

## NOVICE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN EDUCATION AND THEIR EXPERIENCES OF PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE

### Abstract

School leadership is found important for school development and student learning. Consequently, the interest in professional leadership education for principals has increased. In Sweden, professional leadership education for novice principals was made mandatory in 2010. Moreover, enhanced focus on leadership for teaching and learning in terms of 'pedagogical leadership' is highly topical. This study aims to deepen our knowledge of novice principals' experiences of pedagogical leadership practices and relate these to their paths toward principalship. The study follows a qualitative and situated design and adopts a practice-based approach. Observations were conducted in the educational and workplace practices of novice principals in Sweden and interviews were conducted with principals and teachers. Using a conceptual framework of Wenger (1998), the analyses show that principals experience challenges concerning pedagogical leadership if their competence and experience are not aligned with practice and context. This mismatch seems to impair their pedagogical leadership practice. In addition, a lack of leadership experience obstructs their learning in the professional leadership education for principals.

### Introduction

Being a novice school principal is demanding because of the responsibility for managing the organizational and professional direction of the school (Oplatka, 2012). Moreover, taking on leadership means relating to staff members in terms of interpersonal and professional outreach as well as promoting their professional empowerment, and appreciation of job performance (Studni & Oplatka, 2022). Further, the transition to principalship is

shown to be a daunting experience (Arar, 2018; Crow, 2006) as induction requires 'role-making' through professional and organizational socialization (e.g., Bush, 2018; Crow, 2006). Professional socialization refers to initial preparation for example through participating in a professional leadership preparation program while organizational socialization refers to getting to know principalship in practice settings (Crow, 2006). In Sweden, novice principals attend the mandatory and state-regulated Swedish National Principal Training Program

(SNPTP) in parallel with their work. This design can be viewed as an extended process of induction, adapted for connections between professional and organizational socialization. However, for such connections to come about, learning needs to be enabled not only in program settings but also in practice. As Beatty and Manning-Ouellette (2022) recently emphasized in this journal, experiences might be powerful in promoting leadership identity development. Moreover, Wenger (1998) claims that experience need to remain in tension with competence to enable learning. However, as few studies relate the professional backgrounds and competencies of principals to their leadership practice (e.g., Bastian & Henry, 2015; Hitt & Player, 2019; Murphy, 2020) such a claim needs further exploration regarding principals.

There is yet limited research on whether and, if so, how principal preparation programs promote principals' leadership practices (e.g., Bush, 2018). Nevertheless, as weaknesses continuously are detected in the way principals lead processes of teaching and learning in their schools, claims are made for better principal programs (e.g., Kerrins & Cushing, 2000; Kılınc & Gümüş, 2021; Neumerski, 2013). Another claim is that professional preparation can be enriched by understanding principals' pathways (e.g., Murphy, 2020). Although we have some knowledge of principals' pathways (Davis et al., 2017; Murphy, 2020; Sugrue, 2015), Murphy (2020) argues that pathways remain understudied among diverse regions. This is, as principal preparation and formal mandating pathways of principals differ across national contexts, contextualized studies are of great importance. Thus, examining professional 'induction processes' (i.e., the period while introduced to and beginning taking on principalship) and pathways that include principal education are considered important. In this study, professional pathways are seen as the way a professional develops or progresses in work through formal and informal preparation, induction, and work within a specific professional position or in a series of positions. Accordingly, professional paths can be highly structured with clear next steps, formally mandated or non-structured as a matter of ad-hoc, informally mandated as well as a matter of degree between these ends.

As moving toward principalship seem to require a change in professional identity (Crow & Møller, 2017), investigations of pathways might give some clues on the professional identity of novice principals. Applying the conceptual framework of Wenger (1998), well suited for exploring social learning and identity formation entails viewing professional learning as involving inhabiting a social landscape of practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Thus, gaining experience can be viewed in terms of a personal journey on a path through the social landscape of practice, while professional identity rather reflects the pathway through that landscape (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

This article focuses specifically on novice principals' experiences of leading core processes of teaching and learning in compulsory schools in Sweden. In Sweden, high expectations are placed on the SNPTP and its promotion of leadership for teaching and learning in terms of 'pedagogical leadership'. However, whether the program influences novice principals' leadership practices or not is yet not clear. Thus, Sweden provides an interesting case for study. The aim of this study is to describe and deepen our knowledge of novice principals' experiences of pedagogical leadership practice and how their experiences relate to professional paths toward principalship in the Swedish setting. The study addresses the following research questions: 1) How do novice principals experience their journey into pedagogical leadership practice? 2) How can these experiences be understood in relation to principals' path into principalship?

The study will address the research questions by including novice principals in Sweden who attend the mandatory and state regulated SNPTP in parallel with their work. Regardless of this specific framing, results are proposed to inform or contrast principal induction processes in other settings and inspire researchers to make contextualized contributions to these themes.

## The Context of the Study

Before 2021 there was no mandatory preparatory course for principals in Sweden. This means novice principals who were employed in a principal position in Sweden for the time of the study did take on the full responsibility of principal without any formal preparation. Since 2010, the professional leadership education for principals, SNPTP, is mandatory for all new principals in curriculum-controlled schooling such as compulsory and upper secondary school. The SNPTP is to inform about state requirements and statutes of schooling as well as provide the knowledge necessary for goal fulfilment in schools and for a principal to take responsibility for developing the school's pedagogical program. For admission to the SNPTP, one needs to be appointed principal. The SNPTP runs over three years parallel to work as principal. The course is to be finished with approved results within four years and participants are expected to use 20 per cent of their working time on studies (Brauckmann et al., 2020; Skolverket, 2015, 2020). The three years of working as a novice principal in parallel with participating in the SNPTP is viewed as a formal induction phase for novice principals in Sweden in this study.

There is no formal requirement for teacher education or teaching experience to become a principal in Sweden although most principals previously worked as teachers. The formal qualification requirements for employment as a principal are very general, set as a mandate for 'pedagogical insight through education and experience'. The minimum of education approved is 22.5 credits of pedagogy at university and demands for experience need not be from the educational or school sector of society. Individuals, most often working as teachers, self-select and apply for a position as principal and the appointment is made by municipalities and boards of independent schools. Consequently, there is no such thing as a regulated professional path to becoming a principal in Sweden. This is in sharp contrast to the formal and specific requirements concerning teachers in Sweden. Some municipalities and independent school organizers do provide assignments as an assistant principal or the like which can be part of an individual principal's professional path. However, because teachers in Sweden work independently or in independent

teacher teams, there is often no formal leader role besides the principal in the school. Consequently, novices might not have had a role as assistant principal before being appointed principal.

A school principal in Sweden is responsible for one or several school units, leading and coordinating pedagogical work with special responsibility for the development of educational provision that is based on scientific knowledge and proven experience. The principal decides on internal organization and allocation of resources in accordance with the Education Act (SFS 2010:800). The principal assignment and its formal mandates are regulated by national governing documents.

## Preparation, Professional Paths and Pedagogical Leadership

Reviewing research engaging with preparation, induction and professional paths of novice principals, there seems to be a widespread belief that formal principal preparation is a necessity for taking on leadership as a principal (Bush 2018, 2008). However, the empirical base on how preparation or professional education influence the work of principals in schools is limited and needs further attention (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). That program content and features can result in different outcomes depending on how it is understood by participating principals are formerly highlighted (Darling-Hammond et al, 2010; Perez et al., 2011; Jerdborg, 2021, 2022). Kılınç & Gümüş (2021) conclude that formal training prior to appointment is preferable, and that professional identity formation should occur during preparation. Moreover, training should be continuous, contextualized, and include both managerial and learning-oriented practices. Murphy (2020) concludes that novice principals should engage in developmental experiences in schools because of the social and cultural processes inherent in socialization. Thus, preparation can be seen as dependent on both professional socialization (in terms of formal preparation and practice) and organizational socialization (in terms of familiarity with the specific context of practice) (e.g., Crow, 2006).

As novice principals are found to use both personal and professional experiences prior to becoming a principal while leading schools (Murphy, 2020), dimensions of principals' pathways have been proposed to influence student achievement (Bastian & Henry, 2015). There are yet only a few studies of principals' pathways, however, these studies offer some knowledge about the importance of former experiences. Hitt and Player (2019) find that principals with former experience in their current school effectively establish and convey a school vision. Knowledge of the current school even surpasses experience as a principal. Previous experience as a curriculum specialist or department coordinator helps build professional capacity while having previous experience as an assistant principal strengthens collaborative processes and high-quality learning. Bastian and Henry (2015) find that several years' experience as an assistant principal in a school they already know well positively influence student achievement. In addition, they find that the absence of such experience entails a need for support within principal preparation programs (Bastian & Henry, 2015). The need for principals to share (some) pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) with teachers to solve complex problems and shape relational trust within the school is emphasized (e.g., Robinson, 2010; Stein & Nelson, 2003). Timperley (2011) finds that principals with teaching and learning knowledge assist teachers, underpinning mutual relationships and the development of teaching and learning. If not, this obstructs teaching development and decision making in organizational matters important for teaching and learning (Stein & Nelson, 2003). When taking distributed leadership into account, principals still need knowledge to critically evaluate and contribute to others' work (Leithwood et al., 2008; Sinnema & Robinson, 2007).

Timperley (2011) questions whether researchers have underestimated what it takes to navigate the complexities of leadership for teaching and learning. However, this is conceptualized differently across national contexts and may be understood differently depending on contextual traditions of leadership practices. A lack of empirically validated understanding of how such leadership operates in different contexts is highlighted (Hallinger et al., 2020). With global attention on student learning

outcomes, principalship is increasingly framed as leadership that should promote teaching and learning (e.g., Murphy et al., 2016) and the international knowledge base for these issues has grown. The concept of 'instructional leadership' is increasingly converging with relating models such as 'the four paths model', 'learning-centered leadership', 'distributed leadership', and 'pedagogical leadership' (Hallinger et al., 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020). Through the integration of main schools of thought in research, leadership for teaching and learning is shown to be enacted in concert with other dimensions. The need to further examine these dimensions as well as if and how school leaders contribute—and how this translates into changes in teacher practice—is highlighted by several researchers (e.g., Hallinger et al., 2020; Youngs & King, 2002).

In Sweden, a principal's work on schools' core tasks is conceptualized as 'pedagogical leadership' (Ärlestig & Törnsén, 2014). Because student results have been declining in Sweden, there has been a greater focus on the promotion of pedagogical leadership. Thus, education for novice principals, in the form of the SNPTP, was made mandatory in 2010, supposed to contribute to novice principals' ability to evaluate results, analyze teaching and outcomes, handle schools as learning organizations, and understand their important role in leading school development (Brauchmann et al., 2020; Skolverket, 2015, 2020). The term pedagogical leadership thus includes several important areas of a principal's work: to lead core processes by direct engagement through observation and promoting development; to provide prerequisites for teaching and learning by creating visions, communicating objectives and expectations, organizing teaching and distribution of leadership; and relate results to student learning by analyzing and understanding of results, letting them lead to school improvement (Ärlestig & Törnsén, 2014). However, in Sweden, principals are found to allocate less time for pedagogical leadership than principals in other OECD countries (cf. Skolverket, 2014). This issue has been discussed in terms of role-taking as principalship in Sweden traditionally encompasses administrative duties, indirect, and distributed forms of leadership as principals earlier on were promoted to take on a coordinating role in relation to school professionals. Whilst for example

Årlestig (2008) and Liljenberg (2015) concluded that indirect leadership is insufficient to promote school improvement, professional norms guiding principals in how to take on leadership were found to be turning into a new direction of more direct leadership beliefs, whilst direct leadership actions still were found absent (Leo, 2015). Moreover, in the Swedish case, principals' lack of former experiences in leadership was found to obstruct professional development through principal education (Skott & Törnsén, 2018). However, research exploring these themes in further detail and making connections between them would be of great value. In Sweden, this is of specific interest not only because of the lack of research on these themes but also because of the mandatory educational program for principals that aim specifically to enhance pedagogical leadership practices in schools. Moreover, leadership for teaching and learning is particularly challenging for novice principals (Arar, 2018; Oplatka & Or, 2020) although crucial for student learning (e.g., Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2011; Robinson, 2010). Taken together, this implies a need to study how pedagogical leadership is experienced by novice principals in the Swedish setting.

## Conceptual Framework

The social learning perspective of Wenger (1998), further developed by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015), is used to frame this study. From this perspective, neither actions nor activities achieve meanings in and of themselves. Instead, specific meaning is acquired in the context of social processes of negotiation in practice and education is seen as a mutual developmental process between communities and individuals (Wenger, 1998 p. 263).

Wenger's (1998) framework is used in various research fields. Conceptually, the framework has extensive breadth but has been criticized for lack of analytical clarity (Caldwell, 2005). Another criticism is that only some of Wenger's concepts are empirically founded (e.g., Roberts, 2006). These criticisms might seem sound when presented separately. However, together they mirror each other. Analytical clarity derives from using the concepts empirically, and thus they are defined by how they are used to analyze a specific practice. To

apply the concepts in practice and, based on the outcome, determine what to embrace or reject is an approach proposed by Farnsworth et al. (2016) and is how the frame is used in this study.

Wenger (1998, p. 247) considers the community of practice (CoP) as key to organizational competence. Membership in a CoP is a matter of mutual engagement, regardless of a member's title, as participants can have different roles. That is, diverse identities engage mutually but do not fuse. A school principal may thus be engaged in the CoP of teaching and learning, even if they have acquired a different status concerning daily work, authority, and relations with the overarching level of school authorities. The influence of the leader is understood to be mediated by the communities in which meanings are negotiated in practice (Wenger, 1998, p. 85). Wenger (1998) concludes that the role of a leader requires sufficient legitimacy to influence the development of practice by introducing new elements. This means involving brokering across boundaries between practices, where contributions lie precisely in yielding enough distance to bring a different perspective, but sufficient legitimacy to be listened to (Wenger, 1998, pp. 109). However, legitimacy depends upon negotiating new proposals for meaning and making recognizably competent interpretations with legitimate currency within a CoP (Wenger, 1998, p. 201). What form such legitimacy takes, and what aspects are required to make competent interpretations are empirical questions of the study. Likewise, whether there is enough mutual engagement to define any CoP in the teachers' work, and if these show pedagogical coherence in terms of maintenance of their joint practice.

Wenger (1998) argues that competence and experience need to remain in tension to enable learning and include learning in the community. Competence may drive experience: if a newcomer needs to achieve competence defined by a community, they transform their experience until it fits within the regime of competence. Conversely, experience may drive competence: having an experience that falls outside the regime of competence may result in trying to change the regime to include that experience. Consequently, an empirical question of this study is to determine which of these are at play. Learning, as a transformation of

knowing, can thus be characterized as a change in the alignment between competence and experience. This is depicted in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.**  
**Conceptual Framework: A social landscape of practice**

Competence along three dimensions:	Learning as change in alignment:	Experience as a personal journey:
a) Engage and respond b) Understand the practice c) Make use of the practice repertoire	Tension 	<u>Professional socialization:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• formal preparation</li> <li>• experiences from practice</li> </ul> <u>Organizational socialization:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• familiar with specific practice</li> <li>• familiar with specific context</li> </ul>
Places for participation: Principal's education Principal's workplace (i.e., school)	Tension 	Process: Induction to principalship

Competence is viewed along three dimensions, as shown in the left column in Table 1 (Wenger, 1998, p. 137). This is the ability to a) engage and respond in kind to other members' actions; b) understand the practice sufficiently to contribute to and negotiate ongoing pursuit and take responsibility for it, and; c) make use of the practice repertoire to engage in it (personally or vicariously) and its history, and to recognize the elements of its repertoire. Learning necessitates a place in which to define an identity of participation, as depicted in the left bottom column of Table 1 (Wenger, 1998, p. 215). In this study, the places in which to define an identity of participation are a principal's education and workplace (i.e., school).

In this study, the concepts of professional socialization (viewed in terms of formal preparation and experiences from practice) and organizational

socialization (viewed in terms of getting familiar with a specific practice and context) are used to specify what parts of the journey are investigated; thus, complementing the concepts of Wenger (cf. Crow, 2006). These dimensions together are depicted in the right column in Table 1. Lastly, learning necessitates a process (Wenger, 1998, p. 215). In this study, this is a process of induction to principalship through education and practice in which to transform knowledge. Process is depicted in the right bottom column of Table 1.

## Method

A comparable multiple-case study design with a replication strategy was adopted for this study. The validity of findings is strengthened by using replication within a specific setting (Bloor, 2001). The study investigated the experiences of pedagogical leadership of 14 novice compulsory school principals who participated in their final (third) year of study within the SNPTP, in parallel with work as a principal during the years 2018–2019. The sampling of principals was conducted using a sampling frame as close as possible to average external factors for compulsory school principals in Sweden at the time. This meant an even distribution between responsibilities for years P–3, 4–6, and 7–9 (P indicates Preschool class, which in the Swedish school system is an intermediate between preschool and compulsory school), with 80% from municipal schools and 20% from independent schools, with two-thirds being women, and one-third men. This sampling was framed within three course groups at three different organizing institutions (universities). These were sampled through information-oriented sampling.

A situated perspective was used for interviews, with principals being interviewed in both their educational and workplace practice. Each principal was interviewed three times: individually and in groups where they were engaged in the SNPTP, and individually in their school. Each interview (lasting for 60–100 min) was semi-structured, and different interview guides were used according to the setting. The principals' retrospective views were included in interviews to examine the principals' path into the principalship. As practice itself is not equivalent to what is said about it, principals were also observed: first in their educational practice and later in their respective schools. However, experiences are not directly observable but depend on reflection. The observations, logged in semi-structured observation protocols, thus functioned as a complement to the interviews and helped in understanding the contexts and highlighting the meaning of oral comments as a form of triangulation.

Additionally, in the schools, one (or several) teachers were interviewed about the teaching and learning

practices as well as their coherence. They were selected by principals as 'significant others' and were interviewed either individually or in groups. These interviews were semi-structured and lasted for 20–50 min. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In all, this methodology, using contrasting methods of data collection and multivocality within different settings within an overall common frame, enhance the precision, validity, and stability of findings. All participants have obtained formal, prospective information about the purpose of the research, the conditions for participation and how to refrain at any time. They also gave their written consent before participation in interviews in line with ethical guidelines. The overall methodology has limitations. The limited number of principals might present uneven distribution of aspects. Besides, the experiences of principals might be biased toward the time when the study was conducted, and as time passes new understandings of the past might arise. However, exploring their present experiences of developing into principals is also a strength of the study.

## Analysis

The analysis was conducted in several steps. All interview protocols were read several times, and in the first analytical step, data reduction was completed by constructing case reports for each principal and all schools. Second, the focus was set on the experiences of pedagogical leadership and a descriptive analysis was made in relation to the aim and the first research question. Thus, challenges were identified from the empirical data. For the second research question, the principals' paths into principalship were traced and summarized. Then, within-case and across-case comparisons were made to find eventual patterns relating to the research questions. Wenger's (1998) theoretical framework was used to investigate any links that occurred. The analytical focus was set on enabling tensions between principals' experiences and competencies as well as challenges concerning the enactment of pedagogical leadership according to the conceptual framework depicted in Table 1. The analysis was also guided by questions of degrees of

coherence or fragmentation in schools' pedagogical programs and the occurrence of teacher CoPs. Links were identified and interpreted in terms of changes in alignment. As learning involves inhabiting a social landscape of practice in which identity reflects the pathway through that landscape, a metaphorical perspective (Morgan, 1986) inspired from a framework by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) was used in a further step of the analysis to explore the principal's pathways through the landscape. Quotations were selected to exemplify the main results in terms of enabling tensions as well as challenges experienced by principals.

## Results

The following results reveal tensions between experience and competence that can be understood as a constant fine-tuning that enables learning through changes in alignment (cf. Wenger, 1998 p. 214). However, the results also reveal challenges concerning pedagogical leadership in terms of competence and experience being unaligned to practice and context. Pathways reveal further how challenges can be understood in relation to principals' pathways into the principalship. Pathways thus help to deepen the knowledge about novice principals' experiences of pedagogical leadership set in relationship to their preparation and professional path by connecting process and place.

**Experiencing Pedagogical Leadership in Practice.** In the Seacoast school, the novice principal Jessica makes pedagogical leaders' capabilities visible because she engages thoroughly in explorations of teachers' developmental thinking concerning teaching practices. She observes the teachers' learning, planning and evaluation practices, conducts interviews with teachers and connects her understanding to literature within this knowledge field. Jessica benefits from being the principal of a school with a coherent pedagogical program that she knows well and intends to develop. Both Jessica and her teachers thoroughly describe the importance of Jessica's leadership closely connected to the core processes of teaching and learning.

Jessica's story shows how competence runs along three dimensions: she engages with the teachers' community and responds to their actions. Their relationships—in which mutuality is the basis for identities of participation—are formerly established and now translate into her new position as principal, her teachers give rich descriptions of Jessica's understanding of the community's practice, and they emphasize the importance of her knowledge of its history and thus to make use of its repertoire. However, the teachers working with younger students describe how they need to take care of and 'translate' Jessica's leadership actions to how the younger students learn, in contrast to teachers of older students who face the leadership direction in a direct sense. This shows that Jessica's ability to deeply understand the practice is partly fulfilled but partly distributed within the community. Moreover, Jessica's competence and experience in both practice and leadership are obtained within a particular social context.

Another novice principal, Sarah, is also working to develop teachers' results-analysis practices and her observations and evaluation of teaching practices at her school. She systematically analyses what kind of knowledge she needs to do this work in a qualified manner, and what kind of interrelated teacher practices she needs to observe, explore, and understand. Furthermore, she determines what kind of questions she would need to put to the teachers to help them extend their thinking and teaching practice. The examples of Jessica and Sarah show how learning is promoted when competence becomes the driver of experience.

Ulrica—another novice principal—describes how her previous competence and experience as a teacher and an assistant principal in another (similar) location to her present school have been a source of knowledge in her new position, both for reviewing the teaching and starting new approaches, as she states:

Results were nothing ever talked about here when I arrived, but now we do. The teachers now want to get in-depth with the pedagogical work and want to find out why we have the results we have.

Ulrica, and later one of her teachers, describe the big challenge she faced as an incoming principal to her school as she engaged with the formerly dysfunctional teacher's community, responding to their actions. Ulrica's competence in being able to deeply understand the practice of the CoP demonstrates a fundamentally important aspect of her work in taking responsibility and contributing to the pursuit through ongoing negotiations and brokering. She describes her ability to make use of the CoP repertoire to engage in it and to recognize elements of its repertoire as a function of former experiences:

I had with me to look at student results and develop teaching practices, use teacher-teams as working units, work collectively with the assessment of national tests, and more. I need all my former knowledge to be able to lead so that the school moves forward for the student's development and to handle personnel tasks in a qualified manner.

Other participants who work in contexts similar to what their experiences and qualifications have prepared them for describe how these experiences translate into competence. Ellen says:

The fact that I have a solid teacher education and have many years of experience in teaching and curriculum work facilitates my work. My experience and previous education are good bases for meeting the teachers.

Angelica, an experienced school-age Educare teacher, describes how her former experiences translate into competence in her new role as novice principal:

As an experienced school-age Educare teacher, I immediately saw how you could work more systematically around management and organization within Educare. I also saw how the Educare teachers needed to be able to run joint development work. Now, we have systematic development work on the

Educare team's agenda. I have succeeded and it lives on.

The school's present Educare developer describes Angelica's engagement as providing leadership with experience and competence that they have always lacked. Previously, the situation was chaotic and former principals' knowledge of how to organize school-age Educare was insufficient, she tells. However, Angelica understands Educare deeply enough to take responsibility for it and contribute to its pursuit. Angelica engages herself in ongoing negotiations with Educare teachers and thus demonstrates her ability to make use of the practice repertoire.

Angelica is also responsible for compulsory school years P–5 but, contrary to school-age Educare, she describes a lack of competence in her inability to understand the practice deeply enough to enable her to make a sufficient contribution. She is unsure how to give responses to teachers and finds it difficult to engage in results analyses and the development of teaching practices. "I have not become confident in what it is like to analyze teaching, how teachers adjust to the needs of student groups, how to see that a student learns," she says. Moreover, systematic development work—high on the agenda for Educare—has not yet started in school. Angelica also opted her school out of the municipality's development work of subject didactic teaching development and instead tries to establish learning facilities she knows well from school-age Educare. In other words, her own experience drives competence. However, as this competence is insufficient, she is struggling with issues of capability and lack of legitimacy concerning the P–5 span.

Several schools in this study are wrestling with fragmentation and a lack of program coherence after principal turnovers in the past. This makes it difficult to take on as a novice principal. In such a context, in the North School, Lisa describes her lack of qualifications and experience for basically all her responsibilities: preschool class, years 1–3, years 4–6, years 7–9, and school-age Educare, herself qualified in upper secondary school. Lisa is far from alone in this matter. Most of the participants in the study work in contexts different to what their experiences and qualifications have prepared them

for. Henrik tries to lead the learning and development group of his P–9 school, consisting of middle leaders. He tries to develop a CoP around ICT pedagogical use, relating to his pedagogical content knowledge. However, this practice is evaluated as unsuccessful by himself and the middle leaders. Even if Henrik tries to combine his leadership knowledge with pedagogical content knowledge of ICT from his background as an upper secondary teacher, it becomes too general in the current context of P–9 teachers. The group agrees that the use of ICT needs specific adaption to the teaching and learning environments and the knowledge of students at specific ages and their specific learning content. Thus, in the CoP, the teachers had no shared repertoire since they experienced the different practices as being too diverse to become meaningful.

In another setting, the novice principal Sofia says:

I am responsible for following up on the students' results. As an old math teacher in years 7–9, I wonder, what should we follow up on? This is elementary school, years P–3, we are working towards the goals in year three. I have read the goals. But we have no grades. It is difficult for me to follow up without more results.

Sofia is aware of the importance of anchoring her decisions in the teachers' college. However, as Sofia states, she does not fully understand the practice because of her lack of specific pedagogical knowledge and points out that she is unable to analyze student results and likewise to meaningfully combine reification and participation. This results in Sofia not fully engaging with the teachers' community; thus, she cannot negotiate the repertoire in the role of broker as it refers to experiences of meanings that she does not get. This makes it difficult to take the lead in developing teaching and learning. However, Sofia is far from alone. Mattias says:

I have never worked in compulsory school, only in upper secondary school, and it is

very different. [...] In compulsory school, teachers focus on development and education in an integrated manner. I have a hard time understanding this teacher culture, specifically in years 4–6, and I am not happy that I do not understand their working methods and pedagogy. It makes me frustrated, and I feel that I cannot organize those years in a good way. I also have a hard time challenging.

These examples show how competence and experience are intertwined in practice, and learning can be impaired when unaligned experiences become the drivers of competence. This mismatch tends to obstruct mutual engagement and contribution to the development of teaching and learning practices because practice is fragmented rather than developed.

In sum, the experience of and competence in practice was revealed to enable pedagogical leadership in terms of leading core processes of teaching and learning, providing the prerequisites of and organizing for teaching and learning, and relating results and qualities to student learning and school improvement. A lack of experience and competence of practice appeared as challenges concerning how pedagogical leadership was experienced in practice. In the following section, principals' journeys into principalship through professional and organizational socialization are further elaborated using a metaphorical perspective.

**Challenges of Pathways to Principalship.** The pathways to principalship meander through landscapes of practice in which former experiences makes provision for leading excursions through these landscapes. In this study, the metaphor of the Swedish mountain landscape is applied. That is, taking on pedagogical leadership can be understood as taking on responsibility, planning, and leadership in the form of excursions through this landscape. Using such an analogy to picture the pedagogical leadership of novice principals may function to clarify how aspects interrelate and play out in practice, thus

helping to deepen understanding of principals' pathways into the principalship.

The novice principal Ellen describes her journey coming directly from teaching into a new context as a novice principal (i.e., taking the lead of a guided excursion in a mountain region she never visited before, even though she has participated in hiking elsewhere). Ellen says:

To begin as principal, not knowing anyone, not knowing my responsibility, I had to start from scratch. It was very tiring. I had no capital of trust with me at all. It was zero and nix.

Several of the novice principals in this study state that their insight into principalship was vague when they entered the position. As teachers, they had been in contact with principals; however, the transparency with which they experienced the work of principals was described as low. Their path can be likened to having participated in excursions led by others without having reflected on preparations, planning, or considerations. Maria, one of these principals, says:

I did not know what a principal did before I became a principal myself. I only saw a small, pitiful part of it when I was a teacher. It was to improve the school. But there was so much more!

Teachers in Maria's school, working also as middle leaders, conclude that Maria knew nothing about school leadership or context as an incoming principal. Still, she started with reorganizing. They describe this as a difficult time for the school, having a negative effect on mutual relations. However, knowing that Maria was formerly a skilled teacher in another school, they had expectations of her learning how to lead with time. In their view, Maria's first three years of leading made her reach the most basic level of leadership.

This shows that organizational and professional socialization is a process that takes

time. As part of professional socialization, the formal preparation in terms of education intertwines this process. However, this study reveals leadership experiences as crucial for gaining understanding and enabling learning in the SNPTP. This means that novices whose paths did not include leadership practice are at a disadvantage. Mattias (a novice principal) says:

When I started, I knew nothing. What if I became a pilot and had to fly with passengers before I even ran a simulation? Therefore, I am grateful that I got to start in the Principal Program [in parallel with work]. [...] It is strange to try to create an experience blindly without really knowing anything about how to do it, though.

Coming directly from teaching, lacking experiences of leadership to enable understanding in education is difficult. The novice principal Angelica states:

I had hoped to start with the leadership course in the Principal Program because I was unsure of how to take it on. Now I see that I probably needed those experiences to understand the literature. I did not have that insight in the beginning, so it had become difficult.

However, a lack of leadership experience could sometimes be substituted by the SNPTP. That can be likened to having read information about hiking in the region beforehand experiencing hiking. Camilla, one of the novice principals, says:

The Principal Program gives expanded experiences, sometimes when I think that I have been through something before and go back in memory, it turns out that it is notings from the Program that my brain interprets as previous experience.

In contrast, other participants' paths include a provision in form of previous leader experiences. Novices with leadership experience in form of being an assistant, or other principal support, find learning

in the SNPTP easily achievable. One of these is Helena, who has many years of experience as a coordinator. Helena describes the leadership course as fantastic and as real support for her development. The goal-and-result course is described by Helena as having a strong connection to the core of schooling and as easy to process between education and leadership practice. Overall, Helena found it rewarding to read the literature and link it to experience. She also describes how participating in the training is an important experience, getting to know the broader landscape.

Working as an assistant principal offers a period of training in which to gain insights. This can be likened to having gained knowledge and understanding of the location and landscape before guiding excursions. Henrik describes his two years as an assistant principal as important introductory years. He gained insights into the specific location and its position in a broader landscape (i.e., how the municipality was organized and who to turn to with different types of issues). Moreover, he took on responsibility for a minor part of an excursion through this landscape as he learned how to manage the school's finances and gained some experience being a manager. While taking on principalship, his capital of trust was sound and the teachers promoted him to take the lead for the whole excursion (i.e., go for the principalship).

In sum, the principal's pathways show that having some experience in the practice of leadership enables learning in the intertwined relation between the SNPTP and practice. However, this does not overcome experience and competence regarding the specific practice and the situated context.

## Discussion

Addressing the first research question of this study—how novice principals experience their journey into pedagogical leadership practice—the results show their journey are lined with challenges in terms of competence and experience being unaligned, not only with practice and context but also with leadership practice, impairing both pedagogical leadership and principals' learning in the SNPTP. The results also show that experience and

competence aligning with practice and the situated context enable novice principals' pedagogical leadership practice. Engaging with teachers—responding to their actions while using a deep understanding of practice in context and making sensible use of the practice repertoire—is experienced as enabling, seemingly because competence and experience are kept in tension.

The second research question addresses how these experiences can be understood in relation to principals' path into the principalship. The experienced challenges can be understood as non-constituting, not making provision for taking the lead in excursions through the social landscape. This study implicates that a principal's journey (in terms of professional and organizational socialization) is of great importance. As the pedagogical leadership practice calls for experiences of meaning—founded in dimensions of competence—a lack of knowledge of the school's practice is a troublesome experience (cf. Youngs & Kings, 2002). Analyzing results and observing teaching in a qualified way might not be achieved as general pedagogical knowledge is experienced as insufficient (Kerrins & Cushing, 2000; Stein & Nelsson, 2003). Thus, non-participation tends to become an active aspect of principals' pedagogical leadership practices (Wenger, 1998; Liljenberg, 2015; Ärlestig, 2008). Using a metaphorical perspective deepens understanding of how experienced challenges and pathways interrelate. In the Swedish setting, it seemed that novice principals tend to lack provision for the excursions they are about to lead. Thus, their contexts do not make personal trajectories possible in terms of offering a past and a future when defining their identity of participation while becoming pedagogical leaders. These results imply that the professional identity of principals in Sweden includes individual acceptance of personal (but shared with other principals) lack of provision to take on pedagogical leadership in a direct sense while being aware of (and distancing from) policy directions (cf. Leo, 2015). These results imply that shaping regulated pathways, not only through the SPNTP but also through qualification and experience requirements might provide enablement. A non-regulated pathway tells the story that principalship is all about general school leadership knowledge. However, leadership is

always about taking the lead of something specific in context.

The process of induction and the places in which to define a professional identity of participation (as depicted in Table 1) are shown to interrelate in that having some experience in leadership enables learning in the intertwined relationship between the SNPTP and the principal's practice. However, leadership experience does not overcome experience and competence regarding the specific practice and the situated context. From these results, one might argue on the one hand that leadership knowledge, PCK of practice, and situated contextual knowledge should be in focus when promoting pedagogical leadership as they need to merge into pedagogical leadership capability (Robinson, 2010). On the other hand, one might question the one-sided emphasis on the principal being the pedagogical leader in a direct sense that is emphasized in policy (Hallinger et al., 2020). There might be room for re-evaluating and contextualizing policy (Murphy et al., 2016, Neumerski et al., 2013). The result of this study implies a need for addressing this mismatch in one way or another and argues that just placing greater emphasis on the principal to act in direct pedagogical leadership regardless of the circumstances will not have the potential to change or improve schools.

Placing the discussion in an international environment, the Swedish way of appointing principals might seem strange. It places high demands on municipalities and boards of independent schools while preparing and appointing principals. Appointing needs to involve ensuring the principal has contextual understanding and the possibility to gain leadership experience beforehand taking on full responsibility. However, the design of the SNPTP as a general school leadership training probably contributes to a tendency to regard principals as well-prepared generalists, placing expectations on them to have a set of 'universal school leadership competencies' applicable anywhere. The results of this study contest that novices can be both generalists and enact pedagogical leadership in a direct sense in a specific context in tandem.

Wenger (1998) states that learning is dependent on process and place. The training of novice principals in Sweden is designed to offer processes of learning intertwined with places of education and work (Brauchmann et al., 2020). This study shows that such design of process and place are not sufficient to enable learning that promotes pedagogical leadership practices, seemingly because process and place can be unconnected and become separate entities. The results show that process and place not only need to be closely connected but that place also needs to relate to dimensions of competence and that process also needs to relate to [professional] experience. This means educational design interrelates with other sources of identification and negotiability (Wenger, 1998) and that participants need not only process and place, but also reasonable professional paths, which principal education cannot address without connecting to a wider educational landscape (Sugrue, 2015).

The principals in this study often started their principalship in contexts they do not know anything about. However, novices starting in contexts they already know are those with the capability and capacity to transform knowledge into leadership. Furthermore, the principals often begin their principal course in schools with great fragmentation in their pedagogical program but do not reflect on the fact that they, as incoming principals, often contribute to fragmenting their schools further. As program coherence is an important component of school capacity (Youngs & King, 2002) this suggests an extended focus on the school's improvement history to be at the core of principals' preparation. Using the terms 'incoming principal' and 'program coherence' is proposed as this would highlight the school rather than the principal when learning about development work.

This study is limited in terms of the number of principals and schools that were included. Despite its limited scope, contributions are made by providing empirical examples from the induction phase of novice principals to the theoretical constructs of Wenger (1998) that enhance the analytical clarity and empirical base for these constructs. Moreover, by defining a conceptual framework for investigating the tensions between

competence and experience, this study contributes theoretically to the research field of principal development. However, further studies should explore the pedagogical leadership of experienced principals in relation to their pathway.

## **Conclusion**

This study contributes by describing and deepening the understanding of how aspects interrelate in terms of the preparation of school principals and their experiences of pedagogical leadership practice in relation to their path into the principalship. By using a metaphorical perspective, images of pathways through landscapes facilitated the understanding of interrelated aspects that need to be studied together to understand how pedagogical leadership is experienced in a specific setting. The study clearly shows that pedagogical leadership cannot be distinguished from what is to be led or from the context in which it occurs, and that profound knowledge and experience are important aspects of pedagogical leadership.

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