

## **School Leadership and the Organisation of Lesson Study**

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### **Abstract**

Historically, Lesson Study (LS) has been considered a method for developing competence-based approaches to teaching and learning as part of elementary and secondary school practices. This research article is based on qualitative data and the study of implementations of LS in lower secondary schools, where school leadership is analysed in relation to LS work and the use of organisational resources. Emphasis is put on the work of organising, interpreting and implementing LS. Through analysis of empirical data from interviews and observations, two perspectives are discussed which illustrate different styles of leadership with associated perspectives, strategies and forms of organisation. Different, yet complementary perspectives are described that provide insight into school leadership and a multitude of organisational aspects, forms of collaboration and professional development.

*Keywords: School Leadership, Lesson Study, School Development, Competency-Based Approach, Lower Secondary Schools, Work Organisation & Program Implementation*

## Introduction

This article explores the implementation of Lesson Study based on a group of school leaders' organisation of work in lower secondary schools in Norway. The research question guiding the study is: *What characterise the school leaders' interpretations and organisation of Lesson Study at school?* Lesson Study (LS) is a method for professional development used to improve student learning and teacher's instructional skills based on collaboration and mutual efforts in planning, teaching, revising and evaluating lessons. It is commonly referred to as a *systemic* approach to school development, and a cutting-edge competency framework for educational development. Historically, LS has been a way of conducting school- and competency-based development in the form of local, inside-to-outside work processes conceptually rooted in Japanese methodology for student learning and school improvement. The article outlines leadership styles and perspectives where the school leaders' knowledge and experiences are the vantage point for analysing work organisation and implementation of LS.

## Theoretical Framework and Research Perspective

In an international review article, Xu and Pedders conclude that “Most of the research carried out into LS has adopted a small-scale, qualitative, exploratory and inductive mode of inquiry that has helped researchers to study in-depth a range of variations of LS adapted for use in different local contexts” (2015, p. 49-50)<sup>1</sup>. The authors call for further research on school leadership, organisational work and micro-political processes affecting LS work, and refer to Robinson and Leikin (2012), which confirms the importance of investigating LS implementation in *different* schools in *different* countries with *different* practices and organisational culture. The need for empirical studies of LS and of school leadership is also highlighted by other researchers (Lewis, Perry & Murrata, 2006; Spillane, 2009; Hope & Grimsæth, 2016; Wilkinson & Bristol, 2018). However, in spite of a large amount of LS-research and research on school leadership contributing to advantageous policy discourses, there are an inadequate amount of research on school leadership related to LS. Nevertheless, there are some highly important contributions. This includes Akiba and Wilkinson's (2016)

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<sup>1</sup> A systematic review by Cheung & Wong (2014) identifies similar tendencies, but without incorporating school leadership perspectives.

study of a large-scale Lesson Study implementation by the Florida Department of Education anticipating LS to be a useful tool for school development and professionalisation. Introductions and implementations were carried out with the assistance of consultants and state affiliated counsellors who supervised school leaders and teachers throughout this effort of systemwide improvement. In another study Saito & Sato (2012) discuss how LS served as a tool for school reform as they analyse the implementation of LS initiated by the school leaders at a Japanese youth school (*chūgakkō*). Dudley's (2015) research on elementary school principals and their organisation of LS draw attention to aspects as teacher autonomy and teachers' professional learning processes as vital parts of LS work (see also Chenault, 2017).

In a Nordic context, a small amount of studies incorporates leadership perspectives when examining LS at work. As in Olsen and Wølner (2017), although the main focus is LS linked to teachers' learning processes and the development of professional competencies (see Munthe, Helgevold & Bjuland, 2015; Hallås & Grimsæth, 2016). Thus, empirical research investigating school leaders' organisation of LS is highly needed, and the present study is an effort to contribute to this field of research. Styles of leadership and associated forms of organisation are often viewed as results of the leaders' knowledge and experiences, which may impact decision making and implementation strategies (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2014; Northouse, 2016). Similarly, it may be regarded as a result of tensions and influences from both external and internal forces, with consequence for organisation of work and relationship building processes (Miller & Ottesen, 2011; Courtney, McGinity & Gunter, 2018). In this study such impacts are analysed and discussed using empirical data that exemplifies leadership experiences and assessments of LS work associated with school- and competency-based development projects. Considering the developments and historical outlines of LS, this is interesting. Ever since LS was imported to the United States from Japan in the 1990s, the method has been regarded as a tool for local school development, most often with the aim of promoting student and teacher learning (Takahashi, 2000; Hart, Alston & Murata, 2011; Ronda, 2013). Over the past decades, however, LS has gained new focus areas and experienced a strong boost internationally, assembling new participants, associations, stakeholders and advice-giving services. This may be an effect of how associates of educational policy have linked LS to public school improvement programs and education reform agendas, or how local adaptations and modifications of LS developed and fostered

more distinctive forms and varieties. Based on empirical data, LS will in the following be analysed from both *inside* and *outside* perspectives, exposing relations and forms of leadership and organisation expressed through the school leaders' descriptions of LS work. Different views and perspectives are analysed that may discover complex mechanisms, relationships and structures. This is significant, and as Irgens (2016) points out, it is in the interplay of outer and inner forces that ideas and understandings of school practice repeatedly are (co)constructed and conserved. From an in-depth perspective, the article therefore examines how governance and professional interests and relationships influence processes of implementation and organisation of LS work. The core context is the professional collegium, colleagues of teachers and school leaders *at work*, along with the organisation of educational resources at school. An *outside* perspective may open up to what extent the school leaders experience external factors and forces as influential, promoting to the organisation of work, e.g. governing bodies (government or municipal agencies), policy reports, or merging interests advocated by educational authorities indicating what they consider important. In this, the article draws on Hadfield & Jopling's (2016) study of LS and professionalisation as processes of mutual construction and reconfiguration, both *inside* the schools and *outward* associated with plans and programs of the political-administrative apparatus. In studying processes of implementation and development, the article also builds on Fullan's model of ideas and arrangements *put into practice*, and emphasis will be put on the phases of initiation and implementation (Fullan, 2007, 2017).

## **Method and Methodological design**

The study's qualitative research design is based on systematic collection, organisation, and interpretation of empirical data from interviews, observations and field notes. 10 semi-structured interviews with School Principals, Assistant Principals and School Inspectors were conducted at Norwegian public schools in November and December 2015. All are individual interviews with 1-2 hours duration. In terms of methodological design and procedures, follow-up questions and dialogic validation (Malterud, 2017) were completed in 2016 and 2017. Observations of LS work took place in classrooms and plenary sessions at 6 schools, along with 90 school visits at 18 schools in Eastern Norway. Moreover, attendances at LS-related meetings, seminars and conferences have also formed the basis for understanding the school leaders' preferences, references and sources of information and inspiration.

Additionally, the study includes assessment and analyses of local, regional and national policy plans and strategy documents, besides research literature that the school leaders referred to. A total of 6 schools were randomly chosen from 18 schools. Amid the 6 schools, and on the basis of divergent features which would exemplify different perspectives and forms of leadership, empirical data were obtained from two of these schools, in the article termed “School 1” and “School 2”. As part of this inquiry-based case study research, interview data are put forward in the form of two cases, A and B. Case A presents and discuss empirical data from *School 1* and parts of the transcribed interviews with the principal (man, approx. 50 years) and a school inspector (man approx. 35 years). Subsequently, Case B presents data from *School 2* through interviews with the principal (woman approx. 55 years) and a school inspector (man, approx. 35 years). Due to space limitations, the display of empirical data is thus somewhat restricted. At the time of the study the schools took part in a Norwegian state-run initiative entitled “Development at Lower Secondary Level” (DLSL) [in Norway titled “Ungdomstrinn i utvikling”, abbreviated to UiU], associated with a national school improvement reform running from 2013 to 2016. At the elementary school referred to as *School 1*, only student aged 13–16 at the Norwegian grad levels 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> participated, which at the time of the interviews, roughly comprised 200 students and 20 teachers. *School 2*, a lower secondary school with levels 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>, had approximately 200 students and 20 teachers.

Transcriptions from interviews, observational data, field notes, logs, memo records from plenary sessions and meetings with school leaders were systematically compiled, compared, interpreted and analysed. Parts of the work were carried out through research collaboration and discussions with research colleagues. The analysis of similarities and differences is based on this. Likewise, external researchers were consulted for reliability testing. In interpretation and analysis, assessments have been made to whether the interviewee’s acquaintances and knowledge of the study may have affected the interview and its questions and replies (Kvale, Brinkmann, Anderssen & Rygge 2009). For analytical purposes and ethical reasons research data have been anonymised and certain identity markers altered without relocating data from the original context. The study was reported to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) in 2015 and 2016 and meets with research ethical conditions as informed consent and voluntary participation. The amount of schools and respondents represents a limitation, and results from this study can by no means be generalised to the larger number of schools participating in DLSL. However, the study point to important features, tendencies and

developments which contribute to the building of knowledge on LS linked to school leadership and work organisation. Literature searches were conducted through a combination of keywords and controlled vocabulary searches in electronic databases,<sup>2</sup> digital archives and databases for systematic reviews (Campbell Collaboration and Cochrane Library), online handbooks, encyclopaedias, and directly into the archives of Nordic and international journals, and review journals.

## **Historical and conceptual anchoring**

LS can be traced back to 19<sup>th</sup> century Japan where public schools implemented and developed the method. From the 1960s and onwards, descriptions of LS, in Japanese called *jugyō kenkyū*, have been linked to the strengthening of inner capabilities of school-based competence development or *kōnai kenshū*,<sup>3</sup> a concept that signals an inside-out perspective on educational development and professionalisation of practice (Makinae, 2010; Arani, Fukaya & Lassegard, 2010). The quality of LS work was considered to be dependent on interests, efforts and shared responsibilities among teachers and school leaders, along with abilities to implement and anchor LS through professional collaboration and community cohesion (Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004).

## **Lesson Study as a school-based and competence-building tool**

LS work comprises a cycle of “research lessons” named the *Lesson Study Cycles*, where 3-6 teachers collaborate on experimenting and exploring their teaching practices throughout each *inquiry cycle*. The purpose is to develop professional knowledge in working with educational materials and approaches that link professional skills to student learning and organisational change (Lewis, 2002; Wiburg & Brown, 2007; Cerbin, 2011). Joint planning of 1-3 lessons include the formulation of objectives and research questions which provide guidance for teaching, observations and data collections, followed by group discussions and assessments. During the research lesson one of the teachers teach, while the others collect data through

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<sup>2</sup> ERIC (Ovid), PsycINFO (Ovid), Web of Science, Sociological Abstracts (ProQuest), Education Source (EBSCO), International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (ProQuest), Scopus (Elsevier) and Google Scholar.

<sup>3</sup> In the term *kōnai kenshū* (校内研修) *kōnai* translates to “within school” and *kenshū* to “training”.

observation. In subsequent group work the teachers analyse and evaluate their results before revising former plans and procedures ahead of an imminent inquiry cycle. The LS-method is grounded in research methodology and research logic using research questions and contemporary educational literature and research. Actions and achievements are dependent on the teachers' competence, experience and understanding of their students' development, efforts and results.

## **Representations of school leadership and organisation**

In the following, a constellation of anonymised data from the interviews presenting views and descriptions from principals and teaching inspectors at *School 1* and *School 2* are represented and analysed.<sup>4</sup> Case A reveal that the use of LS as a device for school development and teachers competence-building happened to be a long-winded process that somewhat grinded to a halt, despite the school leaders efforts to elucidate the significance, relevance and associations with educational reforms. Likewise, the principal highlighted objectives and opportunities for student *and* teacher learning, and advancements in the curriculum-related subjects involved. Case B illustrates developmental work in progress on top of a committed, in-force leadership, though simultaneously uncovering major challenges in finding and organising time and space for teacher collaboration associated professional development processes. As organisational processes at *School 2* turned out to be rather extensive compared to *School 1*, Case B in this context encompass somewhat more data and descriptions.

### **Case A, School 1**

The school leaders at *School 1* were the School Principal, an Assistant Principal and a School Inspector. In agreement with the municipal school administration, the school leaders decided there would be a two-year period focusing on LS along with competence building and collaboration among teachers. In implementing LS, an important aim was that research lessons subjected to mathematics would facilitate and improve students' understanding and learning outcomes. A team responsible for organising and coordinating the LS work was established, which, along with the school leaders, involved two "Project Resource Teachers"

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<sup>4</sup> All statements (in quotes) come from the principals unless specified otherwise.

[an established Norwegian term for local teachers especially appointed to aid a project/program]. During the interview the principal pointed to conceptual linkages between LS and DLSL [UiU] as ways of strengthening and professionalising school leadership and teacher collaboration, and to reinforce communication and consulting activities between the municipal administration and the school leaders. As pointed out by the principal, this provided school leaders with “sufficient legitimacy” to account for, foster and develop the school’s educational competences and capability. In linking up corresponding concepts and ideas, the principal also draw a line from prior to present policies and reforms including the Norwegian Government’s *Knowledge Promotion Reform* of 2006 (KPR06) [“Kunnskapsløftet”, in Norwegian abbreviated to LK06], White Papers and Official Norwegian Reports which advocated subject specific competence building and promoted professional and practice-based learning and development.<sup>5</sup> When asked to comment on the objectives of implementing LS, the principal swiftly explained:

The aim is to develop knowledge and skills that important to teachers in their day-to-day work with students, and to create a larger professional community. Partly to understand and observe interactions and relations between the teachers' subject-oriented and educational projects or preferences, and the students' learning processes ... so as to develop methods that promote student learning... The latter was also the focus in our 'peer observation and group supervision'-sessions, and a frequent subject in dialogues between the teachers.

The quotation demonstrates an understanding of LS as a tool for professionalising and investigating relations between teacher work and student learning. The principal also stressed that the implementation of educational policies supporting these ideas had taken a long time, as this began more than a decade ago with a governmental policy recommendation for qualitative assessment of student skills equivalent to the competence aims in KPR06, along with tools and methods to carry it out. In an attempt to implement these policies, the principal saw it a matter of “narrowing and refining” the effort, and acquire proficient assistance from

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<sup>5</sup> The principal also referred to former governmental plans, reports and strategic document like “*The Teacher Promotion*” (2014) [the original title in Norwegian is *Lærerløftet*], *White Paper 30. (2007-2008)* [in Norwegian: *Stortingsmelding 30 (2007-2008)*] and *White Paper 31. (2007-2008)* [Stortingsmelding 31 (2007-2008)], along with a webpage on Lesson Study at the website of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training [Norwegian title *Utdanningsdirektoratet*, abbreviated UDIR].



“external supervisors and experts”. He supported state-initiated assessments and improvement strategies for student learning and academic achievement as a basis for developing competence in educational matters as teaching and subject didactics. The implementation of LS was based on such approaches along with concepts for improving the teachers' opportunities to “explore ... and have a critical look at their own work” plotting out whether they “had deviating expectations to different groups of students relative to their cognitive potential”. An additional comment from the school inspector stated that the school’s documentation of “mathematics education reviled that we [the school] did not succeed in improving the outcomes in mathematics, in particular with reference to less proficient students”. Thus, LS should be implemented as a methodological instrument to scrutinize, strengthen and professionalise connections between teaching methods and student work as “[m]athematics is a suitable subject for Lesson Study due to the amount of well-defined topics one may investigate, for instance Algebra” ... “in addition, teachers in the Math Section have a firm and joint grip on their projects and performances, as they reflect, make new arrangements, etc. However, the work [on LS] is not yet structured and systematised” (School Inspector). Some of the teachers had participated in ‘peer observation and group supervision’-sessions for almost a year, working in pairs to observe each other “focusing on the teacher, the observation, and as follows, improving several aspects of each other’s practice in the line of work”. As the result of differing outlooks and experiences, the school leaders decided to “shift the focus from teacher instruction to student learning” since “Lesson Study is a far better way ... of exploring what really works for different students” (Principal).

In adding it up, the principal emphasised that LS truly requires comprehensive, and at times demanding and time-consuming collaboration among teachers, and that collaborative team implementation and the organisation of work can be quite a resource-intensive endeavour. Hence, “keeping up the pressure” seemed crucial besides continuing the process of “volunteering; working with those who communicated their commitment”. The work on preparatory tasks and measures, organisational approaches, and the provision of resources, stretched out in time in spite of the school leaders’ efforts and ambitions to “create development, engagement ... with a continued focus, yet, without expecting an all-around commitment”. Eight months into the project, the implementation of LS still lingered in an embryotic phase while waiting to reach its augured potential.

## Case B, School 2

The school leaders at *School 2* were the School Principal and a School Inspector. At this school, LS work was initiated by “teachers wanting to work together in designing and planning educational content and learning activities for [future] lessons, like in [the methodology of] Lesson Study”. The purpose was “to have a look at [observe] the other’s organisation of class activities” (School Inspector). The organising committee responsible for planning, monitoring and implementation of LS [in the Norwegian context called “Project Group”] consisted of the school leaders and two Project Resource Teachers. Similar to the organisational settings at *School 1*, LS was linked to DLSL, where improvements in mathematical knowledge and skill were pivotal. Efforts and results of LS work were continuously assessed at scheduled assemblies where the school leaders and the teaching staff participated. Work on organisational changes took place as a common preparation where LS and plans on teaching and related practices were described, discussed and defined. The principal regarded *time* as an important resource, emphasising that LS work unquestionably “took its time”, and as such, strived to keep disturbing factors off the road. Common commitment to LS was settled through a written poll involving the entire teaching staff. The decision was soon after followed up by a full-time seminar devoted to the method, in which the teachers prepared by studying a booklet on LS, all organised by school leaders. The principal’s intention was to involve as many teachers as possible since the seminar provided an opportunity to go *in depth*, whilst planning LS work in divisional groups with reference to the various school subjects: “It turned out to be a process of *deep learning* since Lesson Study is a method teachers need to get under their skin ... and we needed to review the practical processes, discuss what was essential, where we wanted to go and... how to collaborate within the subject-related areas”. Similar to *School 1*, the teachers also had some experience in doing peer observation and group supervision. According to the principal, organisational endeavours and experiences from this work stirred an interest in LS work. Thus, LS became part of the school's continuous focus on competence development:

In fact, ahead of the seminar we started by trying out ‘peer observation and group supervision’-sessions as part of the DLSL [UiU] project, though we wanted to focus on student learning processes, not so much on the teacher [as in peer observation]. The idea was to develop the teachers' competence and ... got organised so that the teaching staff could reflect on and share what they aimed at in doing ‘peer observation and group supervision’ and Lesson Study, thus discussing with peers at each grade level

[educational stages], try it out, etc. – as a [democratic] procedure to avoid performing a top-down leadership. It turned out that the majority of the teachers choose Lesson Study and wanted to focus on student learning ... and to do research - because regardless of educational focus or field of study, Lesson Study is a method which can be used to develop something new. Whether it is teachers in a particular section or grade-level who want to develop something new, plans and tasks have to be tested and implemented which makes it interesting to research the subject whilst focusing on student learning – *that* is also where we ought to be. By working with Lesson Study, teachers develop opinions on and an understanding of the act of doing research on learning ... either when they develop something in common, or as a tool for scrutinizing their own educational approaches, and learning how to observe.

The excerpt explains how implementations of LS took place through collaboration, joint discussions and shared assessments where needs and developmental areas were identified. According to the inspector the school's experiences from doing peer observation and group supervision resulted in teachers getting more involved in the process: "Since we had reached this far and our experiences with peer observation and group supervision were encouraging, this [LS] was regarded as a natural extension ... and finally a chance to get to work *in depth*. The Resource Teachers have been highly active and enthusiastic since we started". The teachers took the method into account by exploring links between subject content, assignments and learning needs. According to the principal it was the school leaders' responsibility to facilitate and "visualise this ... [as] the teacher may want to alter processes and procedures, along with the rationale for putting it into practise" ... so "we must intervene and engage, show appreciation, lift things up, and make these processes visible". At the same time she admitted it was an organisational challenge to allocate sufficient resources and "in depth time" to be able to work with different educational levels and sections and elaborated on what seemed indispensable:

Time to go deeper into issues we want to work with, focus on - giving teachers the possibility to go *in depth* [educationally, intellectually and methodically] without too many distractions. I think it's essential to get the teachers involved in development work ... and that the school's subject related sections can work *in depth*, e.g. in mathematics - asking: What is the best way for students to learn algebra? – as a point of departure for planning good quality lessons in algebra, since deep learning and being able to go deeper is essential when working constructively in the subject related areas and sections with emphasis on tasks and arrangements for students ... Ahead of the seminar, I talked to a union representative at school as [LS] work generally is understood as a time consuming activity, and we agreed to validate time spent at the seminar as an adding up of working hours, since we tested it [LS] out in ordinary

lessons. Teacher who taught or observed got this work acknowledged and calculated as regular work hours, time to do collaborative work, or leave of absence. In addition, teacher could have a substitute [teacher] to their individual teaching hours. The trade union agreed to this usage and calculation of time.

The quote illustrates the school leader's specifications of time and framework conditions as resources for development and investigation. "They all found it valuable to be able to sit together and plan something like this - plan the LS research lesson and work within their subject areas. It's an everlasting need and aspire to be able to acquire enough time to collaborate on the subject one teaches" (School Inspector). According to the inspector, it took a lot of planning and organisation to establish such an event. Nevertheless, the principal's backups and encouragements to face up to it finally convinced the sections at all grade-levels. Shared considerations, exchanges of opinions and mutual definition shaped the means by which LS was implemented, as explained by the principal:

To obtain this *shared* understanding of aims and concepts among the teaching staff was important to us. We're having our first [LS] run-through and it's enough to be able to test the observation chart *together* and point to various aspects [as] they've made this cooperative arrangement together. Due to the time set aside for preparing the lesson they'll carry it out and evaluate - in advance of testing it out again [in the next cycle]. So we've filled up the staff meetings of an entire month for doing collaborate work. This is also why we refrain from having the schedule 'collective time' [common planning time] that month. All this time will be set aside for teacher collaboration on Lesson Study, with an option to do this separately, in their grade-level units... [This is] the way we think, work *together*, do things *together*, trying it out *together*, and collectively reflect on and direct the work, as we ask: What do we want to examine together? As well as how to govern it all, identify priorities, etc.

This detailed and thorough organising of resources and collective competence-building processes gave focus to the systematic implementation of LS based on joint decisions. Involving the teaching staff in the decision-making processes was what mattered the most, as to make use of the school's expertise and competence. Prioritising in this manner seemed essential as to how the teachers became a driving force in the implementation process. This was "*absolutely crucial*", since "they [the teachers] are going to design and organise [lessons], plans and observe together. The key factor is having enough time to plan and organise". The principal also called for support and a communicated interest in LS work from the part of the municipal school administration, but reckoned the issue dwindled to nothing among other

matters on the public agenda, like governmental plans and strategies, and the forthcoming fusion of municipal counties: “The municipal school administration could have been more supportive and ... engage in and charted [the school's] development, as Lesson Study is a part of this [common progress], as how to collaborate and develop the organisation”.

## Further analysis and discussion

School leadership and the school leaders' descriptions of LS and the work of organising and implementing it, will with reference to features and tendencies be further discussed in light of the two cases. In Case B, skill development and school capacity building can be identified as an inner potency facilitated by the school leaders' ambitious attempt to focus on collaboration, cooperative action and shared organisational work - while outward connections, e.g. toward the municipal school administration, appears to be weak. Rather than starting with a small group of volunteers (as in *School 1*), the school leaders organised joint meetings and collaboration processes that involved the entire teaching staff. The organising committee ensured the required resources, established organisational frameworks, structures and support systems for participation. This heightened the teachers' expectations, besides establishing and effectuating joint communication and organisation, and evaluation of work. In other words, a democratic and well-coordinated leadership, which in theories on *distributed leadership* are associated with concepts as participating, inclusive and educational styles of leadership (Leithwood, Mascall & Strauss, 2009; Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009) - often with the effect of developing new inner patterns of collaboration (Spillane, 2006). If analysed with regard to more traditional and individual-oriented theories of school leadership, the principal's sincere commitment and efforts to inspire and motivate, might be associated with the term *transformational leadership* (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Northouse & Lee, 2016). Thus, it may also be characterised as a complex or *hybrid* form of leadership (Gronn, 2009). The motive for implementing transformative processes was to acquire professional and organisational development, not an aggregation of academic results (Gunter, 2016). The school leaders' effort to distribute and conjointly mobilise *internal* plans and forces through a deep or “in depth” organisation of time and space, may be characterised as a form of *deep leadership* (Fullan, 2017). Correspondingly, their use of the term *deep learning* may be associated with educational theories or rhetoric found in educational policy documents (e.g. NOU 2014: 7 and NOU 2015: 8 [Official Norwegian Reports]). However, in this case the

application of the term is linked to a particular context, anchored in local discussions and the teachers' examination of practical and principal aspects of LS work.

In Case A, a different tendency unfolds in how associations to education policy reforms, governing documents and the municipal school administration influence ideas and interpretations uttered by the principal, which simultaneously reveal a weaker inner link to the building of collective structures, organisational development and competence. A form of leadership characterised by loyalty and responsiveness to external signals, requirements and systems of accountability, whilst educational authorities appeal to school leaders' responsibility to cooperate (Gunter 2012, p. 58). It was a matter of "keeping up the pressure", although the pressure seems to constitute a sole rhetorical pressure, with insignificant inward effects, and few results in terms of organisation of work and responsibilities among teachers. At the same time, one should not ignore the fact that the principal's position here may have strengthened the school's outward status, while at the same time shielding the teachers' practices from 'intrusive' ideas and concepts of change and improvement (Christensen, Egeberg, Læg Reid, Roness & Røvik, 2017; Gunter, 2018). Thus, the links between the school leaders and the municipal administration were strengthened. At the same time informal conversations with teachers depicted a positive work environment. So the organisational path or position the principal choose - amidst people and politic - may signify an attempt to maintain a balance in the tension field between a self-governing group of teachers and a governing set of educational policies (Abrahamsen 2017). The attempt also may relate to how LS was linked to DLSL [UiU] in strategic plans, regional gatherings for school leaders, and on the official website of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training [UDIR]. As follows, it may be an effect of the educational authorities' system of governance and their multi-faceted and expectations-based approach (see Elmore, 2004).

In Case B, the principal explains how the school leaders tried to avoid a top-down leadership by promoting collective participation and autonomy, intrinsically put into action through various forms of participation, discussion and evaluation. Shared work and distributed leadership was given priority, whilst anchored and development from within. In a mutually defined framework of LS, the teachers committed themselves to examine and practice the method. Organisational resources as time, forums for discussion and study gave strength to

collective responsibility and work. Through continuous testing and modification, the school developed a distinctive, local variant of LS. Proportionally, the fact that *School 2* was slightly smaller than *School 1* may have occurred to affect the organisation of work. In considering to which extent the teachers reviewed and made use of research and academic literature, this turned out to be a limited or downgraded practice due to the lack of experience with research methods, and since examining research was considered less relevant and a time-consuming activity (see Bjuland & Mosvold 2015; Akiba & Wilkinson 2016).

## Summary and conclusion

In analysing different styles of leadership and school leaders' organisation of LS work, two key features are immanent. Firstly, how democratic forms of leadership and participation strengthened the building of inner organisational endeavours and relationships, and as such consolidating the work of implementing LS. Historically, an approach in line with former ways of implementing LS at schools. Secondly, there was a tendency in how change-oriented leadership and organisation cleared the way for education policy reforms initiated by external forces. However, despite volunteers among teachers and vigorous plans for professional development, few major organisational initiatives with reference to internal actions and procedures were implemented. In sum, different leadership styles, organisation of work and processes of involvement and association, in which some attempts failed to engage the teaching staff, and some the municipal school administration. As such, the two perspectives equally reveal *internal* and *external* processes and procedures by means of institutionalised developments and external associations and resources.

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