the concepts that

could be brought to it. Observation was more than merely "seeing what is" because it included the theoretical framework in which they interpreted what they saw (cf. Codd 1989). In other words, theories and concepts made a substantial difference to what was seen. In order to move from a descriptive self reflection and ethical justification, to address the structures of power in schools, reflection would need to be analytic and involve dialogue with others over time. But the contextualized knowledge should receive equal recognition with the decontextualized knowledge of scholarship. The theoretical education, which seemed necessary, should include an understanding of the type of control that state and society exercise on the school, a historical perspective on educational leadership within a national and local context, and an understanding of the micro-politics in schools.

The socially constructed contexts shape the professional relations in schools, and in the project the structures of power were addressed by focusing on the relationship between people in formal power position at school level and at municipal level. By engaging people in power positions at both levels in reflective inquiries, both groups became aware of their responsibility as educators. In maintaining, modeling and encouraging reflective practice at the school level, the role of the superintendent seemed important. He or she was in a unique power position to influence politicians to create *support*, time and space for reflection and to improve contemporary conditions of schooling. A deficiency at an upper level in the school organization can probably not be fully compensated for by strength at the lower level.

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## Appendix

### *THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN NORWAY*

**National Curriculum Guidelines:** The Government and Parliament establish the laws and the educational objectives and framework for Norwegian education. The Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs has the overall responsibility for administering the educational system and implementing the national curriculum. National objectives for education stress the importance of providing equal access to education regardless of domicile, sex, social or cultural background and aptitude. All children irrespective of physical or mental disability or learning difficulties, are as far as possible incorporated into the ordinary school system. There is no streaming according to abilities, gender or other factors. All public education in Norway is free, including tertiary education.

There are three main levels in the educational system:

1. compulsory school (ages 7-13 and lower secondary, ages 13-16);
2. upper secondary education, including apprenticeship training (ages 16-19);
3. tertiary education: colleges and universities.

The Storting recently decided to lower the school starting age to six in 1997, and to extend the period of compulsory schooling to ten years instead of nine (Reform -97).

**Private schools:** The private sector in Norwegian education is small (1,6 % of pupils in compulsory school, and about 4 % in upper secondary). Private schools are regarded as a supplement to state schools rather than as competitors. Most of the private schools are based on a particular religious denomination or philosophy of life. As a rule private schools receive a grant that covers 85 % of the running costs.

The rise in the number of immigrants has increased the proportion of non-Norwegian-speaking students in state schools. In 1992 there were about 21000 of these students at primary and lower secondary school, representing about 75 different language groups.

**Evaluation:** During the primary stage no achievement grades (marks) are given to students. Twice a year the parents have consultations with teachers where they are given an informal

report on student progress. The students are encouraged to be present at these consultations. Grades (marks) are given at the lower secondary level. At the end of year 9 there is a public exam covering the main subjects: Norwegian, mathematics and English. We do not have a tradition of monitoring or teacher appraisal. The teachers decide individually or in collaboration with colleagues how to deliver the national curriculum. However, the curriculum guidelines emphasize collaborative efforts among teachers, and the Ministry is now developing a suitable model for national evaluation. So far, it seems clear that the Ministry put a lot of faith in school-based evaluation.

**Small schools:** Norway has a scattered population. As it is considered important that children should attend school without having to leave their families, there are a large number of small schools in remote and sparsely populated areas. Approximately 1200 primary schools have more than one age group in each class. Some of these schools have less than six students. The maximum number of students in one class is 28 at primary school and 30 at secondary school.

**Management:** In each county there is a National education office headed by a *director*, which carries out central government functions such as ensuring that decisions made by county and municipal bodies are in conformity with the relevant statutory provisions. It also acts as an appeal agency for decisions concerning individual pupils. In recent years a considerable amount of responsibility and decision-making power has devolved from central to local government. The municipalities are responsible for the running and administration of primary and lower secondary schools, and the counties for the upper secondary schools. In most municipalities a municipal committee and a *superintendent* (chief education officer) are in charge of compulsory education. Each school is run by a *principal* (head), assisted by a vice-principal (depending on the number of students), and a coordinating committee on which are represented the parents, the teachers, the students and the remaining staff. In most of the primary schools the job as a principal is a combination of being a teacher and a principal. How many lessons a week the principal will teach, are depending on the number of students in school. If for instance a school has 200 students, the principal will have to teach approximately 10 hours a week in addition to administrative duties. This means that a principal is considered like one of the colleagues as well as the leader of the school.

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