



Leadership preparation for principals in Sweden

Susanne Sahlin

Associate Professor in Organisation and Leadership in Education

Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)

Trondheim, Norway



Sweden- introduction

- Well-established welfare system, high quality educational system and with a good reputation globally (Ärlestig et al., 2016)
- Declining knowledge results (e.g., PISA, PRILS, TIMSS) in recent years – addressed in the governance of the Swedish educational system in different ways

Who becomes a leader?

- **Preschool principals**
 - basically preschool teachers
 - teachers, leisure teachers, guidance counsellors or social workers
- **Principals**
 - basically teachers
 - guidance counsellors, social workers or HR specialists/behavioralists



The typical Swedish principal

- The Swedish principal in preschool and compulsory school is a woman,
- 50.8 years old (50.3 in preschool),
- has a (preschool)teacher education and
- has worked for eleven years on average as a teacher.
- She remains in the same school as the year before and has two deputy school leaders on her side.
- The Swedish principal in preschool is responsible for two preschool units with approximately 100 children and 20 employees.



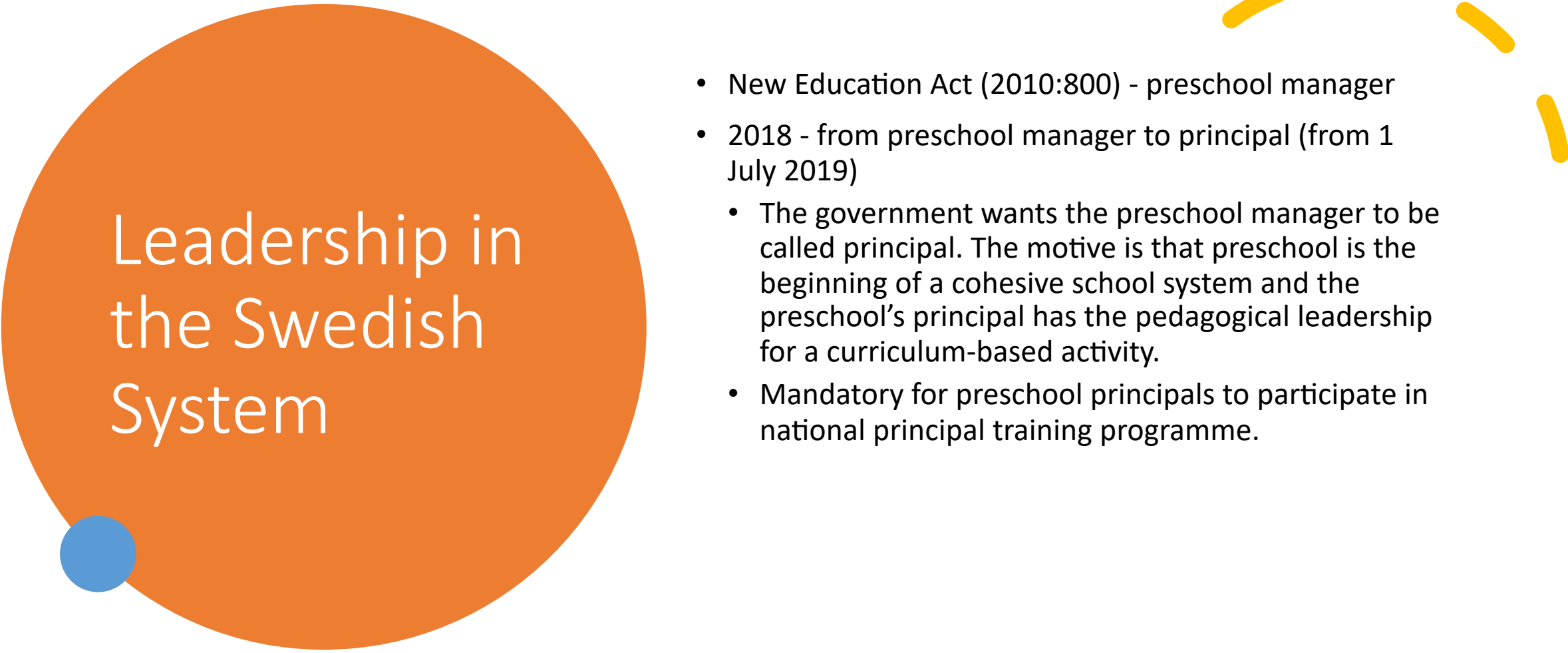
Leadership in the Swedish System

Preschool

- 4900 preschool principals leads 9800 preschools (72% municipal preschools)
- 90% are women
- 4 out of 5 children 1-5 years old in preschool (half a million children or 80 % of all girls and boys in Sweden)
- On average, each child group in preschool has 15.3 children.
- Some preschool principals also teach

School

- 8000 Swedish principals (besides deputy principals) leads 10,500 schools
- 60% are women
- The average school has about 195 students (generally small schools)
- A principal can be responsible for more than one school or for one school and a preschool
- It is seldom that principals also teach



Leadership in the Swedish System

- New Education Act (2010:800) - preschool manager
- 2018 - from preschool manager to principal (from 1 July 2019)
 - The government wants the preschool manager to be called principal. The motive is that preschool is the beginning of a cohesive school system and the preschool's principal has the pedagogical leadership for a curriculum-based activity.
- Mandatory for preschool principals to participate in national principal training programme.

The professional development and trajectory for aspiring principals and principals in Sweden

- In Sweden, school leadership training has been an education in constant change (Ekholm, 2015; Norberg, 2017).
- There has been systematic training of school leaders since the mid-1970s, and before a decision was made in 1976 about the regular training of school leaders, there had been different approaches to such training (Ekholm, 2015).
- The Swedish National Principal Training Program is a state-regulated executive education for professional principals in preschools, schools, and school-age educare centers, as well as for staff with a corresponding leadership function in curriculum-controlled activities (Jerdborg, 2022). The school leadership training program has been mandatory for all newly appointed principals in Sweden since 2010.





CPD for principals

Pre-service (optional):

- Pre-service program for aspiring school leaders 7,5 credits.

In-service (mandatory):

- National Principal Training Programme, 30 credits

In-service (optional):

- The National Agency for Education provides CPD (courses and networks) for experienced principals in preschools and schools.

→ MA and PhD studies are also one possible way forward for principals.

The National Principal Training Programme in Sweden

- A national government training program with strong professional elements at advanced academic level.
- An in-service program: Mandatory for newly hired principals (since 2010)
- 30 credits over 3 years.
- Participants are expected to set aside 20% of their working time for studies.
- 7 universities provide the programme (six year long contract with the National Agency of Education in Sweden)



The National Principal Training Programme in Sweden

A national target document:

"The goal of the training is for the participants to gain knowledge about the school's responsibility in providing students and children with an equal and legally secure education, that the activities are aimed at high goal fulfillment and that school work develops in relation to the set goals." (The National Agency of Education in Sweden, 2021).

**School leadership -
pedagogical
management 10
credits**

**School law and
exercise of authority
10 credits**

**Management,
organization and
quality 10 credits**

Peer mentoring

Ongoing
policy
changes in
the Swedish
educational
system
focusing on
leadership
development

In 2015, the OECD, pointed to the need for more comprehensive strategies for the Swedish school (OECD, 2015), among other things, that the management of the school needs to be strengthened at the system level.

Swedish government policy presented a proposal for an overall strategy for increased knowledge and equivalence, with the establishment of a national professional program for teachers and school leaders to promote teachers' and school leaders' professional development.

Proposal of new national strategy for CPD

National strategy for the development of the school principal and preschool principal profession (and the teaching profession)

1. Principal/Preschool principals

- National Principal Training Programme 30 credits (during 3 years)

2. Accredited Principal/Preschool principals

- Experienced principals who have developed their skills through experience as principals for a number of years (approximately 6-8 years) have completed the school leader training program, and continuous skills development should be able to apply to be accredited principals.

A row of pencils is shown at the bottom of the slide. Most are dark grey or black, but the one on the far left is bright yellow. They are all sharpened and pointing upwards.

The Swedish Model and its influence on leadership development for principals

- **The training of principals in Sweden is well-established**, with institutionalized programs supported by resources, legitimacy, agreements, and organizational stability.
- Despite professionalization efforts, **principals face challenges in acting as educational leaders**, potentially hindered by their role as heads of teachers and difficulties in shouldering leadership responsibilities.
- **Universities face the challenge of balancing their critical mission with preparing professionals in a politically steered system.**
- Comparative studies suggest that **Sweden can serve as an example for more context-sensitive leadership preparation programs for aspiring and in-service principals**, guided by context-related school leadership research.



Thank you!

Susanne Sahlin

**Associate Professor in Organisation and
Leadership in Education**

**Norwegian University of Science and
Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway**

- Email: susanne.sahlin@ntnu.no
 - X: susannesahlin
 - LinkedIn: Susanne Sahlin
 - ResearchGate: Susanne Sahlin
- 

References

- Ekholm, M. (2015). *Skolledarutbildningen: fyrtio års tillbakablickande* [School leader training: looking back forty years]. Karlstad: Institutionen för pedagogiska studier, Karlstads universitet.
- Gibson, M., Outhwaite, D., Sahlin, S., Isaeva, N. & Tsatrian, M. (2023). Leadership Preparation and Development Policies in England, Sweden, and Russia: Exploring Policy and Practice. In: Mifsud, D. & Day, S. P. (Ed.) *Teacher Education as an Ongoing Professional Trajectory: Implications for Policy and Practice*. Springer Nature.
- Haglund, B., & Boström, L. (2022). Everyday practices in Swedish school-age educare centres: A reproduction of subordination and difficulty in fulfilling their mission. *Early Child Development and Care*, 192(2), 248–262. doi:10.1080/03004430.2020.1755665
- Jarl, M. (2013). Om rektors pedagogiska ledarskap i ljuset av skolans managementreformer [About the principal's pedagogical leadership in the light of the school's management reforms]. *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige*, 18(3-4), 1401–6788.
- Jerdborg, S. (2022). *Learning principalship: becoming a principal in a Swedish context* [Diss.]. Göteborgs universitet.
- Johansson, O., & Svedberg, L. (2013). Det nationella rektorsprogrammet. In O. Johansson & L. Svedberg (Eds.), *Att leda mot skolans mål* (pp. 21–26). Gleerups.
- Norberg, K. (2018). The Swedish national principal training programme: A programme in constant change. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 51(1), 5–14.
- Outhwaite, D, Sahlin, S., & Mifsud, D. (2023). The impact of ICA on Leadership preparation and development policies in England and Sweden: Comparing Policy and Practice. In Storey, V. & Beeman, T. (Ed.). *Improving Higher Education Models Through International Comparative Analysis*. IGI Global. doi:10.1080/00220620.2018.1513912
- Perselli, J. (2021). Om skolledarutbildningarnas moderna historia [About the modern history of school leadership training]. In B. Ahlström, G. Berg, M. Håkansson Lindqvist, & F. Sundh (Eds.), *Att jobba som rektor - om rektorer som professionella yrkesutövare* [Working as a principal - about principals as professional practitioners] (1st ed., pp. 337–350). Studentlitteratur.
- School Commission of 2015. (2017). Coalition for school: national strategy for knowledge and equality: final report of the 2015 school commission. Stockholm, Sweden: Wolters Kluwer.

References

- Short about the Swedish Educational System: <https://sweden.se/life/society/the-swedish-school-system>
- Swedish Code of Statues 2007:223. *Förordning om uppdragsutbildning för fortbildning av lärare och förskollärare* [Ordinance on commissioned training for continuing education for teachers and preschool teachers]. https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/forordning-2007223-om-uppdragsutbildning-for_sfs-2007-223
- Swedish Code of Statues 2011:183. *Förordning om befattningsutbildning och fortbildning för rektorer och annan personal med motsvarande ledningsfunktion i skola, förskola och fritidshem* [Ordinance on professional training and continuing education for principals and other personnel with the corresponding management function in schools, preschools and leisure centers]. https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/forordning-2011183-om-befattningsutbildning_sfs-2011-183
- Swedish Code of Statues 2019:562. *Förordning om ändring i förordningen (2011:183) om befattningsutbildning för rektorer och annan personal med motsvarande ledningsfunktion i skola, förskola och fritidshem samt fortbildning för rektorer och förskolechefer* [Ordinance about change in the ordinance (2011:183) about professional training and continuing education for principals and other personnel with the corresponding management function in schools, preschools and leisure centers]. Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet.
- The Education Act. SFS 2010:800. Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet.

References

- The Education Act. SFS 2011:189. *Lag om ändring i skollagen* (2010:800) [Law about a change in the education act]. Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet.
- The Government's Bill. (2009). Proposition 2009/10:27. *Obligatorisk befattningsutbildning för nyanställda rektorer* [Mandatory position training for newly employed principals]. <https://www.regeringen.se/49b729/contentassets/20dca33f39734fd2aa7f451db39f18f/obligatorisk-befattningsutbildning-for-nyanstallda- rektorer-prop.-20091027>
- The inquiry about a better school through more attractive school professions. (2018). *With teaching skills at the center: A framework for teachers 'and principals' professional development*. Stockholm: Norstedts juridic.
- The report on the principals' work situation in the school system. (2015). *Rektorn och styrkedjan* [The principal and the governance chain]. Stockholm: Fritzes.
- The Swedish National Agency of Education. (2010). *Rektorsprogrammet*. [The National Principal Training Programme]. *Beställningsnummer*, 9, 1090.
- The Swedish National Agency of Education. (2019). Måldokument 2019-09-20. [Target document]. *Diariennr*, 2019, 01253.
- The Swedish National Agency of Education. (2020). *Rektorsprogrammet: måldokument 2021-2027* [The National Principal Training Programme: target document 2021-2027]. Stockholm: Skolverket. https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.68c99c081804c5929ea58bb/1655214810993/Rektorsprogram-met_måldokument21-27.pdf
- Ärlestig, H., Johansson, O., & Nihlfors, E. (2016). Sweden: Swedish school leadership research: An important but neglected area. In H. Ärlestig, C. Day, & O. Johansson (Eds.), *A decade of research on school principals: Cases from 24 countries* (1st ed.) (pp. 103-122). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.