Critical perspectives in and approaches to educational leadership in two Nordic countries

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What this chapter is about
This chapter will situate educational leadership in the Nordic countries in relation to political-ideological transformations that have taken place during the last decades by exploring the comparatively divergent development of neo-liberal reform in Sweden and Norway and critically discussing implications for education as a public good in general and for educational leadership in particular.

Our aim is to situate educational leadership within the broader political environments that often go unaccounted for in studies of school leadership. By framing schools and their leaders as political agents, we will show how school principals may enact their roles in ways that are defined not just by their local contextual conditions, but also by their macro-level political structures. By connecting two bodies of scholarship (policy and leadership), we contextualize the field of educational leadership to include an explicit consideration of the broader policy forces and political contexts that act on educational leaders’ work. This approach offers perspectives to promote critical reflection on the implications of the reciprocal relationship between school leadership and education policy.

Key questions this chapter will address
1. Which changes in the political economy have influenced and challenged the idea of public education in Sweden and Norway?
2. What characterizes patterns of and responses to marketization and privatization and the language of public education and educational leadership in the two national settings?
3. How do school principals cope with marketization and privatization, how are they trained, and what knowledge are they expected to turn to?
To answer these questions we draw on different resources, such as a Nordic history research project focusing on the 1800s and 1900s (Ahonen & Rantala, 2001), and our own and others’ previous research on educational leadership and school reforms in a Scandinavian context. We also acknowledge the increasingly important role played by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU) in driving policy towards more homogenization of approaches to school leadership and policy, although national variations exist (Møller, 2009).

**Keywords and outline**

The following concepts are central to the structure of the chapter and its key learning points:

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**Definition box: KEY CONCEPTS**

**Educational leadership:** An emergent relational accomplishment politically positioned within the administrative field in education. It is based on a mandate, but the mandate is a living social process of power and trust that the leaders both are given and must take. It implies a reciprocal interplay as leadership both shapes and is shaped by the conditions where it takes place, in both time and space (Crow, Day & Møller, 2017).

**Social-democratic welfarism:** A commitment to reducing social and political inequality through a generous universal welfare system along with redistributive measures based on need and sustained investment in public education. It encompasses a view that education is integral to democratic development (Møller, 2009).

**Education as ‘public good’:** Emphasizes ‘a common school for all’ with the aim of securing equality in terms of equal opportunities. It is a perspective of education as a social right of citizenship (Englund, 1994).

**Education as ‘private good’:** Implies a possessive individualism where it is possible to differentiate schooling in relation to the specific needs or wants from students and/or families. It means developing a school system based on parents’ and their children’s priorities and judgements about their future (Englund, 1994).

**Neo-liberalism:** A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade (Wiborg, 2013).

**Marketization:** Processes in which market-oriented values, principles and from the private sector are introduced and transferred to the education sphere, often under the umbrella of New Public Management (NPM) (Rönnberg, Lindgren & Lundahl, 2019).

**Privatization:** The transfer of responsibilities from the state and/or public domain to private actors and/or organizations regarding the provision of education (Rönnberg, Lindgren & Lundahl, 2019).
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Next, we will explore the social-democratic welfarist historical legacy in the two countries, followed by the growth of neo-liberal reforms and point to important commonalities and differences. We then trace the images of school leadership in Scandinavia by analyzing both their historical distinctions and forces caused by the spread of political expectations and the impact of transnationalism. Against this background, we then critically discuss how the role of schools, the positioning of school principals in these transformations and how the notion of education as a public good has been challenged.

The cases of Sweden and Norway: Welfare trajectories and contemporary transformations

The social democratic welfarist legacy

Sweden and Norway are geographically, historically, linguistically and culturally very close. Both countries have a strong ideological tradition of emphasising the role of educational institutions in the making of civic society, which has been built on ideas of comprehensiveness and egalitarian values. In addition to preparing children to become able employees, schools should also prepare children to play constructive roles in a democratic society. School access for children from all socio-economic groups, free of charge and with little streaming or tracking has been considered important (Møller, 2009).

However, over the last twenty years, neoliberal reforms of education have been gradually adopted in the Nordic countries, even if to varying degrees. In fact, Sweden and Norway represent marked contrasts in this respect and this makes them interesting cases to compare in this chapter. While Norway has remained more reluctant and has defended the comprehensive and public organization of education, Sweden has allowed private providers to play a much more significant role in delivering education services.

There is no straightforward explanation as to why these countries have embarked on different routes when it comes to marketization and privatization in education (c.f. Definition box below). Even so, factors such as varying macro-economic conditions and different parties in government have been highlighted as parts of the answer. The role of the Social Democratic Parties has also differed, and this party has been more willing to enable market-reforms on education in Sweden (Wiborg, 2013).

The period from 1945 until about 1970 is often referred to as the golden era of social-democratic welfarism (c.f. Definition box above). The cornerstones were citizens’ equal rights, state responsibility for welfare of all citizens, narrowing income gaps and promoting social justice. This model has been supported by the labour market model, with collective
bargaining in co-operation between governments and labour organizations (Telhaug, Mediaas & Aasen, 2006).

Additionally, the development of the comprehensive school system in Scandinavia must be seen in connection with the unique tradition of consensus-seeking politics in education. Both the right- and left-wing parties have sought compromises and agreements on educational reforms. This joint effort has its historical roots in the political mobilization of and alliance between the farmers and the workers. It does not mean absence of conflicts, but there has traditionally been a political striving for consensus. The Social Democratic parties were not rooted in radical socialism, and after the Second World War the workers were able to ally themselves with the growing white-collar middle class (Møller, 2009).

A supplementary dimension to understand the history of education in Scandinavia is the very special form of popular resistance that was constituted by anti-elitist lay religious movements in the 19th century. Particularly in Norway, which, unlike Sweden, did not have traditional aristocracy and economic elites in the late 19th century, these movements grew strong. They implied a broad public involvement in both economic and educational developments. In both countries, local teachers became important agents of civic society and played a crucial role in the processes of shaping national identities. They had the cultural and social capital to act on a trans-local level and to mobilize people to fight for their rights (Ahonen & Rantala, 2001).

The growth of neo-liberal reforms in education

In the beginning of the 1990s, a neoliberal reform gained ground internationally. In the Scandinavian countries it was argued that the welfare-state project had turned national and local authorities into unresponsive, bureaucratic organizations (Uljens et al., 2013). By promoting NPM-related features such as local autonomy, devolution and horizontal specialization and flattened municipal hierarchies, the aim was to have more individualized and efficient public service delivery. During the next 15 years, Norwegian and Swedish governments responded quite differently to these new transnational NPM approaches to educational reforms.

Norway

In Norway, during the 1990s, the NPM agenda did not directly challenge the established tradition of schooling, but it had consequences for the restructuring of the local school administration in terms of deregulation, horizontal specialization and management by objectives. However, the launch of the first Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report in 2001 accelerated a move to a policy influenced by neo-liberalism and a shift from more input-oriented policy instruments towards a more output-oriented policy. It became a turning point in the Norwegian public debates about educational quality. In White Paper No 30, ‘Culture for Learning, 2003–2004’, it was argued that teachers and school leaders needed to do better than before and be more able and willing. This directly suggested that schools had previously failed in raising students’ academic achievements. Each school
would need ambitious school leaders with positive attitudes towards change and improvement. Leadership and accountability became the new panacea for school improvement.

The PISA results have been used to legitimate new forms of bureaucracy in continuous documentation, monitoring of work, and a shift in how trust in education is communicated. New assessment policies with an emphasis on performance measurement and emerging accountability practices characterize the transition processes over the last decade. Prior to these new policies, the public and parents had trust in professionals above all, but now attention was increasingly directed toward trusting what can be measured by results (Møller & Skedsmo, 2013).

To some extent, a market approach to educational reforms has been adopted, but marketization as a principle has been less embraced in the Norwegian context, probably because a market of school choice for students and parents is only possible in larger cities, and private providers are by law not allowed to operate as ‘for-profit’ entities. In Norway in 2018, only 3.8 % of students attended a private elementary school, and 8 % of students attended a private upper secondary school. There is a huge regional variety. While 16 % of the upper secondary students in Oslo and Hordaland (including Bergen) attend a private school, in Finmark fewer than 1 % do so (Statistics Norway, 2018). The population in Norway is widely dispersed, and decentralized settlement is still a desirable aim for most political parties. Moreover, there has also been cross-party consensus to defend the traditional welfare state and a comprehensive school (Wiborg, 2013).

Even so, the language of education at a policy level has increasingly been replaced by the international discourse of learning, which implies an economic way of thinking about education as a commodity to be delivered (cf. ‘education as private good’ in the Definition box above). This new language may erode a broader discussion about education for citizenship over the long term (Biesta, 2004).

**Sweden**

In Sweden, a market approach to educational reform has been pushed much more strongly by, for example, permitting publicly funded but privately owned providers of schooling, which are even allowed to operate as for-profits. Within a short time during the 1990s, Sweden went from a strictly state-regulated and state-delivered system to one inviting and encouraging private interests in the provision of education (Alexiadou, Lundahl & Rönnberg, 2019). The introduction of parental school choice, liberal regulations to open private schools, and the introduction of managerialism into the running of the schools became distinguishing features. In the Nordic and European perspective, Sweden constitutes somewhat of an extreme.

The transformation has undermined the notion of a common school for all (c.f. ‘education as a public good’ in the Definition box above). As an illustration, the notion of equity in education has been a key term in Swedish education policy, but to accommodate the policy changes, the notion has increasingly come to signify equal access to choice of education, rather than the social equality dimension it used to encompass (Alexiadou, Lundahl & Rönnberg, 2019).
When parents are choosing a school for their child, they require ‘value for money’, and the language is rephrased into understanding the teacher as a provider and education as a commodity to be delivered (Biesta, 2004; c.f. ‘education as a private good’ in the Definition box above).

It is worth reiterating that the Swedish Social Democrats went much further with marketization and privatization than the Norwegian Social Democratic Party. Leading Swedish social democrats adopted an NPM-oriented agenda and this policy direction became evident in the implementation of decentralization and school choice reforms. While in office, this party has not abolished regulations permitting providers to operate private independent so-called free schools, nor policies allowing these providers to operate for-profit from revenues from a tax-funded voucher (school fees are not allowed).

Swedish politicians attached high hopes to the school choice and privatization reforms, but there is little evidence that the reforms have lived up to these intentions. Even if parents have been offered far more choice and autonomy, at least in the urban regions, the costs in the form of for instance increasing segregation are high. In the 2010s, public bankruptcies and misconduct of school companies, as well as the steep Swedish PISA decline in 2013, put pressure on education policymakers. But these pressures have not yet resulted in any strong measures to change the overall policy direction (Alexiadou, Lundahl & Rönnberg, 2019).

In the early 1990s, there was a very slow expansion in terms of providers and share of students attending free schools. At the turn of the millennium, however, it became evident that businesses operated as private limited companies were gaining ground. Increasingly, national and international venture and equity firms emerged as actors, and over time, there been an ownership concentration; a handful of large companies host the majority of the free school students. In urban areas, about 50% of the students at the upper secondary level are attending free schools, and the corresponding figure nationally is 25% – a fivefold increase since the early 2000s (Rönnberg, Lindgren & Lundahl, 2019).

These transformations, even if unfolding differently in Sweden and in Norway, have put pressure on school leaders and shaped expectations in particular directions. Next, we turn to these issues, initially by looking back at how school leadership traditionally has been conceptualized.

**The framing of school leadership in Scandinavia**

*From primus inter pares ...*

Both Sweden and Norway have a long history of framing school leadership as *‘primus inter pares’* or ‘first among equals’. This has resulted in not only in a flat hierarchy in schools, but also in uniform teacher training until recently, with little or no formal distinction among members of the teaching staff. Also, trust in teachers’ work has long been a tacit dimension of principals’ approach to leadership.
In Norway, there was, for many years, no specific formal training for school principals, only non-obligatory in-service education provided at the regional level. The choice of candidates for leading positions in the educational system was in general adjusted towards formal assessable criteria, such as number of years in professional service. As a consequence, school principals regarded their administrative functions mostly as applying to rules and regulations. Many principals continued to look upon themselves as teachers with some administrative duties in addition to teaching.

During the 1990s, however, established zones of control were challenged, as some parents and other people outside schools questioned the individual autonomy each teacher had in his or her classroom. This focus shifted the power relationship between the parents and the school, and more emphasis was given to the control of the educational processes. This shift essentially moved the principal from being ‘first among equals’ to a manager, at least in the dominant discourses and in national policy documents.

In Sweden, state involvement in the training of school leaders has occurred since the late 1960s, with the provision of short-term courses in a number of educational and administrative areas. Starting in 1986, a national training program for principals was delivered by the National Agency for Education. Since 1992 programs have been carried out by different universities, while the Agency has kept the overall responsibility. As will be more elaborated below, the current training on management and legislation issues has solidified the shift of principals’ work from pedagogic to managerial.

... to trained managers

In Norway, the interest in principals as managers began to gather momentum in the 1990s, influenced by the NPM discourse, with its focus on strong leaders and entrepreneurs as a vehicle for the modernization project in education. New titles were created for managers at the municipal level, and these people were trained and accredited as managers using business models. Master’s programs in educational leadership and management at the university level were first launched at the beginning of the new millennium, and a national program for newly appointed principals that contains key elements of NPM was introduced in 2009, mainly as a consequence of the country’s participation in the OECD’s ‘improving school leadership’ initiative.

A major assumption was that successful leadership was a key to large-scale education reform and to improving academic achievement, and models of best practice served as a celebration of the hard work of school principals. Based on the education agenda set by the OECD, we argue that some research knowledge (e.g. knowledge about school effectiveness – how to ensure effective learning strategies and increase excellence in literacy and numeracy) has been emphasized by policymakers and administrators in designing these programs in both Sweden and Norway, while research that problematizes power structures has often been marginalized (Møller, 2017).

In Sweden, the National Agency for Education defines the goals, content and coverage of training for school principals. As in Norway, the overall direction has been to situate
principals as managers and administrators. The current program includes three courses: Laws and legal knowledge, management by objectives and finally leadership, indicating the types of knowledge principals are expected to turn to and use, in which more critical scholarship has had a marginal role. For principals, competition to attract students and the public display of performance measurements have created new tasks. Information, PR and marketing strategies, as well as development of school profiles and school programs, are time-consuming parts of principals’ everyday work. This is the case for leadership in both public and private free schools, both of which need to compete for students in order to keep the schools running and their teachers employed.

Later in the chapter, we will listen to the voices of some Swedish principals and how they express how marketization and privatization affect them (c.f. Figure below). But before we do that, we move on to situate national and international discourses on leadership in relation to our national cases.

**Distributed and heroic framing of school leadership**

Today, an overall tension can be discerned in both Norway and Sweden between those who argue for top-down conceptions of ‘strong’ leadership and those who argue for a participative approach and the need for distributive leadership. Overall, the changing social environment in Europe in general has led to new governance structures that provide a particular context for educational reforms, and both the EU and the OECD seem to play powerful roles in driving and attenuating policy across nation states. These structures are also affecting the roles and responsibilities of school leaders and the approach to leadership development.

But even if the international dimension is both important and constitutive, there are national and historical particularities, as well as more overall ideologies (and research) on what constitutes ‘successful’ education, that contribute to the framing of educational leadership. We will use findings from the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) to illustrate this point.

The ISSPP study, which mainly included case studies of successful principal constructed by the researchers based on interviews with principals, teachers, students and parents, provided a window into the lived experience of successful schools and successful principals across more than 20 countries. The goal was to understand under which cultural, social and political conditions leadership was considered successful.

The Swedish and Norwegian cases in this project emphasized furthermore how the construction of leadership identity was grounded in the view that education should promote democracy as a fundamental social value and an ethical guide to citizenship. Mutual trust and respect between school leaders and teachers were at the core of what they thought should count as a successful school. Simultaneously, the Scandinavian studies recorded a stronger focus on managerial practice and external accountability. Understanding leadership as *primus inter pares* was often recognized by the principals as a romanticized, old-fashioned view of leadership in schools. Today, Scandinavian school leaders have, like their colleagues in other countries, taken on many more administrative and managerial tasks. Their superiors, the
teachers and the parents all expect far more of our school leaders than ever before. Evident in all stories of the participating principals across countries is an ethic of care, and an important claim is that successful leadership is distributed. However, how principals’ work is embedded in social structures of power is obscured (cf. our definition of ‘educational leadership’ in the Definition box above).

Thus, although models of distributed leadership have gained terrain both in research like ISSPP and in Scandinavian policy documents, we argue that such models rarely address political and normative dimensions of this type of work (Møller, 2017). Let us take a few moments to think a bit about leadership as a context-sensitive, moral and political enterprise.

Reflection box: STOP AND REFLECT

In current policy documents both strong and distributed leadership are emphasized. While it is argued that strong leadership (often equated with the traits and actions of a heroic principal) is needed to transform schools into learning organizations, distributive leadership recognizes that there are multiple leaders in a school and focusses on the complex interactions and micro-political activities. However, none of these perspectives challenge the wider power structures in which the school is embedded and they do not pay attention to the processes that create and sustain social justice.

Different lenses on leadership present an opportunity for reflecting upon leadership practice in your school. Therefore, we ask you to please reflect on what is considered as a successful school and successful leadership in your context.

- Success in what and for whom?
- Success under what conditions?
- Who is included/excluded?
- How is your understanding of successful educational leadership aligned with our definition (cf. definition box)

Leadership for social justice calls for a collective endeavor in the local community and the wider society, but how do you cope with such a challenge?

- How can you include stakeholders at the local level in the work for a more democratic and just society?
- Whose voices are allowed to be heard?
- How is it possible to facilitate arenas for the many voices?

Business management approaches gaining terrain

So far, we have concluded that school leaders in Sweden and in Norway are increasingly influenced by business management approaches. How such approaches is gaining terrain is further developed below, using the case of Norway as the focal point of the discussion.
A recent feature in Norway, as a consequence of the restructuring of municipal governance of schools, is the fact that many principals today coordinate various functions that earlier were handled at the municipal level.

This new arrangement, recommended by the OECD and coined ‘system leadership’, has both gains and strains. The advantage is that the principals distribute their leadership energies, experiences and knowledge between their own schools and others. Everyone finds himself or herself in a new space of more intensive communication with colleagues from other schools, and this interaction across schools may open up for mutual learning. In the absence of the principal, the staff members have to take responsibility for internal affairs. This creates a potential for the building of deputies’ and teachers’ capacities, but it also burdens them with more workload. Often, this move has taken the shape of increased responsibility combined with decreased authority in a context of often insufficient resources. In particular, the implementation of NPM at municipal level has resulted in less time and attention for providing leadership for improved teaching and learning.

The use of new evaluation technologies by both managers at the municipal level and principals to monitor student outcomes can be read as a shift toward what has been termed ‘organizational professionalism’, which incorporates standardized work procedures and relies on external regulation and accountability measures (Evets, 2011). It echoes the management discourse promoted by the OECD, where a performance orientation is one of the main pillars, closely connected to output control. New expectations of public reporting and external accountability create both challenges and possibilities for school leaders, but how these affect the work of school leaders very much depends on the local organizational work contexts.

In some of the larger cities, merit pay for both teachers and principals has been introduced, but so far it has been tricky to measure any effect. Policymakers argue that competition among schools will promote school improvement and that parental choice is a guarantor of democracy. The line of reasoning is, as in Sweden, that vouchers and choice will give ‘everyone’ a right to choose the school that best serves his or her interests, regardless of social class, gender, and ethnicity. However, others argue that a market model will work only for some parents and schools, to the disadvantage of others and hampering equality of educational opportunity. In Sweden, this debate is more silenced.

1. From a public to private good? Critical reflections and spaces for action

So, what do these national cases tell us? Let us go back to the Definition box presented in the beginning of the chapter and Englund’s (1994) notions of education as a public and/or private good. We think this conceptual distinction is useful as a way to promote discussion on the aims and overall drivers of education in relation to its political context, and consequently also to critically discuss how the roles and functions of school principals and their agency are being re-positioned. This is an urgent discussion in times of marketization and privatization
and the transformations that have taken place in the ‘social democratic welfare states’ we have studied in this chapter. Education as a public good has more or less been taken for granted in the policy rhetoric, but the overall policy direction has clearly promoted the idea of education as a private good in both countries, even if Sweden has taken further steps in this direction than Norway – so far, at least.

In current policy documents from both countries, it is argued that education policy should simultaneously be driven by values of social justice and inclusive education as well as the market. Politicians do not see themselves as tearing down the welfare state. On the contrary, as it is argued that marketization reforms can mobilize teachers and school principals to do better than before. There is, however, an uneasy tension between public and private good embedded in such arguments. It is difficult to see how a mixed public/private education system relying on a possessive individualism could prepare citizens better for the communicative society than a public education that provides the right of the child to encounter the pluralist society within the school (Englund, 1994; c.f. education as a public or private good in the Definition box above).

A closer look at the Swedish transformation

Bringing a language of education for private good into play has allowed for a reinterpretation of the educational process in terms of an economic transaction. It is not only principals who become positioned in particular ways. In the overall policy rhetoric, parents and students also become situated as not making the ‘right’ choices, positioned as not acting ‘rationally enough’ and as being in ‘need’ of certain nudging measures to help them to choose ‘better’ and ‘more actively’. Such positioning becomes constitutive for how blame is attributed and for how solutions are legitimized. Indeed, it also works to leave the overall policy direction favoring choice and competition unchallenged and even reinforced (Alexiadou, Lundahl & Rönnberg, 2019).

In the Swedish case, there are few attempts to politically change or alter these developments towards both extensive marketization and privatization (cf. Definition box above). This is a bit peculiar, as this shift surely comes with a ‘price’ in terms of, for instance, segregation and a declining emphasis on social justice. Teachers and principals remain largely silent on these issues as well, which also is a bit peculiar, since their daily work and working conditions are affected to a considerable extent by these shifts.

We said we would return to the Swedish principals and listen to how they describe their work in times of extensive marketization and privatization. As the figure below exemplifies, their talk describes significant changes, including schools being business-like, segregated and the task of leadership as an entrepreneurial manager, requiring knowledge and skills that reach far beyond the traditional pedagogical domain. The changes have affected principals in both public and private free schools.
Note: Figure created by the Authors. The quotes are from Holm & Lundström (2011).

The quotes, along with other evidence, point to the quite remarkable transformation that was made possible in the Swedish case, in which education and the work of school professionals have been significantly altered. Very few policymakers, or even researchers predicted that these realities would be the result of school choice and the introduction of private (for-profit) school operators in combination with tax-funded vouchers.

The quotes in the figure also illustrate that neo-liberal reforms do more than shape policy and curriculum. They also influence how school principals (and teachers) understand themselves
as professionals. An ethos of public service is challenged by the discipline of the market and outcomes-based accountability.

Creating spaces to think differently

Schools are sites of struggle and politics is the essential mechanism of that struggle. Certain interests are threatened by change, both within the school and in the wider political community. Professional development for both teachers and principals should pay attention to the ethical challenges principals and teachers are facing within a society dominated by economic rationales. It should include reflective analysis of how broader political and economic policies are affecting education for public good. As researchers, scholars and educators, we should reclaim a language of education based on trust and risk, subjectivity and agency, challenge and responsibility.

Future educational leaders will inevitably have to deal with the realities of marketization and privatization and their different national and local manifestations. We argue that these leaders also need to be provided with conceptual tools, perspectives and agency that enable them to unmask the corporate myths that the business community and the associated market-based discourses promote. We need critical leaders (and scholarship) to take these discussions further, learn from them and to find ways of strengthening and defending education as a public good.

In the light of the concepts and ideas related to the critical perspectives and approaches to educational leadership that have been discussed so far in this chapter, and before summing up our main argument, we would now like to invite you to engage in two activities:

Activity box: A REFLECTIVE POLICY DESIGNER PROMOTING EDUCATION AS A PUBLIC GOOD

1) Answer the following questions.

- Is there a tension between education as a 'public good' and 'private good' in your national and/or organizational context? Why/why not?
- When it comes to formal and informal expectations on educational leadership and educational leaders, are there particular features linked to education as a public or private good that are embedded in these expectations?

2) Be a 'policy designer'.

You have been commissioned to develop national or local policy that will aim at strengthening the public dimension in education and promoting education as a public good. What policy would you design and what measures and strategies for implementation would you suggest for its success? Why? Unlike reality (and luckily), there are no budget restrictions attached to your hypothetical policy design experiment.
What is to be learned?
We have highlighted changes in the political economy that have challenged the idea of public education in both Norway and Sweden, but to different degrees. We have illustrated how policy and expectations on school leadership have been transformed as a response to marketization and privatization as well as to international trends and actors. We have also discussed how the languages and ways of talking about public education and educational leadership have been affected in the wake of these transformations. In this context, the Swedish far-reaching marketization and privatization of education may serve as a cautionary tale to learn from.

Marketization has put principals in a position in which they have to cope with demanding challenges, and to do so they need both training and different forms of support. But principals can also, importantly enough, critically reflect upon their own agency and what spaces there are for action, in terms of for instance defending social justice and democratic values in times when they are challenged. In particular, and as a key learning point, we have wanted to highlight the importance of finding room for acting differently in relation to defending education as a public rather than a private good (Englund, 1994, c.f. Definition and Activity boxes above).

2. References


### 3. Further reading


