



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

LEDARSKAP FÖR LÄRARES LÄRANDE

Förstelärare som lärarledare

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Akademisk avhandling

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Leadership for teacher learning – First teachers as teacher leaders

Abstract

Today, new teacher leader functions are emerging in several parts of the world. Previous research has highlighted the potential of teacher leadership to enhance teacher learning, but also recorded resistance among teachers to being collectively led in efforts to improve teaching and learning. The aim of this thesis is to draw attention to, and contribute knowledge about, local school actors' explicit and implicit teacher leadership constructions in schools. Three overarching research questions are addressed: 1) How is teacher leadership constructed in schools? 2) How do these constructions enhance and constrain possibilities to lead teacher learning? 3) How can visualising explicit and implicit teacher leadership practices contribute to learning about leadership for teacher learning?

Spillane's model of distributed leadership and Wenger's theories of social learning are used to study, analyse, and create knowledge about teacher leadership constructions. Empirically, the thesis is based on material collected in two qualitative studies conducted in Swedish schools in 2019 and 2021/22. This included interviews (58) with visual material and video-observations (6) designed to capture relevant understandings and practices, both explicit and implicit.

The results show that egalitarian and autonomous norms strongly influence teacher leadership constructions, while 'first teachers', whose roles are supposed to include leadership, are solely regarded as teachers, not leaders, with unrecognized functions and practices. The mainly acknowledging and facilitative teacher leader practices both enhance and constrain teachers' learning. On one hand, teachers are encouraged to share ideas and try out alternative teaching methods, while on the other hand, current methods and perspectives on teaching and learning tend to be conserved rather than challenged. Supportive and acknowledging leadership practices therefore need to be combined with challenging of perspectives and a habit of inquiry. By visualising explicit and implicit understandings and teacher leadership practices, local school actors and researchers can gain new insights about ways to develop and improve teacher leadership to promote learning. Four conclusions are drawn: 1) Local school actors' understandings of teacher leadership need to be nuanced, challenged, and developed. 2) Leaders for learning need to manage learning as both individual and collective, concrete and abstract, acknowledging and challenging. 3) Conscious choices and changes are needed at all organisational levels to utilise teacher leaders' capacities. 4) Visualisation of, and reflection on, explicit and implicit understandings and practices contribute to more conscious choices and changes in leadership for learning.

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