

Chapter 11

Codification of Present Swedish Curriculum Processes: Linking Educational Activities over Time and Space

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Abstract The aim of this chapter is to explore the relationship between curriculum and leadership research with examples of three recently completed mixed methods studies of assessment cultures and leadership as interlinked activities of governance and school management. We employ curriculum theoretical concepts like e.g. codes and arenas to illustrate their usefulness as a point of departure to further theorize a changing educational landscape. In our study, we illustrate how curriculum and leadership research are historically linked. We put forward some concepts to address the increased complexity of the governance system, and we stress the need to strengthen how different ways of forming the steering system interplay with key curriculum questions. Leadership researchers have, to a large extent, studied school development on a municipality- and organizational level asking questions on how to manage and guide school development. In contrast, curriculum researchers have studied school development from a reform- and governmental perspective more asking questions on how to steer educational development through law, curricula and evaluation. We suggest that these research traditions ought to be further united in order to develop both traditions in less normative, and more, critical ways, and to answer crucial educational questions in glocal times (Marginson and Rhoades. Conceptualising global relations at the glonacal levels. Paper presented at the annual international forum of the Conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Richmond, VA, November 15–18, 2001). This chapter concludes with an argument for a new comparative curriculum code due to major shifts including curriculum practices, message systems, levels, arenas and number of curriculum-makers engaged.

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Introduction

In Sweden and other Nordic countries the formation of educational systems has primarily been an issue for the national state in a rather homogenous society. Today, governance of education is embedded in global movements and a multicultural society influencing the role and function of the state. We will use two empirical cases, based in three recently completed research projects, to illuminate how curriculum and leadership research have worked in tandem to explain and develop both policy and practice. The cases focus on the assessment culture of the Swedish schools and implications of changes in governance for local educational leadership.

Ever since the establishment of the comprehensive school system in the 1950s and onward the interplay between educational research, policy and practice has been stressed and elaborated in various forms. Research focusing curricula, management, organization, evaluation and improvement was developed to support educational reforms. Curriculum and leadership research have often been labeled in different ways and partly they have been separately developed. However, in Sweden they emanate from the same line of studies with a tight connection between societal missions and research. The aim of this chapter is to explore assessment cultures and leadership as interlinked activities of governance and school management. We will employ curriculum theoretical concepts like e.g. codes and arenas to illustrate their usefulness as a point of departure to further theorize the changing Swedish educational landscape.

Different curricula, frames and regulations as well as curriculum-making constitute shifting educational experiences and paths and as a consequence also different ways to develop knowledge on education. With changing conditions follow both a window of opportunity and a need to scrutinize the way we conceptualize and research various educational phenomena. In the remainder of the chapter we first present changes in the Swedish educational system. This is followed by a short outline of some key features of research issues in the development of the Swedish comprehensive school system. We then turn to our two empirical cases on assessment cultures and local leadership. Finally, some conclusions are drawn about the development of curriculum and leadership research.

Changes in the Swedish Educational System

After World War II a comprehensive school system was developed in Sweden. It was unified and un-streamed enrolling all students – irrespectible of sex, social or geographical backgrounds and the students were put in the same age-based schools. In the case of compulsory and upper secondary education, the schools were almost exclusively run by municipalities. This set the agenda for constructing and negotiating the concept a *school for all*. Usually, students attended the nearest school and primarily tracking, if necessary, was meant to take place within schools.

The Swedish Democratic Welfare State

For long, the Swedish Social Democrats formed governments by themselves having strong impact on policy, especially up until the mid-1970s. Education was regarded as an essential part of an all embracing welfare policy and the concept of equality was a guiding principle for reforms, and the method for achieving *equality* was a high degree of standardization with funding's and important decisions made at the national level. Sweden was characterized as a typical social democratic welfare-state regime (Esping-Andersen 1996). Hence, public education came to be both a part of the Swedish welfare project and a prominent example of it (Lindblad and Wallin 1993). During a period of expansion of the modern welfare systems in the 1950s, political governance and administration of reforms were relatively straightforward. Politicians made the priorities and decided upon the goals and resources that were supposed to guarantee attainment. Failures were usually attributed to shortcomings in the original plan or in the execution of the plan, and problems were expected to be solved at the next stage. Post-war expansion of education made central planning important and national educational administrators, politicians and educational researchers came to work rather closely together (Marklund 1985). Established within national educational planning were concepts like social engineering and a rational paradigm (Forsberg and Pettersson 2014; cf. Marklund 2008). The so called rolling reforms initiated in the 1960s can serve as an example. Reforms based on findings in state-commissioned investigations were implemented and evaluated. Reformulations and further change were expected to take place on a regular basis (Johnsson Harrie 2009).

During the 1970s a number of factors, internal as well as external, challenged the perception of a welfare state. Globalization, new communication technologies, unstable political situation and the rise of discussions on a knowledge society all promoted changed relations between policy, labour market and economy (SOU 1990:44). In addition, the better-educated citizen called for enhanced influence. The criticism of the welfare state focused on the inadequacy of governance, increased costs, inefficiency and an overload of tasks (Held 1997). Despite educational reforms and resource allocations the system did not deliver what it promised. Even though reforms had changed the distribution of education socially and geographically, social background was still the best predictor of educational attainment (Härnqvist 1992). The Swedish model with a strong public sector was considered rather as a problem than an effective instrument for distribution of welfare and social change (cf. Forsberg and Lundgren 2004/2009).

Changes in Governance on Both Vertical and Horizontal Axes

In the last two decades the Swedish public sector and education system have been radically and extensively transformed (Englund 1995; Lundahl et al. 2014). Shifts in governance of Swedish education during the last decades include changes on

both vertical and horizontal axes. These can be seen as expressions of changes in the relationship between the state, the society and the individual. On the vertical axes, globalization of education is manifested in transfer of policy and participation in programs initiated by international organizations like e.g. the EU and the OECD. At the same time, decentralization and deregulation have distributed responsibilities in new ways with municipalities as chief responsible for compulsory and upper secondary school. However, curricula, syllabuses and system for control and evaluation rest on the national level, even though there have been changes over time in the level of detail and degree of precision.

On the horizontal axes a number of suppliers of schools can be identified such as private companies or non-profit organizations running independent schools along municipality-driven schools. In addition, a third informal sector is growing, the so called shadow education sector, with offers on for example homework support (Forsberg 2015). Changes on both the vertical and the horizontal axes have together contributed to an increase of players involved in the governance of education; including governmental organizations (GO) as well as non-governmental organizations (NGO), international governmental organizations (IGO) and grey-zone actors (Lindblad et al. 2015). We will shortly describe two waves of reforms from the late 1980s up until today as a background for our cases on assessment cultures and leadership, respectively. These reforms have significantly altered the framing of schooling as well as the knowledge, values and norms codified in education.

Two Waves of Reforms

Two National Commissions paved the way for changes in the governing of education and introduced a move from centralism, universalism, social engineering and consensus to decentralisation, particularism and polarisation (Lindblad and Wallin 1993), as well as to marketization (Lindensjö and Lundgren 2000). The *first wave of reforms* was initiated in the late 1980s with a clear policy shift illuminated in a series of activities that affected the structure, distribution and content of education – but also its governance and control. The aim of these reforms was said to increase democracy, professionalism and efficiency (e.g. Lindblad and Popkewitz 2001). Up until the 1980s, the Swedish educational system was highly centralized. The Regional Boards of Education were responsible for enforcing educational policies and making decisions on the allocation of resources for each school. In 1991, municipalities were given full authority for primary and secondary education and granted responsibility for the organization, implementation, and operation of schools. This included staffing and in-service training for teachers and principals. Due to changes in the national regulations of independent schools they increased in numbers. Municipalities and independent schools became the principal organizers of schools, but it was still mandatory to hire a principal as an administrative and educational leader of the school. Many Swedish schools are small in comparison to large urban schools in e.g. America, and a single principal often leads a campus

without additional administrative assistance. A result of these reforms of decentralization and deregulation was a more heterogeneous Swedish school system, opening up for a larger variation in organization, instruction and outcomes. In other respects the system was made more homogeneous in that upper-secondary school programs were made equivalent in enabling university studies and the pre-school system became more integrated with the comprehensive school (Skott et al. 2015b).

During the last years of the 1990s and the first decade in the twentieth century Sweden experienced a *second wave of reforms*. The line of action can be described in a two-way direction. The state is regarded as an important source of action, change and control. At the same time the municipalities, local schools and their actors are made accountable and responsible for the organization of education, allocation of resources, student achievements and school results. However, central means of control remained and became even more important e.g. the Education Act, objectives of the national curriculum and syllabi and the national system of testing and grading. These artefacts of hard governing have then been combined with soft governing tools introduced in the 1990s and reinforced in the 2000s, such as governmental development plans for education and a system of national quality assurance and assessments (Bergh 2010; Lundahl 2006; Nytell 2006). There was a shift into a more evaluation based discourse of governance with strong focus on assessment, monitoring and inspection on both the individual and system level. The curriculum and the assessment system also came to be more aligned and international comparative tests were included in the national system and discourse on assessment and evaluation (Pettersson 2008). The second wave has been described as reclamation of a more homogeneous and teacher-proof school system where school content, in particular subject knowledge, has once again been more nationally uniform (Forsberg and Román 2014). In all, changes in governance, curriculum, and assessments and their relations created a new frame for education. Questions may thus be raised on how assessment and educational leadership are discussed and analyzed within a societal discourse of education. This is particularly important when local actors are expected to take actions and the state monitor performances within an outspoken discourse of quality and equity in a regime of control. Not least, in relation to a society less homogenous and with students with increased variances in cultural background.

From Frame Factor Theory to Code, Context and Curriculum Processes

At an AERA meeting in 1979 professor Ulf P Lundgren stated that curriculum studies in Sweden are rooted in questions asked by national politics and answers given by research to the conflict between creating equal opportunities for all students and adjustments to a differentiated and technologically advanced society. In the following we will present how the early Swedish curriculum theory was developed.

Social Engineering: A Basis for Curriculum Studies

An organized and agreed relationship between politics and science can in Sweden be dated back to at least the 1930s based on a specific collaboration between the state and organizations representing capital and labor interests. A key issue for the public sector was to simultaneously cope with demands on democratization and efficiency. The development involved various reforms that been summarized with concepts like – centralism, universalism, social engineering and consensus (Lindblad and Wallin 1993). In Sweden cultural homogeneity, secular modernity and social-democracy provided a basis for promoting a discourse on social engineering. But rather than an intermediary social engineer that runs in between politics and science, social science itself came to cooperate more closely with politics and administration (Marklund 2008).

Educational Policy, School Development and Curriculum Research

Swedish curriculum studies have been elaborated together and in close connection to politics and national agencies. The endeavor of launching a model for comprehensive education as well as the implementation of the model was closely followed by educational research. An early example is Torsten Husén, an internationally renowned Swedish researcher. Most of his research has been oriented towards policy issues closely related to school reforms in Sweden (e.g. Husén and Boalt 1968). Interested in comparisons of social and economic heritage and the development of a comprehensive school system Husén embodied two separate, but interrelated themes: the relation between education, social justice and meritocracy, and social efficiency and the allocation of individuals. However, Swedish curriculum research has also been closely connected to school policy and reforms (Vislie et al. 1997). Hence, Swedish researchers came to be engaged in the activity of providing politicians with empirically based knowledge for policy decisions. However, a sharp line was articulated between politicians asking questions and researchers giving answers (Säfström 1994). Within this tradition a number of empirical studies were conducted evaluating various educational reforms. In this way Swedish educational policy, practice and research to some extent submerged, creating specific educational researchers as *state intellectuals* giving answers to policy.

The Frame Factor Theory: A Step Towards Educational Sociology

Within the paradigm of *state intellectuals* Urban Dahllöf in the 1960s formulated the frame factor theory giving special attention to what was conceived as a *black box* of educational research (e.g. Dahllöf 1967, 1971). The main question was if and how the un-streamed groups of students in the comprehensive school system had implications for classroom processes and school results. Dahllöf was especially interested in processes that were beyond control for teachers and students. The concept of frames, introduced by Dahllöf, came to be important in Swedish educational research and has later on been elaborated and discussed in a number of studies (e.g. Lundgren 1972; Gustafsson 1977; Skott 2009).

Curriculum Codes: The Socio-economic and Historical Context of Education

In the 1970s Ulf P Lundgren followed in Dahllöfs' footsteps, studying the framed classroom processes. Lundgren elaborated the concepts of steering group, codes and contexts. Codes relate to the purpose, content and method of a curriculum. He raised questions on how the frames were constituted, and identified historically developed curriculum codes manifested in the selection and organization of school knowledge (e.g. Lundgren 1977). Shifts in codes were related to changed relations between production and reproduction (Lundgren 1983); neither the purposes of education nor the subject content were taken for granted.

Since schools are institutions reproducing social values, the organization of teaching includes activities on three levels (e.g. Lundgren 1977, 1983): First, the selection and organization of knowledge, norms and values; second, the governing and organization of education including educational research and development and third, how the political curriculum document relates to classroom activities. The concept of code includes a multilevel way of thinking related to actions on different system levels, also expressed in terms of arenas for formulation, realization and mediation (Lindensjö and Lundgren 1986, 2000). This elaboration on linkage of levels includes thinking and reasoning on how different actors and educational activities are coordinated. As such, governance and leadership is integrated in the code concept. In the section *Educational Leadership in a curriculum tradition* we discuss this further. Curriculum research was presented as a pedagogical problem focused on the transformation of knowledge, values and norms from one generation to the next and the part played by education in reproduction (Kallos and Lundgren 1979). With an historical lens Lundgren identified four different curriculum codes: the classical, the moral, the rational, and the realistic. Even though they succeed each other there are also layers of the predecessors in later times.

Curriculum research in Sweden came eventually to leave a positivistic behavioral tradition and entered research inspired by sociology and history due to the interest introduced by Lundgren concerning codes and context. As such, the work of Pierre Bourdieu (cf. Callewaert and Nilsson 1979, 1980; Broady 1990) and Basil Bernstein (cf. Bernstein and Lundgren 1983; Beach 1995) came to influence Swedish curriculum research and the further development of sociology of education. Through this influence reproduction theory became noticeable during the 1970s more focusing on the function of school subjects and school knowledge as sociocultural reproduction (e.g. Berner et al. 1977). The codification of educational knowledge was by Bernstein further differentiated in relation to three educational message system: curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation.

[...] curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge, pedagogy defines what counts as valid transmission of knowledge, and evaluation defines what counts as valid realization of this knowledge on the part of the taught. (Bernstein 1975 p. 47)

This quote captures a complex reality especially relevant for our empirical cases and for analyzing the shifts and moves of contemporary education (cf. Forsberg 2011).

Curriculum as a Political Problem and the Linguistic Turn

The Swedish researcher Tomas Englund fits very well for explaining the shift towards sociology and history. He introduced curriculum as a political problem, as a site for different groups struggling over education and its content (Englund 1986). Englund analyzed the content of citizenship education in Swedish policy and textbooks concluding in an alternative curriculum code in relation to Lundgren – the civic curriculum code – including three conceptions: the patriarchal, the scientific-rational and the democratic.

What became evident within studies influenced by sociology and history was the importance of language and consequently some of the curriculum research made a linguistic turn in the late 1980s and early 1990s focusing on meanings inherent in the curriculum and textbooks (e.g. Östman 1995; Selander 1992). Another prominent curriculum theorist employing historical and linguistic perspectives is Agneta Linné (1998, 2015), researching the formation of teacher education and knowledge traditions within higher education. The emphasis of language was also significant when Swedish curriculum research in the 2000s developed an interest for globalization and how this affected national curriculum and how different groups and organizations were struggling over education and its content (e.g. Pettersson 2008, 2014; Nordin 2012).

Curriculum as a Sociological Problem and Phenomenography

Curriculum research in Sweden is normally discussed in terms of a bias towards systemic and structural issues, but Swedish curriculum research have also been influential in entering the classrooms to study curriculum as a practice and the role of agency. As a matter of fact the Swedish curriculum tradition was born within an empirical classroom research tradition (cf. Dahllöf 1967; Lundgren 1972, 1977; Gustafsson 1977). Researchers were interested in explaining the outcome of classroom processes, especially the underachievement of the educational system in creating a uniform, equivalent and democratic education, said to be a school for all. Within this specific focus several studies were conducted e.g. Callewaert and Nilsson (1979, 1980), Arnman and Jönsson (1983), Arfwedson (1985), and Arfwedson and Lundman (1984). The main analytical frame for catching these processes has been developed within the conceptualizations of what is perceived as the delivered and/or experienced curriculum. One scientific strand flourishing from these initial questionings is phenomenography with explicit claims on what and how students learn in school and higher education (Marton 1981). Within this trait of curriculum research students' conceptions of various phenomena are examined – and findings show that educational phenomena and learning objects are experienced in qualitatively different ways.

Curriculum as a Governance Problem

Beside these inside and outside classroom studies in Swedish curriculum research there is also a profound tradition evident concerning governance, leadership, organization and development of the school. For instance, Erik Wallin and Gunnar Berg are inspired by a neo-rationalistic view on organizations, which they make relevant for the education sector by inscribing it in the main ideas and conceptualizations of the Swedish frame factor theory model. According to their view – the school-as-an-institution is seen as established within society by dominating interest groups for promoting their goals and interests, which is formally codified and manifested in the curricula and other equivalent rule systems. Simultaneously, an organization is also under the pressure of informal control mechanisms, e.g. traditions, rituals, school codes, public opinion. The result of this is that the school-as-an-organization is considered as a result of interplay between the formal steering that emerges from the state and different kinds of informal influences rooted in the society in general, and particular in the local community. As such, the activities in schools are being shaped in the juncture between state legality and social legitimacy. Consequently, there is an essential established connection between an organization and the structure of society (Berg 1986; Berg and Wallin 1986).

Educational Leadership in a Curriculum Tradition

In *Handbook of Leadership for Learning* (Townsend and MacBeath 2011) the editors argue that the use of the concept leadership became common only 20 years ago. Earlier the term was management but it became associated with conformity, uniformity and stasis. Leadership comes along as an alternative focused on change, development and movement (Townsend and MacBeath 2011). Educational leadership was used in the Nordic countries in the 1970s and 1980s but internationally:

[...] it was not until the 1990s that the interest in leadership really began to gather momentum. Chairs and centers were established in universities, new journals were created or renamed, development programs were introduced and governments began to pick up on the emerging trends. (Townsend and MacBeath 2011 p. 3)

Obviously, the concept of leadership is multifaceted and we need to clarify it. In this section, we elaborate three important concepts in Sweden – *styrning*, *ledning* and *ledarskap* (*steering*, *leading* and *leadership*) – for understanding the political and scientific discourse of leadership in Sweden. All three concepts are well rooted within the Swedish curriculum theory tradition and are often used for linguistic clarity of what in English most often is discussed in terms of governance and management of schools. The three terms steering, leading and leadership make sense from a Swedish context, but is maybe not that evident translated into English. The concepts are further discussed in case II.

Steering, Leading and Leadership: Context Dependent Concepts?

Steering, leading and leadership are elements of the *steering system* (Forsberg and Wallin 2006). Within the Swedish curriculum tradition it is looked upon as a system of rules, formally drawn up by the government to exert influence on processes and results in education (Skott 2009). The concept of leading captures the relational aspect where steering switches to local processes. Here individuals or defined groups of individuals (instead of the government) have the responsibility to organize and exercise influences (Nihlfors 2003).

Steering, leading and leadership create conditions for teaching and learning. We are especially focusing on leaders acting in-between groups of people, in and on different levels and in different networks (e.g. Robinson et al. 2009). We limit our discussion to individuals with formal functions and positions as educational leaders, well aware of that many other sources have influence (Seashore Louis et al. 2010). The formal functions and positions of leaders are manifold, from politicians and professionals on the national, regional and school owner (municipality and independent) levels to the school and preschool level (e.g. principals, preschool leaders, teachers).

Within the Swedish curriculum theory tradition issues regarding the steering system have been analyzed in relation to school organization and school development as well as investigations directly addressing school leadership (cf. Svedberg 2014; Berg 1986). Using examples from our own and others research we will pay special attention to leading and leadership has in a curriculum perspective.

Codes, Arenas, Curriculum Processes and Leading

Following Dahllöf, it was above described how Lundgren raised questions on how frames are constituted. Discussing reasoning and concepts relating to leading and leadership the concepts of codes and arenas can be taken as starting points. Codes relate to the so called representation problem, emanating from the period when production and reproduction became separate processes. What is to be taught in schools is not up to the teachers to find out alone. Society and the state is strongly involved in what content is to be selected and how to organize schools and teaching in classrooms. Noteworthy is that one level of curriculum explicitly highlights the importance of organization. This means that the concept code can be used for analyzing linking of different levels at different times, but also to more narrowly study what happens at different system levels. As such the concept of codes can be most useful in discussing the activities of leading and leadership within a steering system.

Although the organizational level was recognized as important during the early days of curriculum theory in Sweden, it seems like the concepts were mostly developed either related to the national or the local level. However, during the early period of Swedish curriculum theory a profound tradition discussing leadership and organizational research was developed. This includes studies by researchers like Erik Wallin and Gunnar Berg, as mentioned above (e.g. Berg 1986; Berg and Wallin 1986). The curriculum theory concepts were however not elaborated further by them. This goes also for researchers studying school improvement (e.g. Ekholm 1976).

The concept of code thus includes a multilevel way of reasoning related to actions on different levels. This is where the analytical conception of different arenas for formulation, realization and mediation is important for understanding different activities (Lindensjö and Lundgren 2000). Today, the concept of curriculum processes is most used as an analytical tool for understanding variation in activities on different levels. These curriculum processes is understood as occurring at different levels but interlinked and related to each other in the form of textual activities. Some activities go on while text is formulated, while others are visible when texts are to be enacted (indicating that governing has an inbuilt direction, from the top to the bottom, but one can also identify curriculum cycles, when realization activities precedes formulation). During different times, and in different local settings, the complexity of the realization arena varies (Skott 2009). In this complex setting of curriculum processes on different arenas it is possible to identify various, what can

be called, leading positions. These leading positions are not only recognized within the formal system, it is also possible to locate leading positions in an informal system of steering e.g. media actors, educational grey-zone actors (Lindblad et al. 2015), or national and international organizations involved in education, but they are crucial to uplift for discussing curriculum processes. All of these leading positions are important for the linking between different levels in the governing system, handling for one thing the curriculum as a governing means (Nihlfors 2003).

Research on Curriculum Processes and Leading

One position identified as important for curriculum processes is the superintendent (Moos et al. 2016). The educational superintendent is a research area that few researchers in Sweden and Europe until just recently have had in explicit focus for understanding curriculum processes. This can be contrasted against the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) that since 1923, nearly every tenth year has made a study of the American school superintendence (e.g. Glass et al. 2000; Kowalski et al. 2010). During the last years a series of symposiums (called In search of the educational superintendent) stressing research on educational leaders conclude that the term superintendent, frequently used in different settings, referred to different role expectations, duties and responsibilities, serving different purposes and needs (Nir 2014). A result of this cooperation became a survey instrument used in thirteen countries and the results of this survey are presented in the publication *The Educational Superintendent; Between Trust and Regulation* (Nir 2014).

Within this growing field of research various theoretical perspectives are used, and curriculum theory can be presented as one voice in a larger choir of perspectives. Scholars from different research areas have shown an interest in the black box of schooling where leading and leadership are important phenomenon. For one thing political scientists have shown an interest in the schools as a political organization (Pierre 2007) or in municipality ownership (Jarl 2012). One problem with the spreading, in terms of research areas, is that researchers on governing of schools represented by political scientists and researchers on leadership of schools represented by educationalists rarely meet at the same conferences. On educational conferences these studies have mostly been presented in leadership sessions and not in curriculum theory sessions, which might contribute to a low profile for this kind of research in some areas. This observation also goes for research studying the position of local politicians, which is surprisingly sparsely observed as an important actor for educational leadership. However, Wallin (2000) has evaluated projects with local politicians in focus. This is especially surprising for the Nordic context due to that the municipality level in many respects is an interface between the national and the local educational policies. The local is a level where national and local interests meet and political and professional standpoints on knowledge are interchanged and negotiated. This observation has been discussed by several Nordic researchers (e.g. Moos and Paulsen 2014) but in these discussions the results have primarily been

highlighted, and seldom are the discussions placed within a context of curriculum and curriculum-making.

Key Actors for Leading

One actor that has been of interest is the principal, but more seldom pre-school leaders are in focus (Nihlfors et al. 2015). During the first 10 years of the twenty-first century the research on school principals have increased across Northern Europe. However, there is still a need for advanced research on these matters (Ärlestig et al. 2016). Noteworthy is that there is an emerging interest within leadership research to understand implications of context for principals' daily work. This, combined with a growing interest on theoretical elaborations for understanding aspects of leading and leadership, might indicate that the timing is right for a development of research on what can be called curriculum leadership. This can perhaps create a link between curriculum- and leadership research for a better understanding of the specific context of educational leadership.

Case I: A Shifting National Assessment Culture

Contemporary governance and discussions on school leadership in Sweden has enhanced the importance of quality and how to establish and develop it in a knowledge society. Assessment and evaluation take different forms, but during the last 25 years in Sweden there have been a strong emphasis on tests focusing on performance output, especially international large-scale assessments and activities that monitor, value and judge outcomes (cf. Forsberg and Wallin 2006; Lundahl 2006). We describe and analyze an assessment culture that has been on the move for some time now. We use data from research projects on assessment cultures, international large-scale assessments and educational control and quality regimes. Some have been funded by the Swedish research council (Forsberg 2006; Lindblad et al. 2015) and a number of studies (Forsberg and Wallin 2006; Nytell 2006; Pettersson 2008) were conducted within the research program of STEP at Uppsala University primarily inquiring educational changes from the 1990s and onward.

Assessment Cultures and Key Actor Arenas

With an elaboration on the concept of educational assessment culture we focus on conceptions of assessment and assessment practices that include different ways to measure, value, judge and document student achievement and school performances. Further it involves how outcome data is used as information or facts about how

school performs. Assessment practices in Swedish schools can be categorized and to some extent divided into formal/informal and formative/summative assessments. Formal assessments are officially regulated whereas informal are the everyday assessments employed in the classroom and its context. Formative assessments are in many cases unrecorded and informal, while summative always are documented and formal. However, there have been examples of formative assessments being regulated in Sweden – e.g. the so called development dialogues (joint meetings between the teacher, the student and the parents) and individual development plans, IUP (recorded agreements between the teacher and student on goals to achieve). During the last 20 years of educational reforms in Sweden there has been an intensified formalization of assessment practices on three key actor arenas: politics/bureaucracy, school practice and educational sciences (cf. Forsberg and Román 2014).

Assessment: A Multilevel and Multifunctional Phenomenon

A variety of assessment activities on different levels co-exist in Sweden. They exist on different levels: international (large scale assessments and international co-operations on evaluations and inspections), national (assessment criteria related to syllabuses, grade system, national tests, guidelines for assessment, system for information and involvement of parents, follow-up, evaluation and inspection), local school board and agencies (follow up tasks and quality responsibilities), school/classroom (teachers formative and summative assessment of student performances). In addition, requirements of teacher certificates and more differentiated teacher salaries increases demands on documentation of teacher performances and qualifications.

The assessment system with its different practices can be visualized as a very powerful multifunctional communication device that governs schools but also signals what school is all about. It provides information to teachers, students and parents on what knowledge and skills are to be given priority and puts up norms for how knowledge is to be observed, measured, valued and communicated. Assessments affect the relation between different actors. Assessments have a twofolded disciplinary functions; it corrects student achievement and behavior, the latter something that might be expressed in marks on conduct. Assessments also have a normalizing function when it is used for deciding whether a student is qualified for a certain school form or stage, whether a student should do an extra year or whether a student should be subject to special education. Educational assessments in such cases often interact with psychological and medical assessments. The selective function of assessment is related both to selective processes in society and the school system and to choices made by the student. Further, assessments have a prognostic function. These functions are not new to the educational system, but during the last decades they have been stressed on behalf of the curriculum. Finally, simple rather than complex assessment tools have been emphasized and are more frequently used.

Assessment: A Boundary Object Connecting Actors, Activities and Places

Data on student performances are used to follow and determine the development of single students. Frequently, suppliers of schools also use surveys to map students, parents and teachers attitudes on different aspects of the school. Together data like these are used to inform on the effectiveness and efficiency of the school as well as to make up ranking lists of different kinds, nowadays often reported in media. For example, a research project on school management and performances showed that Swedish principals communicate by numbers to a rather large degree (Svedberg 2014). The findings pointed to a multi-faceted picture of principals' interaction with, meaning-making of and value attached to, educational outcomes. Four facets of the assessment culture of school leadership were identified: the narrative, the archive, the number, and the demand. The data also revealed two discourses of outcomes related to different objectives of education: the performance discourse and the care discourse (Forsberg et al. 2016). Data on individuals are accumulated and function as information about performances on other levels, and usually without being contextualized step by step. The other way around, policy and regulations on international and national levels as well as conceptions of assessment frame local schools and classroom practices.

An institutionalized, but in research often forgotten tool is homework and related feedback. Homework connects different actors and places. Yet another is related to the increase of players involved as suppliers of education. Evaluation and inspection are tools used to connect the public allocation of assignment and resources with accountability. Here public, private and non-profit organizations are connected. Today, with a changed system for funding, based on the thinking of a school for all, includes at least rhetorically the right to attend the nearest school or a private school, and reduced taxes for homework support and a proposal on mandatory provision of homework for municipalities can also be understood as a call for homework support for all (cf. Forsberg 2015). Assessments documented in written statements and marks are crucial at different stages of transitions and affect students' life chances. Assessment as a boundary object has a more elaborated and stronger position in the present education system. This is due to the emphasis put on student performance and outcomes and partly it depends on the increase in levels, arenas and actors involved in the communication with and about results – and not least, expectations on education in the so called knowledge society.

International Large-Scale Assessments as Practice and Discourse

Sweden has been involved in international large-scale assessments first as one of the co-founders of the IEA and later on as an active part of the OECD and the EU. From the 1960s and onwards, international large-scale assessments were conceived as a technological/instrumental method for making the process of schooling more effective and as such were fitting with the dominant ideology of social engineering. The international tests primarily concern only a few subject matter areas and only a few age cohorts have been tested. In the international tests Sweden has normally been ranked above the average, and in many cases we have also held top, or close to the top, positions, but during the last 15 years there has been a falling trend for the Swedish student results. This has caused a lot of educational concern and dismay. It is not enough for Swedish education to be satisfied with medium or below medium results – Sweden is supposed to be at the top. In this discourse both researchers and policymakers have been deeply involved – discussing and referring to international tests – but more seldom teachers or principals participates. Today, the international assessments are an integral part of the national evaluation system of education and in the debate it stands out as an inevitable part of it. Nowadays Sweden also takes part in regional assessments.

The discourse about international tests in Sweden has been an ongoing debate around several issues, but the reliability of the tests is one of the more frequently raised. The discussion circles around methodological consistency with regards to national curriculum, objectives and content. However, commonly test outcomes are accepted as depicting the national school situation in a fair way, and the results emanating from the tests are mostly interpreted as evidence based results that in turn can be used for identifying reforms to be taken. In a study by Daniel Pettersson (2008) the reception of PISA on the Swedish politics/bureaucratic arena was studied. Conclusively, international large-scale assessments came to be important sources for information but different actors used them in different ways depending on individual purposes and goals. International assessments and the national discussions they lead to, as such, to reflect actors view on education. The tests were given meaning in the context of politics, administration and media. They were also used as points of descriptions and departure for educational visions of the future. In addition, they were used to distribute shame, blame or glory (cf. Steiner-Khamsi 2004). In media debates the tests often served as a marker of legitimation, used as arguments for both stability and change (e.g. Forsberg and Román 2014).

In part the tests are used as a tool to evidence-base practice and politics. Today, schools by law, are expected to evidence-base their practice. However it is less common among practitioner than politicians, at least rhetorically. A much discussed Swedish example is the former Minister of Education Jan Björklund (2006–2014). He managed to successfully take the lead in the political and media debate on education. Björklund set the agenda in close connection to PISA and TIMSS, lending legitimacy from the research-like comparative tests. As often is the case in politics,

there is already a solution at hand, searching for a problem to solve. While Björklund at first met some resistance, eventually his line of reasoning gained ground and several reforms during the last 10 years have been legitimated with reference to falling results in the tests and the urgency to act. In the Swedish case, the international assessments as such came to play an important part in the reforms of the curriculum, the syllabuses, the grading system and the organization of upper secondary schools.

Grading, Leaving Certificates and Exams

In Sweden, students have for several decades until recently not been introduced to marks and report cards until the [eighth](#) grade. There has been an intense and long-lasting debate on marks and its didactical impact, which to some extent can be discussed as the perpetuum mobile of the assessment discourse in Sweden. When to start with marks and report cards seem to be the large gap in the assessment discourse today, with class-teachers, politicians to the left and education researchers generally more critical to marking compared to subject teachers, politicians to the right and researchers belonging to other disciplines than education. During the last 20 years we can observe a shift towards a more positive consensus. It is now more common that actors from all three arenas (politics/bureaucracy, research and practice) accept and advocates marking as a tool to promote justice, equality and quality. Instead of being questioned, marking is now more discussed in terms of mark inflation as well as mismatches between marking and national test results.

The previous focus on more complex assessment tools and a practice of mostly formative assessment are diminishing. One reason is that development dialogues have shown to be problematic in some aspects. Numerical marks seem to admit a reduction of complexity, which for many make them more clear-cut and paradoxically more informative compared to more elaborated verbal assessments (Forsberg and Lundahl 2006). Another reason why marking and other summative assessments have become more important has to do with the school choice reform of the 1990s. Schools now market themselves in order to attract students. Referring to good markings, i.e. a high ranking is a popular and successful marketing strategy for schools. The marking accordingly serve an economical function, since schools – especially independent schools – need students in order to get financial support (Lundahl et al. 2010).

Markings, leaving certificates and exams are meritocratic tools that regulate transitions within the educational system as well as between the system and the labor market. As such they are crucial, with an impact on students' life chances and opportunities to fulfill their individual goals. For long, all students leaving upper secondary schools with acceptable grades could enter higher education. This recently changed and now students can leave upper secondary education with one of three different exams – apprentice, vocational or academic, and it is only the academic exam that is directly qualifying for attending higher education. Today,

grades, leaving certificates and exams are closing paths for students not able to produce expected results in various assessments.

National Tests: Professional Guidance or Guardian of the Meritocratic Ideology

In Sweden there was a previous system of testing the proficiencies of students with the help of national tests. From the middle of the 1940s until the middle of the 1990s the national tests were based on a system of norm-referenced grades. In the beginning there were norm-referenced tests in grade 2, 4 and 6 but later this changed to a compulsory achievement test in Mathematics only in school year 9 and in grade 3 for two of the programs in upper-secondary education. The main aim of the tests was to standardize teacher grading. In the first wave of reforms in the 1990s a new grading system was introduced to coincide with new curricula and syllabuses. At the same time national tests were introduced in three subjects in grade 9 to serve as professional guidance and to complement other kinds of assessments performed by an individual teacher. During the second wave of reforms the amount and extent of national tests came to gradually increase and as such laying a stronger foundation for evaluating students through summative assessments. Today there is a variety of tests in grade 3, 6 and 9. In the last years in Sweden national standards and tests have been formulated and implemented and in-service training materials have been produced and delivered to teachers. The purpose of the national tests has shifted from primarily a tool for professional guidance to more of a guardian of the meritocratic ideology of a justly system designed to measure the efficiency of Swedish education. (cf. Lundahl 2006).

Reformed Tasks and Activities for National Agencies

National school authorities have in Sweden had a crucial impact on evaluation regulations and teacher assessment. During the last decades the national agencies have gone through a number of make-overs. At the end, evaluation department and the agency responsible for school improvement were closed down. Instead, criteria-based control and inspection as well as the production of guidelines and evidence-based data and publications were reinforced and strengthened.

Starting in 2003, all schools in Sweden were inspected over a 6-year cycle. Control of output was introduced within an organizational tradition that previously foremost targeted input, processes and school development. Consequently, control is now seen as prerequisites for improvements. In 2008 the Inspectorate was moved away from the National Agency of Education (NAE) to an independent agency with a strengthened responsibility towards a more intensified inspection. School inspection,

dating back to the 1860s, is not a new phenomenon in Sweden. However, the function, intensity and scope have varied over time (Lindgren et al. 2012). In the first wave of extensive school reforms during the 1990s inspections of schools was marginalized, due to reforms focusing on decentralization and profession-based governance. After a shift in government in 2006 a new structure for inspections was introduced based on three main areas: (i) knowledge, norms and values, (ii) leadership, and (iii) quality. The model for inspection draw extra attention to what was called attainment/goal fulfilment and leadership, but they also introduced the individual rights of pupils as a separate area to be inspected. In total the new agency summarized four areas to be assessed: (i) attainment/goal fulfilment and results, (ii) educational leadership and development, (iii) learning environment, and finally (iv) individual student rights (Lindgren et al. 2012). This period of inspection relied on an ideology of school improvement accomplished through more control-directed inspections. An overall pattern of change can be identified concerning the state using inspection as a mode of governance in a system of both public and independent schools. There is also a shift in focus from inspection of soft areas, like norms and values, to hard areas, like knowledge and attainment (Lindgren et al. 2012). This shift is tightly interconnected with both inspection techniques in use and a growing reliance on evidence. When state inspection is focused more on these aspects of education, so is research and practice.

Case II: Curriculum Leadership in a Changing Educational Landscape

In order to describe and analyze curriculum leadership in the changing educational landscape we will take our point of departure in national demands on *local systematic quality work*. This enables us to illustrate how the national curriculum is linking leaders on different levels in the Swedish educational system. This includes taking into account both the international embeddedness of the local school and the assessment culture permeating and made up by actors at different levels. The overall aim is to elaborate educational leadership within a curriculum theory tradition.

National Demands on Cooperation

According to the national law every school owner and all schools have to (Education Act 2010, chapter 4 §§ 2–8) systematically and continuously plan, monitor and develop the work to fulfil the goals in the curricula. The Swedish State School Inspectorate are responsible for the monitoring (Education Act 2010, chapter 26 §§ 19–23). It is mandatory to document the monitoring of the curriculum and to involve the pedagogical staff, pupils and parents. To make this happen the law has an

implicit assumption, or even request, on leading and leadership. Depending on how curriculum and curriculum work is defined the linking of owners, principals, teachers and parents can be understood as part of the curriculum, and as such be included in discussions of local curriculum work. As such, leading can be considered as an important aspect of curriculum processes.

Since the local systematic quality work is supposed to relate to the classroom work and students learning, visible through results, a question to ask is how this turns out in practice. In the following we focus on educational leaders above teachers and we use findings from a nationwide research project completed in the years 2009–2015. The project included surveys and interviews with superintendents, chairs and members of educational boards in municipalities and principals and pre-school leaders in both independent and municipality own schools.

Leading and Communication in Different Local Contexts

The Swedish governing system includes three major levels of responsibility. The law and school curriculum is formulated at the national level, by politicians and administrators in ministries and national agencies. The responsibility to enact these laws and regulations is given to the boards of local school owners – the municipalities or independent schools. The municipalities have politically elected boards, while the independent schools have their own boards. This is in fact the independent part, since all schools follow the same regulations and curricula, are public financed and inspected by the same authorities. As a consequence, all schools and owners have to perform local systematic quality work. In reality municipality- and independent school owners have different prerequisites and different interpretation of the existing frames. There are also differences between schools connected to the same owner as well as between different school owners.

On a general level the results from the project illuminates a variety of interlinked curriculum processes (Nihlfors and Johansson 2013; Nihlfors et al. 2015; Skott et al. 2015a). The investigated leaders are all rather well-educated, think they have a rather broad scope of action, appreciate their work but they do not rely on other leaders competences on different levels. A main exception is the relationship between the chair of the board and the superintendent in municipalities (Skott 2014a). One explanation can be that they have to trust each other to get power over the political agenda. School leaders (principals and pre-school leaders) very seldom meet politicians to discuss e.g. the result of their systematic quality work and it is also rare that these type of documents ends up in board meeting protocols. Comparatively, it is more common that reports from the State School Inspectorate are on the agenda. However, the structure of some independent schools with internal boards, consisting of staff or parents changes the communication structure. In these schools there are somewhat different kinds of challenges for leading. For instance, a principal can be chair of the board and superintendent at the same time. An added complexity is that the board, which can be seen as the top in a local chain of leading,

can consist of active teachers. Furthermore, the individuals at these leading positions meet regularly, often on a daily basis. (Skott 2013) In what ways the introduction of independent schools change leading structures on a local level have to be further studied.

Multilevel Structures of Leading in Municipalities

The lack of knowledge pointed to in the previous section becomes visible when elected members of the municipality school boards express that students' results have enhanced during the last years when it is in fact the opposite. Some explanations why this is the case is found in statements from board members about e.g. PISA results and school performances. On an explanatory level data are often on an aggregated level that makes it difficult to handle for unremunerated politicians having civilian jobs. They have to rely on superintendents' information and they are not fully content with this situation. Also, principals and pre-school leaders express uncertainty on how the superintendents present their school situation for the board.

The school leaders (principals and pre-school leaders) prerequisites for leading are affected by levels above them, by different types of so called middle leaders or superintendents' offices. The more middle layers existing, the more seldom you can find direct communication between school leaders and politicians, this also goes for superintendents. The lack of communication also affects comprehension between different groups. One reason for this is diversity in both culture and language (Nihlfors et al. 2016).

The National Agency for Education is supposed to be a link between the national level and the school owners. This link is however complex since the Agency more often communicates directly with school leaders and teachers, supporting them with general advices. This is strengthened by the fact that all newly appointed principals, according to law, must attend a national program for principals (a university based education), where the educational content is focused around the law and how to enact it (Skott and Törnsén forthcoming). It is not necessarily so that all principals relate themselves as being links in a local chain of governance. This experience is further strengthened through the inspection of single schools. The law also recognizes the principals and the pre-school leaders as responsible for schools inner work. Consequently, the national level "bypasses" the school owner level, making the multilevel leadership of the local school more complex than it has to be. In some questions the different levels are supposed to cooperate, in others the local level are autonomous, even though the results of the lowest levels (and thereby the processes leading up to them) are to be seen as the common denominator.

The findings of the project also indicate that contemporary emphasis on results, and not least PISA results, has together with the national organization of education resulted in feelings of insecurity and perceived lack of courage to act as an educational leader. Some leaders wait for, and even look forward to, the report from the State Inspectorate that gives them a legitimacy to act. However, there is a rather big

difference between national and local school leaders' interpretation of expectations and confidence. Comparatively, national leaders, even if they have a negative rhetoric, can be looked upon as an ally (Nihlfors and Johansson 2013).

Municipalities' role as school owner is often unclear and sometimes unknown for single school leaders (Skott et al. 2015a, b). At the same time a new actor, the independent schools, are intertwined with municipalities school organizations. There are for one thing no local state authorities handling the transfers of financial means to independent schools. This is done through the municipalities own organizations, where a sum is calculated to follow each child in the municipality as a guarantee for the parents in choosing schools'. This means that the municipalities' middle leaders are not only to be linked to the municipality school leaders, but also to the ones in independent schools. The superintendent often has to balance the numbers of municipality schools in relation to existing and planned independent ones. Communication between leaders on different levels across the educational landscape is necessary. Particularly, this communication is seen between pre-school leaders. While primary and secondary schools are given permissions and are inspected by the State inspectorate, the pre-schools apply for permissions and are inspected by the municipalities. The municipalities' own pre-schools are however inspected by the State inspectorate, on a group level. This means that the same position in a municipality administration is given a double function, where the law encourages a more direct communication between the municipality school office and the independent pre-schools, than it does regarding the municipality pre-schools.

Taken together this raises questions about how local school machineries can be understood in the new horizontal landscapes, how leadership could be enacted to enhance learning, in schools and at different school levels. At the front is local curriculum-making and issues of winner and losers in the curriculum power game.

Curriculum and Leadership Research: Concluding Remarks

Within the Swedish curriculum theory tradition there has been a focus on different curriculum practices (policy, practice, research), educational message systems (curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation), arenas (formulation, realization, mediation), and curriculum makers (politicians, bureaucrats, school owners, educational leaders, teachers, students and their parents). In addition, researchers have paid attention to different spaces (international, regional, national, local) and times (formation, manifestation, reformation) in relation to the selection, ordering and manifestation of knowledge, norms and values as well as the management and organization of teachers, students and school activities.

Curriculum, codes, context, frames and arenas are empirically based key concepts. Over time, analyses have contributed to elaborations of the concepts and their meaning in relation to data from pre-school to higher education and through analyses of the changes of society as well as educational governance and leadership. The

aim of curriculum research has been and still is to develop knowledge of the cultural and social reproduction of society. In addition, both curriculum and leadership research has contributed to our knowledge about the reproduction of the school as an institution and an organization.

The history of Swedish curriculum and educational leadership research is inseparable on knowledge and power. They both developed in relation to each other and in tandem with the central welfare state. Knowledge produced was part of that overall program on equity and efficient meritocratic distribution into different educational tracks. Hence, the central state was both the initiator and the receiver of research results. From this position Swedish curriculum research came to develop from investigating quantifiable factors to also include qualitative dimensions and meaning-making processes. Included were perspectives from a range of disciplines, such as education, didactics, philosophy, sociology, history, economics, psychology and linguistics.

In this concluding section we will discuss the changing Swedish educational landscape and based on our two cases elaborate on some of the concepts of the curriculum theoretical tradition. First, we address the context of education in the twenty-first century. Then, we suggest that the framing of education and the codification of educational knowledge, norms and values are best described in terms of a comparative curriculum code. Finally, we single out some issues on how curriculum and leadership research can be further integrated and developed.

The Context of Education in the New Millennium

While the nation state still is the hub of educational systems the state and its institutions are nowadays explicitly and firmly embedded in the global arena. International organizations like EU and OECD emphasize the importance of education to the knowledge society and the possibility for nations and regions to compete on a global market. The employability and mobility of students and workers are stressed. Standardization and formalization are reached both through regulations and consensus building activities. Mostly the latter, since education on the primary and secondary level are formally regarded as a national matter. However, soft governance tools, like the open method of coordination in EU have contributed to the introduction of both policy and programs on the national and local level. A number of indicators, measurements, reviews, inspections, ranking lists and associations for cooperation have been developed to keep track of member states involvement, rank and progression. At the global level education is framed foremost as an economic value. The economic return of education for regions, nations and individuals is prominent in the political debate.

At the same time globally education for all and nationally a school for all points to the value of inclusion and equality of opportunity. Here, we can also identify programs of sustainable development, especially related to the UN, promoting education for sustainable development (ESD). In comparison to neo-conservative and

neo-liberal trends in education ESD has had less of an impact on the educational system and its governance. However, there has been a growth of Swedish research producing knowledge about teaching and learning regarding the intersection between ecology, economy, ethics and social justice within the larger framework of ESD (cf. Öhman 2011).

Earlier a school for all in Sweden primarily meant a comprehensive school system without streaming and tracking. With the establishment of the independent school system it takes on another meaning. Rather than one school for all children in a neighborhood, a school for each and every one is put forward, indicating a shift from the social to the individual level. Here education as a commodity with prospect of bringing back expected, specific, predetermined and measurable returns comes to the fore.

The rationale of educational reform in Sweden used to be grounded in centralism, universality, social engineering and consensus. This was followed by reforms based on ideas of decentralization, professionalization and democracy, which lately has shifted to a rationale built on recentralization, management, quality and evaluation. These different rationales relate to power and control over education in different ways. As a consequence, questions of how the system is governed, curriculum goals established and content selected and evaluated are in turn variously answered. Even though earlier rationales are not totally abandoned there are clear alterations in emphasis and thus the relations between policy, practice and research is changed as well. The evidence-based movement and the establishment and closing down of various national agencies are illustrative examples.

In sum, the context of education in the new millennium is very different from the world in which the Swedish curriculum tradition was formed and manifested. While the key-concepts still are viable, their specific meaning require further elaboration to be relevant in relation to this new context.

The Changing Educational System of Governance, Framing and Steering

Within the new context of education there have been changes of governance on both vertical and horizontal axes related to arenas of formulation, realization and mediation. The educational landscape of governance is today multifaceted and complex. We identified a shift from input and processes towards output. With reference to Hopmann (2003) there are several findings indicating that Sweden has left the German Didaktik tradition of process control in favor of the performativity product control model manifested in the Anglo-Saxon world. The former is characterized by its licensing model with professional self-control and self-evaluation and the latter focus foremost on outcomes and efficiency.

The changes of governance are accompanied by moves within all the frames of educational governance. The Educational Act and curricula of education still stress

different democratic values the school has to safeguard, employ and promote as well as a broad concept of knowledge. It is, however, evident that the message systems of curricula and pedagogy are less important than the system of evaluation and the overall culture of assessment. The allocation of resources is primarily an issue for the boards of the municipalities and the independent schools. Although, the establishment of a school market together with the voucher system has made the schools more vulnerable. A damaged reputation may in fact in its most drastic form come to the closure of a school. Lately, there has also been a judicialisation of education, with an increasing number of conflicts settled in court, a possibility to fine schools and a growing amount of general guidelines. The complexity also relate to the interplay between different levels within and without the nation and the three level of analysis taken into account in curriculum research; the societal/ideological level, the curriculum level and the teaching and classroom level (Lundgren 1989).

Given our two cases, findings related to the assessment culture are closely aligned to the overall changes of the educational landscape and the message system of education. Findings of the educational leadership projects stress a need to use more specific terms to address the new complex situation in which leadership is exercised. We put forward the steering system including steering, leading and leadership as fruitful concepts to explore how educational leadership can be analyzed focusing both expectations and feed-back in the system (cf. Wahlström et al. 2010). As a consequence more nuanced and specified empirical findings have been reported showing ruptures in expected ways of leading and leadership. Often school owners were by-passed when deviations were reported and rectified. Dialogue between school owners and the national level has during the last decades been rare. It is “a tangled web of couplings” in educational organizations (Rowan 2002). What can be described as loose and tight couplings exist simultaneously and even on the same level in a system of control (Nihlfors et al. 2014).

Curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge. Analyses of steering, leading and leadership and how these three elements of the steering system are linked in empirical cases may supplement our present knowledge about educational leadership and its prerequisites. Embedded in the steering system is local curriculum-making (Paulsen and Moos 2014). In the long run we may also be able to develop knowledge on how to develop cultures where values can be challenged and the role of educators can be strengthened also in relation to the political agenda (cf. City et al. 2011).

The Comparative Curriculum Code

What are the implications of the new educational context, the framing of education policy, practice and research and the steering system for the codification of educational knowledge, norms and values? While we argue that it is reasonable to introduce a new code, we do not state that the civic curriculum code with its patriarchal, scientific-rational and democratic conceptions is outdated. However, there are major

shifts including curriculum practices, message systems, levels, arenas and number of curriculum-makers engaged, so we find it relevant to suggest, what we call the comparative curriculum code.

Like all curriculum codes of modern societies this one is anchored in a meritocratic ideal. Life chances of individuals cannot be legitimized by referring to ancestry or social rank, differences have to be conceived as fair. The meritocratic ideal has emerged as an important symbol of fair distribution of both educational and vocational chances relative to student achievement, as a combination of intelligence/ability and effort/performance. Today achievements, grades, exams and entrances to further education or working life are established through comparison with specific criteria or in relation to performances of other individuals.

The meritocratic ideal is employed both on individuals, schools, and primary organizers of schools, nations and regions. While the basic legitimation in a meritocracy is student achievement, it is not necessarily prescribed in content, form or how to evaluate and by whom. The ideal of meritocracy may as such be open for curricula aiming for liberal education (*Bildung*) or schooling, the latter pointing to a more restricted educational program.

Even though, comparisons has a long history in the Swedish educational system, especially in relation to assessment and evaluation it is the way things are played out in the present that puts comparisons on the front stage – no matter what position or function an actor uphold, or where (s)he is active and with what in the educational system.

There are several factors contributing to a situation where comparisons have become the hub of the system: legitimacy problem related to the efficiency of the welfare state and the Swedish school performance; the competitive character ascribed to the global knowledge society; the character and purpose of international organizations; the marketization of Swedish educational landscape; the evidence-based movement; an empirical turn in research; technological developments enabling collection, selection, analyses and dissemination of a large amount of data and findings; a need to reduce complexity in a challenged system and; changes in the distribution of authority, responsibility and accountability. As shown above the assessment culture in total also contributes with its techniques to document, evaluate, rank and mediate performances and results. Important is also to recognize the shortcomings in the system, single schools and failures of individuals with different backgrounds.

Comparisons based primarily on data from student performances have strong implications for standardization and formalization of education. Quantifications, rankings and clear-cut concrete and evaluable objectives, standards and curricula have become popular political means for school leadership and improvement. To help professionals orientate themselves they are provided with shortcuts to knowledge of the educational system through research reviews over areas identified as important for practitioners. Here a number of different knowledge brokers have appeared.

How are curricula, pedagogy and evaluation conceived of within the comparative code? First of all, with comparisons as the guiding principle for codifying the selection, transfer and evaluation of knowledge, the message system of evaluation is

primary. Curricula end up at the backstage accompanied by a risk for regarding knowledge and values as separate entities and reducing knowledge to prescribed and measurable knowledge. Also the system of pedagogy and transfer is affected, were diagnoses, keeping track and documentation have become more prominent aspect of the transfer process over the last years. Key-elements of the comparison code are legitimacy, standardization and formalization, also three of the main concept in comparative education today again holding a strong position in the field of educational research, policy and practice.

Looking into the Future: Research to Come

It is crucial that we uphold the Swedish curriculum tradition, i.e. continue to theorize on empirical grounds and closely follow changes in the educational system and develop new critical research question. An overall aim has to be to further elaborate on the key-concepts of the classical era and adding new ones when necessary. It is also important to continue to keep asking questions of the reproduction of the society, the culture and the school and its relation to changes in the production. In this chapter, we have also illustrated how curriculum and leadership research are historically linked. Here, we have put forward some concepts to address the increased complexity of the governance system. But we need also to strengthen how different way of forming the steering system interplay with key curriculum questions. Conclusively, leadership research have to a large extent studied school development on a municipality- and organizational level asking questions on how to manage and guide school development. In contrast, curriculum research have studied school development from a reform- and governmental perspective more asking questions on how to steer educational development through curricula and evaluation. We suggest that these traditions need to be united in order to further develop both traditions in less normative, and more, critical ways, to answer crucial educational questions in a changing educational landscape in glonacal times (Marginson and Rhoades 2001).

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