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Learning leading - responsiveness in leading professional learning

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' professional learning is closely connected to and dependent on different leading practices. Teachers professional learning is regarded as a key factor in successful school development, and development leaders at different levels are assigned to provide for and support such learning. However, the connection between leading and learning needs to be further explored. In this article, we focus specifically on development leaders' leading practice when leading professional learning. Based on the theory of practice architectures, the study explores the interplay between development leaders and teacher leaders in a professional development programme, where the leading and learning practices of the different leaders meet. The findings show that development leaders' leading practice is characterised by responsiveness to ideas of successful leading, to experiences and observations of leading practices, to teacher leaders' understanding and to their own leading practices. Through these types of responsiveness, a formative aspect of leading unfolds where the interplay between development leaders' leading and teacher leaders' learning practices appears. We refer to this as *learning leading*.

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Introduction

Teachers' professional learning is closely connected to and dependent on different leading practices. In a previous article, we explored such leading practices and identified how principals' leading, teacher leaders' (TL) leading and external development leaders' (DL) leading formed what we call *a web of leading* (Nehez *et al.* 2022). Thus, leading professional learning can be seen as a social and relational phenomenon, where several actors collaborate and co-create leading practices related to the common goal of creating conditions for professional learning to support pupils' learning.

In many countries, principals' and teachers' professional learning is organised by various development departments at national, regional and/or local levels, where DLs are employed to lead and support professional learning (Dierking and Fox 2013, Håkansson Lindqvist and Nehez 2023). In Sweden, where the education act (Swedish Ministry of Education 2010) states that education must rest on scientific ground and proven experience, many school authorities employ DLs with research qualifications to lead professional learning among and together with principals and teachers (e.g. Serder 2016, Nehez *et al.* 2021, Sagar 2022). A joint focus can be to explore and develop the connection between principals' leading and teachers' professional learning as well as

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teachers' teaching and pupils' learning. Timperley (2019, p. 104) emphasises that such connections are complex and that there is no direct relationship between, for example, teachers' opportunities to engage in professional learning and reaching outcomes such as pupils' enhanced learning.

The article is based on a study of a case in an independently run Swedish school consortium where teachers' professional learning is organised in cooperation between DLs operating at a consortium level and principals and TLs at the school level (Rönnerman and Sörlau 2023). In this specific case, the DLs lead the TLs' professional learning to strengthen their leading of their teaching colleagues' professional learning. There is a need for more knowledge on if and how DLs contribute to professional learning in the web of leading (cf. Håkansson Lindqvist and Nehez 2023).

Hence, the aim of the study is to explore the interplay between DLs and TLs, in a professional development (PD) programme, in the joint practice of leading professional learning. We do this from the DL's perspective.

A practice-based view on leading for professional learning and praxis development

In this article, we focus on interconnected practices aimed at leading teacher learning and development (Nehez *et al.* 2022). In these practices, actors (principals, DLs and TLs) with different roles, competences and positions share the responsibility to lead for professional learning and praxis development (cf. Edwards-Groves *et al.* 2020). In line with Kemmis *et al.* (2014, p. 27), we hold that education has the purpose: 'to prepare people to live well in a world worth living in' which is the very characterisation of praxis. To make praxis development happen, we consider learning in and for practice as an essential aspect (Salo *et al.* 2024).

In a framework for understanding the complexity of learning in and for professional practice in terms of praxis development by Salo *et al.* (2024), a presupposition is that learning that supports praxis development is relational. This presupposition draws on the theorisation of learning by Kemmis *et al.* (2014, p. 5) as something that happens in intersubjective spaces, where people are engaged with each other, develop as professionals, and grow as human beings in reciprocal relationships. To understand these intersubjective and relational aspects of professional learning, Salo *et al.* (2024) bring the concepts *trust*, *recognition*, *agency*, *power*, and *solidarity* to the fore. They also conclude that 'learning for praxis development takes place in and for professional practices, which includes reflection, inquiry, dialogue and collaboration' (Salo *et al.* 2024, p. 13). These are therefore main activities in and for learning. In the framework, time is viewed both as a resource and an open-ended flow. Understanding time as an open-ended flow draws on Schatzki's work (2010), where he refers to time as the temporal process of social practices. Salo *et al.* (2024, p. 13) conclude '[t]ime as a resource and flow is essential as part of the site-based practices – the happeningness – and time and flow are also inherent components of human growth'.

The study, as well as the framework mentioned above, was informed by the theory of practice architectures (TPA - Kemmis *et al.* 2014, Mahon *et al.* 2017) and the theory of ecologies of practices (Kemmis *et al.* 2014). In line with the TPA, DLs' leading is regarded as a site and time specific social practice composed of *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings*, the happenings of a practice, that hang together in a distinctive *project* (i.e. what the sayings, doings and relatings are aiming for – Kemmis *et al.* 2014). Here, the project is defined as leading professional learning.

In line with the TPA the DLs' leading practices are considered as enabled and constrained by the practice architectures in the specific site (cf. Kemmis *et al.* 2014, Mahon *et al.* 2017). *Cultural-discursive*, *material-economic*, and *social-political arrangements* in the site combine to form practice architectures that prefigure the DLs' leading. More specifically, cultural-discursive arrangements (norms, discourses, and ideas) prefigure the sayings in leading practices, material-economic arrangements (financial resources, time, and space) prefigure doings, and social-political arrangements (rules, roles, and hierarchies) prefigure relatings. Furthermore, in line with the theory of ecologies of practices (Kemmis *et al.* 2014, Mahon *et al.* 2017) we consider the DLs' leading

practices as *ecologically related* to other practices. They are shaped by and shape professional learning practices and teaching practices. They are also shaped by and shape other leading practices, such as the principals' leading practices and TLs' leading practices.

Previous research

This section presents previous research on the relation between leading and learning in sites of professional learning. In the research field of continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers, Kennedy (2014b) makes a distinction between models with different purposes. She describes a spectrum, where at one end are models with *transmissive* purposes and at the other models with a *transformative* purpose. Considering teachers as agentic and knowledgeable rather than just reform implementers, models with transformative or at least malleable purposes are foregrounded. These models are characterised by collaborative inquiry such as action research and models of coaching or communities of practices. In these, learning is a result of interactions within communities and not merely a result of pre-planned learning episodes in, for example PD courses. In action research models, participants themselves are involved as researchers who contribute to knowledge production as well as improving practices.

However, Kennedy (2014a, p. 349) points out that though 'capacity for professional autonomy is greater in transformative models, this does not in itself imply that the capacity will necessarily be fulfilled'. Even though there are potential opportunities available for teachers to influence the agenda, the activities may still be defined by an external party in position of some kind of power, such as principals, TLs or DLs. Empirical studies have identified that this occurs and therefore sought to understand how. Robinson (2017) and Emstad and Birkeland (2020) show how principals undermine the possibility for teachers to influence school development and professional learning agendas when they are not open to learning about the teachers' needs. They highlight the importance of *learning leadership* in professional learning.

Håkansson Lindqvist and Nehez (2023) identified how external DLs constrained principals' and teachers' learning by transferring information and concepts rather than letting the principals and teachers relate to the concepts and process them to make them more appropriate in their own practices. In an earlier study, Nehez *et al.* (2022) explored how different decisions were made by principals, TLs and an external DL to support teachers' professional learning and found that teachers themselves were not involved in this chain of leading practices to create conditions for professional learning. An implication for leadership from these findings is to organise for agency and participation in planning for those who are supposed to learn, something that is highlighted also by Fraser *et al.* (2007).

Hargreaves (2004, p. 303) stresses that 'more important than whether the source of the change is external or internal is whether it is implemented in a way that is professionally inclusive and supportive and demonstrably beneficial for students or not'. This conclusion is based on research of teachers' emotional responses to educational change. Hargreaves (2004) found that mandated change often brought about negative responses, experienced as alien, imposed, over-pressurising and under-supported, whereas self-initiated change brought about positive responses. However, almost 40% of the examples of self-initiated change were mandatory in origin. An implication for leadership is that leaders should create practice architectures for change to ensure that teachers get the chance to invest in their own purposes and exercise their own professional judgement in the change process.

Overall, in CPD, a shift from transmissive to transformative models have been identified (Fraser *et al.* 2007, Muijs *et al.* 2014). In this shift, the concept *professional learning*, in terms of an individual or social process that develop teachers' and leaders' professional knowledge, skills, assumptions and actions (cf. Fraser *et al.* 2007, Muijs *et al.* 2014) has been commonly used. It carries a belief in the importance of learning for transformation, development, and change. However, leading professional learning is complex. In a seminal review article on teachers'

professional development, Opfer and Pedder (2011) demonstrate the complexity of different outcomes from professional learning processes. To understand this complexity the individual teachers, the school and the learning activities need to be taken into consideration. Regarding teachers, their knowledge, attitudes, and ability to learn are factors that matter. At the school, norms, structures, and practices in place have significant power. When it comes to learning activities, collaborative, sustained and intensive PD initiatives have a greater effect on changing practice than individual and time-limited PD programmes.

Methods and materials

The study presented in this article was conducted within an independently run Swedish school consortium, following the same curriculum and guidelines as all schools in Sweden. The consortium includes seven preschools, seven elementary schools and two upper secondary schools in six municipalities. It was strategically and purposively selected based on a combination of the unique and on personal knowledge (Goetz and LeCompte 1984 cited Merriam 1994, p. 63). The uniqueness is that the consortium has had a conscious organisation for professional learning and development for 30 years. The consortium claims to have a common vision and goal to organise professional learning that simultaneously promotes the organisational as well as, teachers' and pupils' learning. It can be considered a constructive case in which nurturing of praxis is in focus. As for personal knowledge, it is connected to one of us researchers working as a DL in the consortium.

The school consortium has a specific structure for teachers' professional learning. Within the consortium, PD for teachers is organised in eleven (two hour long) PD meetings each year. The meetings are scheduled by the school board at the same time slot for all schools and are directed to all teaching staff. The focus of the PD is related to the vision of the consortium and to the school's local goal of development, addressed by the principal. The meetings are planned and led by principals and TLs, who have the specific task to facilitate professional learning among their colleagues in the direction of the school's needs of development. At the PD meetings, the TLs facilitate the teachers' individual and collegial learning through systematic inquiry of the relation between teachers' teaching and pupils' learning. The inquiry is inspired by action research and consists of an iterative process with different parts: problem definition, planning, action/testing in the classroom, observation, analysis, and conclusion.

At the consortium level, there are DLs assigned to support principals and TLs in leading professional learning. The DLs organise continuous meetings for principals to plan the processes of PD. Additionally, they organise a PD programme for TLs with a focus on the role of leading teachers' professional learning. This programme aims to create a joint space for reflection on leading professional learning as well as to develop TLs' knowledge about leading school development and professional learning. The programme consists of eight (three hour long) sessions over one year and its content varies depending on the consortium's needs. During the current study, the aim of the programme was twofold: to prepare the TLs for leading their colleagues in the iterative process of inquiry, and to explore together with the TLs how collegial learning can best be achieved. Between the programme sessions, the TLs were asked to try different kinds of activities related to the iterative process of inquiry with their teacher colleagues and reflect on these activities in a purpose-built digital tool. Their reflections were shared with two other TLs and with the DLs, and the group could comment on each other's reflections. Before the start of the programme focused on in this study, the consortium had agreed that the overarching question of how to support the TLs to develop a culture that promotes professional learning was important.

Data and analyses

The analysed data was collected from the first four sessions of the PD programme for 33 TLs at five schools in 2021. Two of the sessions were digital with TLs at the same school sitting together. The

other two sessions were physical in two regional groups. The programme was led by two DLs, one of whom is also one of the researchers in this study. During the physical sessions the DLs led one group each. The data consist of the DLs' planning documents, the keynote presentations (with presentation notes) constructed by DLs and presented at the sessions, the DLs' logbooks with minutes and reflections, and the TLs' digital written reflections shared in chats at digital sessions, in digital documents and in a digital tool between sessions.

The analysis was conducted in three overarching phases. Firstly, the DLs' sayings, doings and relatings (in planning documents, keynotes, and logbooks) when leading the programme were identified and categorised. Following the theory of practice architectures (TPA), this step was guided by the question: What is happening in the DLs' leading practice? Six categories emerged from the data: 1) creating a sense of togetherness, 2) organising dialogues for exchanging experiences and reflections, 3) organising activities for understanding the TL role and practice skills that help TLs in that role, 4) creating an awareness of activities as means rather than objectives, 5) informing about upcoming activities and assignments, and 6) following up and planning for the upcoming meetings in the iterative process of inquiry.

Secondly, the analysis was delimited to the categories that focused directly on TLs' leading practice, Category 3 and 4. Inspired by storyline methodology and narrative analysis (Birks *et al.* 2009, Soslaui 2015) all data was sorted chronologically. Within the data related to each category, sayings, doings and relatings were traced and coded to identify the interplay between DLs' leading practice and TLs' learning practice and how it evolved. Below is an example of the coding related to Category 4, more specifically DLs' and TLs' work to understand the systems theoretical concept 'context description' which is used in different meetings within the consortium to establish a sense of common mind among the participants. The italicised text is a direct quote translated from Swedish.

[TLs] The TLs reflect in the digital tool [doings] on how context descriptions can be done. [sayings]

[DLs] The DLs read the reflections [doings and relatings] and note in the logbook [doings] that the TLs have different understandings of what a context description is (its purpose) and how it can be done [sayings]. They also note [doings] that some of the understandings of the concept tend to result in a joint activity rather than contributing to a greater understanding of the whole [sayings and relatings]. They highlight that since they strive to work with activities as a means (for a different purpose) rather than as a goal, they need to clarify the meaning of the concept of context description [sayings]. At the next session, the DLs add content [doings] where they clarify the meaning of the concept by contrasting it with other systems theoretical strategies used within the organisation [sayings and relatings]. At the end of the session, they ask the TLs to share their takeaways from the meeting. [sayings]

[TLs] One of the TLs writes [doings]: *At our school we have got a new way of understanding context description.* [sayings and relatings]

When all data was coded, we documented the interplay in written summaries that represented the two categories, one summary for each category. These summaries were referred to as narratives: Narrative 1 (N1) and Narrative 2 (N2). N1 represented Category 3, *Organising activities for understanding the TL role*, and N2 represented Category 4, *Creating an awareness of activities as means rather than objectives*. The documentation was guided by the question of what happens here and aimed to show the ecological relatedness between the DLs' leading and the TLs' learning practices that we had access to by their notes and reflections. The relatedness is visualised in Figure 1.

Each narrative consisted of approximately four pages narrated text written in the present tense. The narratives summarised a flow of happenings in and between the two practices and included italicised quotes from the data that exemplified the happenings. Overall, they visualised the interplay between sayings, doings and relatings in the two practices, how the happenings flowed between these, and how the two practices were ecologically related (see Figure 1).

Thirdly, inspired by thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), both narratives were analysed to understand what characterised the DLs' leading for professional learning in terms of relatedness

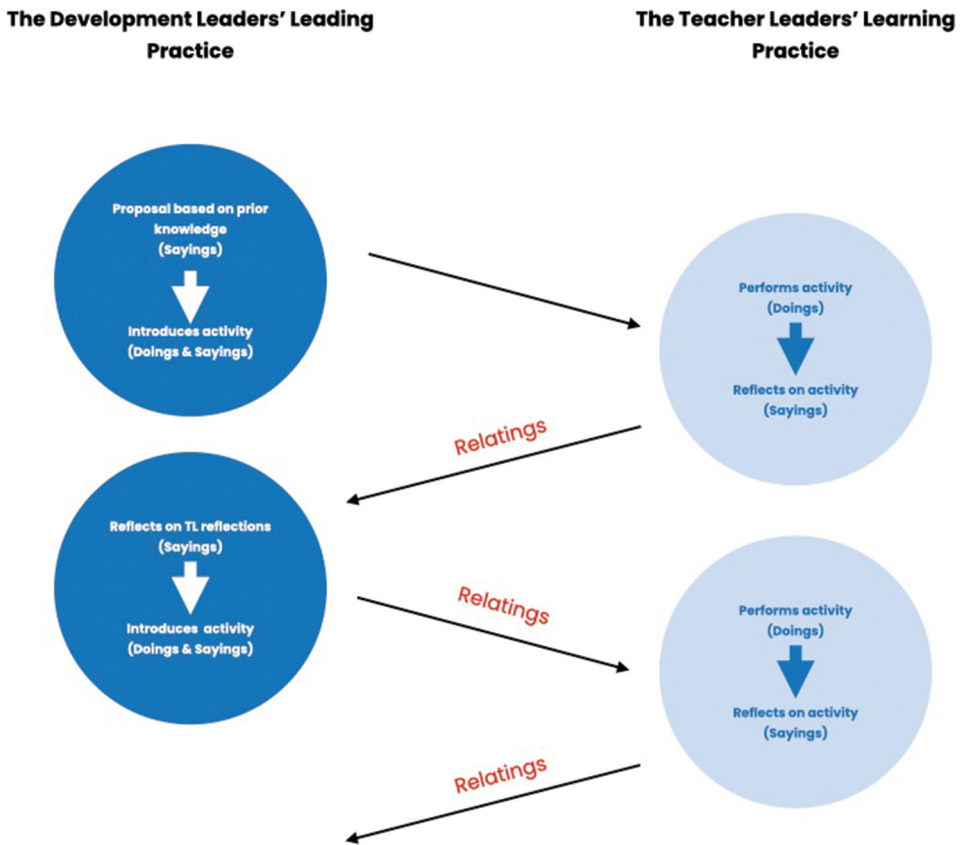


Figure 1. How sayings, doings and relatings in development leaders' leading practice are intertwined with sayings, doings and relatings in teacher leaders' learning practice.

shown by their sayings, doings and relatings. More specifically, the analysis was guided by the focus of the relatedness, and what characterised that relatedness. To identify and describe the relatedness, the concepts trust, recognition, agency, power, and solidarity, foregrounded by Salo *et al.* (2024), guided us. Four themes emerged and were all identified in both narratives. The themes are presented in the findings and are exemplified with selected excerpts from the narratives translated from Swedish.

Ethical and methodological considerations

The study follows the research ethical principles of the Swedish Research Council (2017). Both participating DLs and TLs were informed of the aim of the study and that the focus in data collection and analysis was on social practices rather than on sayings, doings and relatings of specific individual DLs or TLs. The participants have given their consent to participate and for the data to be used. For confidential reasons, the names of DLs and TLs are pseudonymised.

The methodology for analysis, inspired by storytelling and narrative analysis, can be of great use to describe and understand phenomena (Birks *et al.* 2009), in our case the interplay between DLs and TLs. A challenge in the methodology was composing the coherent narratives including both DLs' and TLs' practices, especially as one of the researchers also was one of the DLs. To overcome this challenge the narratives were composed by the author with personal knowledge of the site, whereas the other two authors could pose critical questions to the text until both narratives were

coherent and well balanced. This was specifically important since the last phase of the analysis was based on the narratives. To promote distance and self-critique, the DLs were described in the third person. Furthermore, in the last phase of analysis, one of the authors with no personal knowledge of the site made the analysis of the narratives. This was later refined with the help of critical questions from the other two authors. Overall, critical questions in different phases of the analysis helped to secure distance and self-critique for all authors.

Findings

This section describes the DLs' leading practice, which is the focus of this article. The analysis shows how the DLs' leading practice is formed through the interconnected processes (relatings) with the TLs' learning practice. The DLs relate and respond in ways that can be described as responsive, leading to transformation of the DLs' leading practice over time. Four types of responsiveness have been identified, namely: 1) responsiveness to ideas of successful leading, 2) responsiveness to experiences and observations of leading practices, 3) responsiveness to TLs' understanding and 4) responsiveness to own leading practices. The four types of responsiveness that characterise the DLs' leading practice are presented below with examples from N1 (*Organising activities for understanding the TL role*), and N2 (*Creating awareness of activities as means rather than objectives*).

Responsiveness to ideas of successful leading

The first type of responsiveness is about how the DLs relate and respond to ideas of successful leading, both from an academic perspective (research about leading, professional learning and school improvement) and from organisational norms of how to lead professional learning. The school consortium has worked with systems theory for a long time, which has led to systems thinking and ideas becoming norms for the DLs. They shape their leading practice from these ideas in two ways, related to what they think will be important for the TLs when leading teachers' professional learning, but also for themselves as DLs when leading TLs' professional learning. This doubleness shows, for example, when the DLs stress that it is important to create a sense of coherence among the teacher colleagues in the iterative processes of inquiry that the TLs lead. In the DLs' keynotes and presentation notes they speak both to and about the TLs, but at the same time also about themselves, all included in a 'we':

We need to become professional learning communities with a joint assignment and a jointly shared idea of how we can co-create learning. To achieve this, we might need to give time for the overarching context description, i.e. one that not only defines the specific meeting but also the aim of why we are there. (N2)

The excerpt above shows that the DLs are relating to an idea that a sense of coherence is important in creating conditions for teachers' professional learning. This idea comes from educational as well as organisational literature (e.g. Stoll *et al.* 2006, Timperley 2019, Öquist 2021) that the DLs have read. Similar examples are found in N1, where the DLs are responsive to the idea about the importance of acquiring analytical skills for both TLs and teachers. Other ideas that are identified in the narratives are expressed more implicitly, for example the idea of the importance of systematic inquiry, documenting reflections, promoting both individual and collective learning, acting as role models, and how to organise professional learning (e.g. Nylund *et al.* 2016, Hirsh 2017, Timperley 2019). These ideas are highlighted by the DLs as relevant for themselves as well as for TLs.

The responsiveness to these ideas is shown by the DLs' sayings, doings and relatings during the sessions of the PD programme. It is visualised in the different activities that the DLs introduce during the sessions. For example, they create a digital space for reflection and act as role models by giving examples of how to conduct analyses or how to do different types of context descriptions. It is also visualised through the process during the programme, where certain ideas become a recurring part of the content in the sessions.

The DLs recognise their ideas from research and the organisational norms of how to lead professional learning as valuable and something that both the TLs and they themselves should know about and act upon. They act as bearers of these ideas and they use their power *with* the TLs, to set their knowledge in motion. They aim for a mutual recognition of the content through collaborative exercises and dialogical reflections throughout the programme. In this way, the leading also includes a dimension of professional learning (as described in Salo *et al.* 2024) where the ideas are something that the DLs and the TLs together discuss, use, and develop in their leading and learning practices.

Responsiveness to experiences and observations of leading practices

The second type of responsiveness is about how the DLs relate and respond to experiences and observations of the TLs' but also other related leading practices. While supporting both principals and TLs in leading school improvement and professional learning the DLs make a lot of observations and gain experiences throughout their work.

When planning for the PD programme the DLs reflect in their logbook on the importance of possibilities for each TL to develop different skills that are necessary when leading professional learning. When supporting and observing principals and TLs, one skill that they have identified as crucial but difficult to achieve is about analysing and problematising different kinds of data in school improvement work. To analyse data is central in the inquiry model that the teachers are engaged in. It is a skill each of the TLs need in order to create conditions for their colleagues to analyse data. However, the DLs know from observations that the TLs' analytical skills vary:

To be a TL is also about individual learning. It is important to bear in mind that the TLs are not a homogenous group even if we often think and talk about them like that. How can we support their individual learning, in a way that promotes the professional learning communities? (N1)

The DLs' responsiveness to experiences and observations of leading practices is also identified in N2. From their own practice of leading TLs, they have seen the power in creating new thinking models as part of a transformative process. Based on these experiences, they reflect on the importance of creating new thinking models among the TLs when planning the PD programme.

In response to their own experiences, the DLs plan for what they call a 'training camp' in analysis for the TLs at the third session of the PD programme. This training camp includes step-by-step guidelines on how to work with analysis. The DLs use these guidelines during the meeting with fictitious examples of data to model the process of analysis. In the same way, they plan for input, dialogue and training related to context descriptions at the first session, as a way of creating new thinking models for the TLs.

The DLs use their own knowledge and skills, acquired from both practising and observing, as a base for role modelling in the PD programme. They relate to the observations of the TLs, to create facilitative power (Salo *et al.* 2024) through which the TLs will have the possibility to develop their knowledge and skills with the help of the DLs. A relational trust, built over time between DLs and TLs, sets the scene for this interactional exchange of knowledge between professionals within the school consortium. The TLs' engagement in the activities set up by the DLs, is evidence of this.

Responsiveness to teacher leaders' understanding

The third type of responsiveness is about how the DLs relate and respond to the TLs' understanding of the content in the PD programme as well as their understanding of leading. This type of responsiveness is revealed by the DLs' sayings, doings and relatings identified in logbooks and keynote presentations.

The narratives show that the DLs try to develop the TLs' understanding and that they use the TLs' digital reflections to continually explore the TLs' understandings. In N2, one example is about

what happens after a session on context descriptions. The TLs work with an assignment to plan for and try out a context description when introducing the next professional learning meeting at their school. In the digital tool they outline what they had planned to do and how it worked. They reflect on what was successful, what was not, and what is wise to do next time when leading their professional learning community. The DLs analyse the TLs' documentation:

One understanding that becomes obvious is that the concept context description is used as a strategy for creating fellowship in the group, and thereby is given another purpose than helping the group to understand what the joint inquiry work aims at. (N2)

The excerpt shows how the DLs reflect on the TLs understanding of the concept context description. Similar examples are identified in N1, in which the DLs' continuous exploration of the TLs' understanding of analysis is made visible. After presenting a concrete example of how to conduct analyses and letting the TLs practice this together, the DLs ask them to share their thoughts about the example. As the TLs find the example useful, the DLs keep on working with analyses in similar ways and more deeply. Later, they identify a changed understanding when the TLs reflect over the iterative process of inquiry they lead at their schools:

One takeaway from today's discussion is how to interpret pupils' responses. (...) If you base your analysis on the pupils' answers, it is important to also reflect on how to collect data in order to draw your conclusion. Here we might need to help each other (...) to be able to interpret the results. (N1)

Some TLs reflect on challenges related to conducting analysis with their teacher colleagues:

Since many teachers lack data, it becomes difficult to conduct an analysis. It is easy to skip certain steps and jump to some kind of conclusion. (N1)

The excerpt above, as other TL reflections about challenges when conducting analyses, show how they better understand and experience the possibilities and challenges with analysis, after having worked with this in the PD sessions and afterwards tried it out in their own leading practice. Pleased with how the understanding has evolved, the DLs go on planning for other areas of competencies that need to be further developed.

The DLs make use of the TLs' agency in explaining what is valuable for them and their learning. Agency manifests itself as intentional action, guided by a purpose or an intention (Salo *et al.* 2024). It also emerges in the interplay of individual and environmental circumstances. In the examples, it becomes obvious how the DLs' purpose, to support TLs' knowledge about and competences in how to analyse, cooperate with the TLs' need for the same. The sequence of sessions, communication and shared reflections visualises a flow (Salo *et al.* 2024) of activities and learning (human growth) that evolves, until the DLs are satisfied with the way they have contributed to deepening the TLs' knowledge and skills and decide to continue with other things in the programme.

Responsiveness to own leading practices

The fourth type of responsiveness is about how the DLs relate and respond to their own leading practices, more specifically the choices they have made in leading the TLs' professional learning. This type of responsiveness is revealed by the DLs' reflections on how they succeed in leading the PD programme in relation to the aims of the programme and in relation to their interpretations of the TLs' pre-understanding and developed understanding. For example, when having introduced the concept of analysis at a training session the DLs reflect in their logbook on how they succeeded and why, and what to improve:

Maybe it was a challenge to conduct the analysis in some of the groups. It could be due to being conducted in groups and that there was a lack of time for each of them [TLs] to develop their understanding. It could also be due to the fact that it is challenging to analyse reflections if you have not done it before. Furthermore, the digital tool that we use is new, which can have made it even more tricky. [I] think we must talk more about what an analysis is and how you can conduct [an analysis], especially in a professional learning context. I think

that we have to model an analysis in the three steps next time. [I] also think that we can let the participants do some parts of the interpretations and conclusions of the analysis. Beside this, we can give time for evaluation of step 4 (Analysis) [of the iterative process] as it is a critical point in the cycle. And to be curious about how they have planned step 4 and how they have achieved the goal of that step and how they have worked in line with the purpose. (N1)

Similar examples, as shown in the excerpt above, are identified in N2. For example, the DLs reflect on the fact that the TLs have a different and less complex understanding of context description than the one the DLs had in mind and that they have not created the right conditions for the TLs to develop their understanding. They conclude that they need to use more time for this.

The DLs continually improve their strategies and tools for leading the TLs' professional learning through self-recognition, which means seeing their own knowledge and competences as important and acting on it (Salo *et al.* 2024). This is mainly done when the TLs' understanding needs to be challenged according to the DLs, and in relation to how the DLs highlight specific ideas or handle identified needs of the TLs. This means that the DLs' self-recognition always is related to and aimed at mutual recognition, where knowledge becomes shared and, in that sense, a collective asset for all leaders in the school consortium.

Discussion and conclusion

The aim of the study has been to explore the interplay between DLs and TLs in a PD programme in the joint practice of leading professional learning, with a specific focus on the DLs' leading practice. The PD programme aimed at developing TLs' leading of professional learning among their teacher colleagues. With the help of the theory of practice architectures (TPA - Kemmis *et al.* 2014), we have identified how the DLs' leading practice is formed through a flow of relatings, mainly in relation to the TLs' practice (see Figure 1). It responds and transforms in four distinctive ways, which we have described as different types of responsiveness:

Responsiveness to ideas of successful leading shows that the DLs' leading practice is formed by research practices related to school improvement and professional learning as well as organisational norms and values. These practices influence the way the DLs structure the PD programme for the TLs and learn together with them.

Responsiveness to experiences and observations of leading practices shows how the DLs' leading practice is formed by principals' and TLs' leading practices combined with their own experiences of leading. This responsiveness can be compared to a modelling process, which is enacted as facilitation activities, shaping a common language, common activities, and similar ways of relating to each other in different parts of the school consortium.

Responsiveness to TLs' understanding shows how the DLs' leading practice is formed by the TLs' learning and vice versa. The two practices respond to each other through activities and shared reflections. The learning, or formative aspect in leading, appears to be essential in forming productive conditions for professional learning.

Responsiveness to own leading practices shows how the DLs' leading practice is formed in relation to their knowledge and strategies for supporting learning as well as to their interpretations of how the TLs manage to learn and develop their skills. This nurtures a constant refining of the leading and learning practice where the DLs and the TLs meet.

A noticeable movement throughout the findings is how the DLs relate responsively to other leading practices. In a web of leading (Nehez *et al.* 2022), the DLs' leading practice is ecologically related to leading practices on both the consortium and principal levels, which influence TLs' learning and leading. Responsiveness to leading practices at the consortium level influences the structure and content of the PD programme, for example when working with context descriptions to create a common understanding in the group.

Moreover, the findings show how DLs' leading and TLs' learning practices hang together. The two practices are responding to each other through activities and shared reflections.

Responsiveness seems to be a necessary ingredient to make transformation of practices possible. For example, if the DLs were not interested in knowing about the TLs' practices, or if the TLs were not interested in learning about analyses, the leading and learning reported here would never have happened. For the DLs, the responsiveness nurtures their constant refining of their leading practice. Thus, by identifying these types of responsiveness, a formative aspect of leading unfolds. With concepts from the framework for understanding the complexity of learning in and for professional practice in terms of praxis development (Salo *et al.* 2024) it becomes apparent that this process of leading through responsiveness inherits essential dimensions of learning.

The learning aspect of leading appears to be essential in forming productive conditions for professional learning. This expands knowledge from previous research showing the importance for principals leading teachers' professional learning to learn about their needs and how to support these (Robinson 2017, Emstad and Birkeland 2020). The findings show that learning appears to be important in all leading practices in a web of leading, also in DL's leading practices. Compared to the studies of Robinson (2017) and Emstad and Birkeland (2020), our study highlights the interplay between different leading (and learning) practices. Our findings show that TLs not only learn to lead their colleagues, but also contribute to forming the DLs' leading practice within the PD programme. The DLs use their power *with* (Salo *et al.* 2024) the TLs to be able to transform both their own as well as others' practices. They recognise their own knowledge and skills and interact based on this with the TLs to reach mutual recognition on how to lead and learn. Both DLs and TLs act agentively in relation to intentions, aims and conditions.

Due to the findings in this study, we can now further develop what we have described as a web of leading (Nehez *et al.* 2022). We include the dimension of learning as an essential part of the web of leading for praxis development. It is important to be aware that the happenings in and between the different practices in the web is not one-directional: a web depends on practices hanging together and forming each other (see Figure 1). Responsiveness as ways of learning, becomes crucial to be able to involve and engage others, as part of and included in the web of leading.

Overall, the findings explain how leading, through responsiveness, involves an aspect of learning. Our conclusion is that, in a web of leading where participants act responsively, leading can and should be considered as *learning leading*. This can be compared to research that stresses that leading does not necessarily create requisites for professional learning (Hargreaves 2004, Kennedy 2014a), especially if teachers' engagement is not regarded as an important part of school improvement initiatives (Hargreaves 2004). Our findings show how taking others' engagement, reflections, misunderstandings, and current knowledge into account through responsiveness have the potential to build mutual recognition and relational trust, and in the long run support agency. Thus, time for dialogues and possibilities to adjust ongoing PD programmes in relation to needs and conditions in every specific case must be planned for. Furthermore, the findings exemplify how professional learning for transformative purposes (cf. Kennedy 2014b), happens when participants scrutinise and reflect upon their different practices in the web of leading. The leaders must embrace learning not only for others, but also as an essential aspect in their own leading.

The study shows how leading activities do not in a simplistic way lead to desired learning (cf. Opfer and Pedder 2011). By zooming in on practices, as is done with the TPA (Kemmis *et al.* 2014), it becomes possible to show how the happenings of leading emerge in complex ways. Sayings, such as ideas put into words, may not in a simplistic way be transferred to others. Participants need to be given the possibility to be active, agentic and to build trust with others to be able to interact productively. This takes time and happens in interaction. In line with Salo *et al.* (2024) we have paid specific attention to relatings, between practices and between participants, which contribute to insights and explanations that may be enlightening to use in future research. If professional learning is not happening as expected, a possible explanation could be lack of responsiveness in the leadership. This turns the focus on how leading and learning interacts, rather than looking at the different practices in isolation.

It is important to keep in mind that the types of responsiveness in the leading practices identified in this study represent possibilities from a specific context, namely a school consortium where professional learning for teachers is organised in collaboration between DLs, principals and TLs. However, there are other ways to organise professional learning that are not covered in this study. Thus, how different schools organise for, or not, responsive ways of leading, is an interesting topic to explore further.

A practical implication of this study is that DLs who lead professional learning need to be aware that leading should include a dimension of learning through responsiveness. The activities and ideas that base the leading practice should constantly be mirrored against the participants being led. If not, there is a great risk that the aim of PD initiatives will not be achieved. Either the DLs' practice and the TLs' practice will never meet, or learning will happen that the DLs are not aware of and therefore cannot consider in their planning and implementation of the PD programme. There is a risk that professional learning needed for praxis development does not happen.

To be able to lead responsively, the correct arrangements need to be in place. Aspects like time for adjustment, different tools for communication and belief in the importance of being responsive and understanding learning objects from the perspective of others are examples of arrangements that enable responsiveness. With such arrangements it becomes possible to act responsively and respond and relate to information that is relevant for leading professional learning. Such arrangements form learning leading in the web of leading for professional learning.

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Disclosure statement

One of the authors of this article was one of the development leaders in the study as well as one of the designers of the professional development programme where the development leaders and teacher leaders in focus of the study met.

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