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Scandinavian approaches to school leadership

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Structure of Talk

1. The ideology and history of the Scandinavian education systems
2. Scandinavian educational culture in transition
3. Images of Scandinavian school leadership in the past and today
4. The role of municipalities
5. Municipal governing in transition
6. Summing up and questions regarding the future direction

1. The ideology and history of the Scandinavian education system

- Equity, participation and welfare state
- Social democracy, as political movement and a broader ideology
- The cornerstones:
 - citizens equal rights,
 - responsibility of the state for welfare of all citizens
 - narrowing the gaps (income and gender)
- The labor market model

1. The ideology and history of the Scandinavian education system ...continued

- Nurturing a national identity
- A tradition of consensus-seeking politics in education
- A special form of popular resistance constituted by anti-elitist lay religious movements in the 19th century
- The local teachers became agents of civic society.

1. The ideology and history of the Scandinavian education system ...continued

- Similar and unique
- The district policy dimension has been particularly central in Norway - schools are important for ensuring the survival of the many small communities
- Compulsory education in Denmark has been even more localized. It includes a stronger anti-state ideology
- Grundtvig's influence on Danish education

2. Educational culture in transition

- The 1990s – a global transition towards more marketization of education
- Introduction of parental choice, assessment, New Public Management
- The structure of public education has been substantially changed towards a quasi-market model, particularly in Sweden and Denmark, less in Norway
- The distribution of accountability models are signifying hallmarks of this transition process

3. Images of Scandinavian school leadership in the past and today

- School leadership as *primus inter pares* - principals look upon themselves as teachers with some administrative duties in addition to teaching.
- Principals today have taken on many more managerial tasks; we expect far more of our school leaders than we ever did.
- Primus inter pares is today more recognized as a myth or a romanticized, old-fashioned view of school leadership.
- However, amongst many teachers the “primus inter pares” view is still prevailing.

3. Images of Scandinavian school leadership ... continued

- The discrepancy between leaders and staff is still relatively small, reflecting the historical collegial tradition
- Instructional leadership is still the teachers' responsibility and domain
- Little or no intervention in classroom practices, and relationship with parents has mainly been the teachers' responsibility
- Veteran principals were driven by their basic beliefs. They wanted to retain the psychological rewards they had got as teachers: "Keep in touch with the kids". Mid-career and early career principals: Emphasis on professional accountability

3. Images of Scandinavian school leadership ... continued

- A focus on democratic values and a concern for the welfare of others and the dignity and rights for all individuals.
- Commitment to comprehensive education and social justice.
- Conditions for non-coercive rational communication were crucial for the development of successful learning cultures in schools.
- Emphasis on trust in teachers' motives.
- Leadership teams / distributed leadership

4. The role of municipalities

- The local municipalities play a strong role, and leadership at this level is shared between professional administration and elected politicians
- In most municipalities teachers still enjoy considerable trust and autonomy, and relationships are not very hierarchical in practice
- Huge differences across municipalities: The support school leaders receive seems highly depending on where the school is located
- “Muddling through” as a response to new accountability expectations

5. Municipal governing in transition

- Today many principals coordinate various functions that earlier were taken care of at municipal level
- The new construction has both gains and strains:
 - distribution of leadership experiences
 - opportunities for mutual learning
 - potential for capacity building at school level
 - more workload at school level
 - increased responsibility combined with decreased authority in a context of often insufficient resources

6. Summing Up

- Ambiguity and uncertainty are words capturing the conditions schools are facing today
- Scandinavian schools as the cultural core of the local community.
- Dominant leadership discourses in Scandinavia, although rooted in an historical and socio-cultural context, are increasingly influenced by a more global discourse
- Local traditions will ensure that they are played out differently in national contexts.

Future direction?

- Will the common school be maintained as tenets of equal educational opportunity in Scandinavia in the future?
- Are the Scandinavian constitutional mindsets still striking different compared to other countries?
- For how long will and can municipalities and schools continue to respond to the new accountability expectation with the classic Scandinavian “muddling through”?

Thank you very much!



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