

# **Narrating the relationship between leadership and learning outcomes**

A study of public narratives in the Norwegian educational sector

**Helene Marie Kjærgård Eide**



Dissertation for the degree philosophiae doctor (PhD)  
at the University of Bergen

2015

Dissertation date: 04.06.2015

© Copyright Helene Marie Kjærgård Eide

The material in this publication is protected by copyright law.

Year: 2015

Title: Narrating the relationship between leadership and learning outcomes  
A study of public narratives in the Norwegian educational sector

Author: Helene Marie Kjærgård Eide

Print: AIT OSLO AS / University of Bergen

## **Scientific environment**

Department of Education, Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen

## Acknowledgements

Writing a thesis such as this may feel like a lonesome endeavour. Luckily, I have been surrounded by researchers who have contributed to the realisation of this work. I would like to thank you all for your continuous support throughout the process of finishing this thesis.

I am deeply grateful for the professional and personal support from my supervisors: First and foremost my main supervisor Associate professor Gunn Elisabeth Søreide, Associate professor Astrid Tolo and Professor Sølvi Lillejord. Gunn Elisabeth Søreide has been an important mentor throughout this project in her own calm, positive, challenging, and when needed, nurturing way. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to find “my own way” in the early stages of this project and for your supportive, yet challenging and wise supervision. Sølvi Lillejord together with Astrid Tolo has showed me important tricks of the trade, such as hard work, commitment and a focus on details. They have done it all in their own energetic and positive ways, leaving me in a privileged position.

A special thanks to Associate professor Marit Ulvik and Associate professor Ove Skarpenes for valuable comments on the mid-way evaluation, and to Associate professor Gry Heggli for challenging me to improve my work considerably at the end evaluation.

I am grateful to the Department of Education at the Faculty of Psychology for giving me the opportunity to do this work. I am especially thankful towards my fellow PhD students at the department, and also for the contributions from Professor Svend Brinkman in workshops and seminars. Being amongst humorous, open and supportive colleagues is truly a blessing. Thank you all.

Special thanks also to track leaders and PhD candidates in Track 3 at the National Graduate School in Educational Research (NATED), for sharing, discussions and fun at seminars, conferences and PhD-days. A special thanks to Sølvi, Christina, Tine, Kristin, Kirsten, Sverre and Ruth for sharing your knowledge, for being supportive and friendly.

I would also like to thank the great people at the Graduate school of Education at the University of Bristol for being so welcoming and letting me participate in discussions and seminars. A special thanks to Professor Leon Tickly and Dr Malcolm Reed for sharing your knowledge and perspectives with me.

A special thanks to my large and playful family for your continuous support, interest and comfort when times have been rough. I am truly blessed having you all in my life.

Finally, I am especially grateful towards Ole-Kristian. You are my rock and compass. Thank you for your unconditional love, support, generosity and patience, and for the most precious relations in my life: Sara Kristiane, Anna Marie and Linus. I love you.

## **Abstract**

In the last couple of decades improving student achievements has gained increased focus amongst policymakers. The increased focus on school leadership when discussing quality in schools has been especially evident in educational systems where success is measured and defined by student achievements, and in systems characterised by increased accountability, competition, and school league tables. At the same time, the influence of supra-national agencies on national policy-making has increased immensely and processes that frame education policy are often constituted globally and beyond the nation state. Today, the idea of a positive relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes in schools has also been taken up in national policy in educational systems where competition and accountability are less paramount. School leaders' contribution and significance for student learning outcomes therefore seems to be a travelling policy idea.

Still, although policy ideas and initiatives may travel amongst nations, they are reframed in the national and local contexts in which they are taken up. Policy ideas are therefore reframed differently amongst nations, and in the various local contexts in which they are in play. Consequently, although they might look the same at a surface level, policy ideas and initiatives may take on differing forms when they enter national policy systems, as the process of reshaping traveling policy initiatives and ideas into national and local policy is complex and multifaceted. This thesis investigates some of this complexity as it explores how ideas about the relation between school leadership and student learning outcomes are framed and expressed by significant actors within the Norwegian educational system.

The thesis could be framed as an interpretive narrative analysis. Rooted in a constructivist perspective, where policy making is seen as a communicative practice and a product of human interaction and meaning-making, the thesis explores how the school leadership is connected to

student learning outcomes in contemporary public narratives presented by policy documents, school principals and teachers.

Through three studies the thesis presents three public narratives about the relation between school leadership and student learning outcomes. Study 1 is based on an analysis of contemporary Norwegian White papers and an OECD report from the *improving school leadership* activity. In the narrative plot illuminated in this study, school leadership is connected to student learning outcomes in a causal chain, where influence and effect follows a hierarchical structure. As a consequence the most significant actor in this narrative is the individual school leader, whose actions, priorities and competence is seen to influence all the elements below in the hierarchy.

In Study 2 the school principals' narrative connects school leadership to student learning through practices of quality assessment. In this plot, the different events and actions are connected through the conception of leadership and learning as relational work, underscoring the interconnections between school leaders, teachers and the task at hand. Further, the school principals narrate the teachers as the ones making instructional decisions, which consequently make teachers, and not school leaders, the most significant actors regarding student learning, as teachers' decisions and teaching practices may not be ascribed to school leader influence, but rather be informed by school and teacher culture, teacher identity and competence. Accordingly, the most significant actors within this narrative are the teachers.

In Study 3 the plot in the teachers' narrative describes the relation between school leader teams and students learning outcomes as mediated through teachers' practice in the classrooms, teachers' professional and instructional development, and the facilitation of a productive working environment for leaders, teachers and students. Further, a significant distinction between internal and external elements in the narrative is made, and emphasis is

put on the internal working processes within each school, as these processes are narrated as more significant for student learning. However, one external element – the context of each individual student – is narrated as more significant for student learning than any of the other elements. Thus, student learning is mainly explained as dependent on elements that are beyond both teachers' and school leaders' control. Consequently, the most significant actors within this narrative are the students.

In the three narratives presented in the thesis school leadership is conceptualized in differing ways. In the policy narrative based on policy documents leadership is ascribed to the work, priorities and decisions made by those attaining formal leadership positions in schools. Further, this narrative presents leadership as a factory design, where the acts of school leaders are seen as having an explanatory effect on both organizational success and student achievements. In the school principals' narrative as well as the teachers' narrative, leadership is described as conjoint action, expressed as dynamic relationships between formal leaders and teachers, and amongst teachers. In these two narratives the significance of school leadership is hard to ascribe to the work of formal leaders as both teachers and school principals describe instructional leadership first and foremost attached to the work of teachers. Thus in these two narratives leadership is conceptualized in a more delegated and distributed way, as a multifaceted and relational process of shared responsibility, power, trust and authority.

Also, the concept of learning outcomes is described in different ways. In the policy narrative, learning outcomes is conceptualized as generic and school subject related knowledge that can be measured and documented through tests and grades, and accordingly as a measure for school efficiency and success. Both in the school principals' narrative and teachers' narrative on the other hand, a vague approach to learning outcomes is evident. These two narratives

rather conceptualize learning outcomes in a constructivist sense where learning outcomes are narrated as what one ends up with after some sort of engagement.

The thesis therefore concludes that the three narratives presented relate school leadership to student learning outcomes due to different rational accounts: one (the policy documents) building on research-based accounts of school leaders' effect and influence, and the other two (school principals and teachers) building on accounts of structural and cultural working conditions within schools. As such the analyses presented in this thesis poses somewhat conflicting perspectives on the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes, and further they legitimize leadership practice in differing ways. Some of these varieties can be explained by the contextual nature of narratives. As contextual accounts they reflect the culture of the organizational and professional context of which they are in play at the same time as they reflect the tensions between two competing discourses; accountability and teacher professionalism. These tensions are what school leaders are faced with and need to balance in their everyday practice in schools.

## List of publications

### Article 1:

Eide, H. M. K. & Søreide, G. E. (2014): "A Norwegian policy perspective on the relation between school leadership and pupils' learning outcomes"

*Policy Studies*, 35 (6), pp 576-591

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2014.971729>

### Article 2:

Eide, H. M. K. (2014): "Narrating the Relationship between School Leadership and Student Learning Outcomes; A Norwegian School Principal Perspective".

Article in review, *International journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*

### Article 3:

Eide, H. M. K. (2014): "We all take part in it – Teachers' perspectives on the relationship between school leadership and student learning outcomes".

Accepted with minor revisions, *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*

## List of figures and tables

Table 1: Design overview	7
Table 2: Overview of schools	33
Table 3: Overview of participants	34
Table 4: Analytical steps in the first reading	38
Table 5: Examples from the categorical reading in Study 1-3	38
Table 6: Word count in Study 3	39
Table 7: Analytical steps in the second reading	40
Table 8: Key tasks in school leaders' work (Study 2-3)	41
Table 9: Identification of plots	43
Table 10: Analytical questions in the identification of narrative plots	43

### Enclosed

Table I: *Overview of participants* (Article 3)

Figure 1: *“The narrative plot in the “School leadership and learning outcome narrative”* (Article 1)

Figure 2: Figure 1: *“The relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes in principals' narratives”* (Article 2)

Figure 3: Figure 1: *“The relationship between school leadership and student learning outcomes in teachers' narratives”* (Article 3)

# Table of content

**Scientific environment**

**Acknowledgements**

**Abstract**

**List of publications**

**List of figures and tables**

<b>1. Introduction</b>	1
1.1 Characteristics of school leadership in Norwegian primary and secondary schools	3
1.2 Theme and research question	5
1.3 Research Design	6
1.4 Outline of the thesis	7
<b>2. Review</b>	9
2.1 Perspectives on the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes	9
2.2 Conceptualization and usage of “Distributed leadership”	14
2.3 Conceptualizing Learning outcomes	17
2.4 Summing up	18
<b>3. Interpretive and analytical framework</b>	20
3.1 Constructivism, social reality and policy	20
3.2 Narratives	21
3.2.1 What is a narrative?	22
3.2.2 Policy narratives	23
3.2.3 Organizational stories	25
<b>4. Data and Methodology</b>	28
4.1 Selection and collection of the empirical material	28
4.1.1 Selection of policy documents for Study 1	29
4.1.2 Schools and participants for Study 2 and Study 3	31
4.1.2.1 Interviews	34
4.2 Narrative analysis and analytical tools	35
4.2.1 Analytical dimensions	36
4.2.2 The readings	37
4.2.2.1 The first reading: What are learning outcomes?	37
4.2.2.2 The second reading: What do school leaders do?	40

4.2.2.3 The third reading: Narrative plots relating school leaders' working processes to students' learning outcomes	42
4.3 Reflexivity	44
4.3.1 My role as a researcher	44
4.3.2 Validity	46
4.4 Ethical considerations	48
<b>5. Key findings in the three Studies</b>	51
5.1 Differences in the narrative plots	51
5.2 Different conceptions of school leadership	52
5.3 The concept of learning outcomes	53
<b>6. Discussion</b>	55
6.1 The construction of the narrative plots	56
6.2 Differing perspectives on school leadership	57
6.3 Opposing interpretations of learning outcomes	61
6.4 Questioning the dominance of the policy narrative	64
6.5 Troubling the construction of a meta-narrative	66
<b>7. Concluding remarks and implications for further practice and research</b>	70
7.1 Implications for leadership practice	70
7.2 Implications for further research	72
<b>Literature</b>	74
<b>Enclosed</b>	
Article 1: A Norwegian policy perspective on the relation between school leadership and pupils' learning outcomes.	
Article 2: Narrating the Relationship between School Leadership and Student Learning Outcomes; A Norwegian School Principal Perspective.	
Article 3: 'We all take part in it' – Teachers' perspectives on the relationship between school leadership and student learning outcomes.	
<b>Appendices (in Norwegian)</b>	
Appendix 1: Formal approval from the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD)	
Appendix 2: Information letters and statement of consent from the participants	
Appendix 3: List of questions introduced in the interviews	

## **1. Introduction**

In the last couple of decades improving student achievements has become a focus of policymakers both nationally as well as internationally, and school leadership has been put forward as a central theme when student achievement and school success have been discussed (Spillane, 2003; Slater, 2011; Coburn, 2005; Day et al., 2009; Day, Leithwood and Sammons, 2008; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2008). The increased focus on school leadership when discussing quality in schools has been especially evident in educational systems where success is measured and defined by student achievements, and in systems characterised by increased accountability, competition, and school league tables (Slater, 2011; Tubin, 2011). Simultaneously, the influence of supra-national agencies on national policy-making has increased immensely, and processes that frame education policy are often constituted globally and beyond the nation state (Aasen, 2007; Karseth and Sivesind, 2010; Grek, 2009; Sugrue, 2006; Rizvi and Lindgard, 2010). As a consequence, the idea of a positive relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes in schools has also been taken up in national policy in educational system where competition and accountability are less paramount. Thus, school leaders' contribution and significance for student learning outcomes seems to be a travelling policy idea (Ozga, 2006; Gunter, 2012).

Although policy ideas and initiatives travel beyond national borders, they are still mediated at a national and local level and in particular historical, political and cultural dynamics (Rizvi and Lindgard, 2010). In other words, policy ideas and initiatives are reframed in the national and local contexts in which they are taken up (Ozga, 2006; Gunter, 2012). Accordingly, travelling policy ideas are reframed differently amongst nations, and in the various local contexts in which they are in play. Consequently, although they might look the same at a surface level, policy ideas and initiatives may take on differing forms when they enter

national policy systems (Rizvi and Lindgard, 2010). The process of reshaping traveling policy initiatives and ideas into national and local policy is therefore complex and multifaceted (Ozga, 2006; Rizvi and Lindgard, 2010; Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012).

This complexity is evident with regards to both school leadership and learning outcomes. The concepts “school leadership” and “learning outcomes” are multifaceted in the way that they both as theoretical concepts and in practices can be ascribed and understood within differing conceptual frameworks (Bolden, 2011; Proitz, 2010, 2013b; Harris, 2007; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood and Riehl, 2003; Spillane, 2006). Further, both concepts are attached to historical and cultural changes in the educational sector as well as in educational policy (Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006).

This thesis takes on a constructivist perspective, where policy making is seen as a communicative practice and a product of human interaction and meaning-making (Ball, 2000; Fisher and Gottweis, 2012), where decisions about how “things ought to be understood, or done” are made (Aasen, 2007; Ball, et al., 2012). Accordingly, policy making is perceived as not only limited to official government bodies, but is fundamentally seen as an “ongoing discursive struggle over the definition and conceptual framing of problems, the public understanding of the issues, the shared meanings that motivate policy responses and criteria for evaluation” (Fisher and Gottweis, 2012, p. 7). In this discursive struggle there are several actors representing differing, yet significant perspectives, and this thesis pays attention to how public narratives of three such actors; policy documents, teachers and school leaders define, frame and negotiate the relationship between school leadership and learning outcome. Public narratives are narratives that are “attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual” (Somers and Gibson, 1994, p. 62). They can be narrated by e.g. media, researchers, documents, politicians or other persons, and are constitutive to identity, institutional practice and governmental policy (Roe, 1994; Gubrium and Holstein, 2009;

Czarniawska, 2004, 1998). The thesis is inspired by Lejano's (2006) description of an interpretive perspective on policy as "narratives that are crafted by storytellers" (Lejano, 2006, p. 12). In that sense, this study could be identified as an interpretive narrative analysis (Yanow, 2000; Fischer and Gottweis, 2012). It should be noted that the thesis does not set out to provide knowledge that is needed to craft policy, nor does it set out to be advisory to policymakers at national level on how to strengthen school leadership effects and influence on student outcomes. The contribution of such an interpretive approach is to provide knowledge about some of the complexity surrounding a policy idea as it travels between contexts and amongst actors within a policy sector.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate and discuss how the three above mentioned agents narrate the relationship between school leadership and student learning outcomes, and further how school leadership and learning outcomes are conceptualized in these narratives. The study does not aim to illuminate historical and cultural developments of the concepts "school leadership" and "learning outcomes", but rather seeks to unpack how school leadership and student learning outcomes as well as the relationship between them are interpreted and described in contemporary public narratives.

In this general introduction to the thesis I firstly describe some characteristics of school leadership in Norwegian primary and secondary schools before I attend to the research questions and design of the thesis.

### **1.1 Characteristics of school leadership in Norwegian primary and secondary schools**

In Norway, both primary and secondary school are predominantly public and approximately 97% of all students in primary education attend their local, public schools. Primary and lower secondary schools are owned and governed at municipal level, while upper secondary schools are owned and governed at county municipal level. Up until the introduction of a national

quality evaluation system (NQE) in 2004, primary and secondary education was regulated through the Education Act and the national curriculum, which defined the overall purposes of schooling and set goals for the individual subjects (Sivesind & Bachman, 2008; Skedsmo, 2011). Norway still has a national curriculum, which is decided by the parliament and is authoritative for all Norwegian public – and private – schools, but the introduction of the NQE has changed the way public schools are governed and has led to increased accountability for teachers as well as school leaders and school owners (Sivesind & Bachman, 2008; Mausethagen, 2013c).

From an institutional perspective, the current Norwegian educational system could be characterized as “loosely coupled” (Weick, 1976; Orton and Weick, 1990), where school owners and leaders are given autonomy to adjust and exert governmental intentions, at the same time as they are held accountable for their own results. Balancing governmental intentions with institutional and professional needs and priorities thereby becomes an important aspect of school leaders’ work (Moos and Møller, 2003). Today, as in other OECD member countries, the governing of the Norwegian educational system is characterised by Management by objectives, accountability systems and quality assessment. Still, in contrast to countries such as USA, England, Australia and New Zealand, Norway has a low stakes accountability system. Consequently school leaders and teachers are at low risk of being sanctioned if their results don’t meet the expectations. Although all schools are under governmental supervision, both locally and nationally, this supervision seldom results in redundancy of neither leaders, nor teachers (Moos, Krejsler & Kofod, 2008).

According to Møller (2009), Norway, as other Scandinavian countries such as Denmark and Sweden, has a long history of “framing school leadership as *primus inter pares*, or first among equals” (Møller, 2009, p. 171). School leaders, both principals and department headteachers have been regarded as first among equals among members of the teaching staff. In addition,

Norway has a uniform and academic teacher education (Tolo, 2011), and this has resulted in a “flat hierarchy” in schools (Møller, 2009). However, governmental initiatives to develop a more systematized school leader education, combined with recent reforms in teacher education has reframed school leadership as a profession distinct from teaching as well as altered the structuring of teacher education (Møller, 2009).

Currently, several studies describing the structuring of leadership in Norwegian primary and secondary schools, identify leadership as a joint function of a leadership team, where teachers are expected to take on significant responsibilities and decisions in their everyday classroom-related work (Moos et al., 2008; Møller et al., 2005; Møller et al., 2007; Møller, 2009; Helstad and Møller, 2013; Vennebo and Ottesen, 2012). Consequently, the relationship between formal school leaders and teachers is not characterized as very hierarchical in practice, but more so, leadership is described as conjoint, or stretched- over (Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Gronn, 2003) both formal leaders and teachers. Thus, leadership in Norwegian primary and secondary schools is characterized by a high degree of delegation and distribution. Based on the before mentioned studies of school leadership in Norwegian schools this thesis investigates how leadership as a shared or distributed activity within Norwegian lower secondary schools is interpreted and expressed in public narratives.

## **1.2 Theme and research questions**

The issue of interest in this project is the relationship between school leadership and student learning outcomes. As mentioned, both leadership and learning outcomes are attached to historical and cultural developments, leading to a current situation where both terms are used in a variety of ways amongst scholars and in everyday conversation. This thesis is conducted within a narrative analytical framework, and sets out to identify how leadership is connected to student learning outcomes in public narratives, and further to illuminate different

interpretations of school leadership and learning outcomes that are in play in the narratives posed by policy documents, school leaders and teachers. The thesis therefore has the following overarching research question;

- *How is the relationship between school leadership and pupils' learning outcomes narrated by actors in the Norwegian educational sector?*

The overarching research question is followed by two sub-questions;

- *What perspectives on school leadership can be identified in the narratives?* and
- *How is "learning outcomes" conceptualized in the narratives?*

### **1.3 Research design**

The thesis holds an interpretive research design and focuses on processes of meaning construction in policy documents and among actors in the field of school leadership and teaching. The data material consists of four policy documents and twelve semi-structured interviews with principals and teachers. The aim is to illuminate how socially shared rhetoric and narrative resources generate recognizable and plausible accounts about the relationship between school leadership and pupils learning outcomes. The empirical material in the thesis has been analyzed in three studies and is presented in three articles. Study 1 explores policy documents and is presented in Article 1. Study 2 explores interviews with six principals and is presented in Article 2, and finally Study 3 explores interviews with six teachers and is presented in Article 3. Although the empirical basis for each article varies, the analytical approach has to a large extent been consistent, raising mostly the same analytical questions in each of the articles. In short, the analysis has been conducted according to the design presented in table 1:

Table 1: Design overview

	Study 1/ Article 1	Study 2/ Article 2	Study 3/ Article 3
<i>Empirical material</i>	Policy documents OECD report White Paper 31 White paper 11 White paper 19	Interviews with 6 school principals	Interviews with 6 teachers
<i>Analytical approach</i>	Narrative analysis focusing on narratives techniques	Narrative/Textual analysis of interview transcripts	Narrative/Textual analysis of interview transcripts
<i>Main research question(s) for each study</i>	What dominant narratives and narrative plots about school leadership can be identified in Norwegian educational public policy? How do narrative plots in relevant policy documents connect school leadership and pupils' learning outcomes?	How is the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes narrated by school leaders in a Norwegian school context?	How is the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes narrated by teachers in a Norwegian school context?
<i>Analytical questions</i>	What are learning outcomes? How is the work of school leaders described? What are the challenges facing school leaders in contemporary society? What are the elements connecting school leadership to student learning outcomes? How is leadership connected to student learning outcomes?	What are learning outcomes? What do school leaders do? What are the elements connecting school leadership to student learning outcomes? How are principals' working processes related to student learning outcomes?	What are learning outcomes? What do school leaders do? What are the elements connecting school leadership to student learning outcomes? How are school leaders' working processes related to student learning outcomes?
<i>Analytical/conceptual tools</i>	Plot Policy narrative Narrative techniques	Plot Public narrative	Plot Public narrative

#### 1.4 Outline of the thesis

This article- based thesis consists of an extended abstract of seven chapters followed by an appendix where the three articles are presented. In the extended abstract, the first chapter

outlines the general introduction to the thesis and the research questions. In chapter two, dominant research trends and key arguments in research on the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes are outlined, followed by a presentation of how distributed leadership and learning outcomes have been used and conceptualized in scholarly works. Then, in chapter three I present the interpretive presuppositions and analytical tools that form the analytical framework for this study, followed by a presentation of the methodological approach and considerations in chapter four. Chapter five summarizes key findings from the three Studies, followed by a broader discussion in chapter six. Chapter seven outlines the overarching conclusion of the thesis and implications for further practice and research.

## **2. Review**

In this chapter a brief presentation of research investigating the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes will be given. I will firstly outline and highlight some of the key arguments built by the international studies dominating the investigations of the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes, before I secondly outline how the two terms “distributed leadership” and “learning outcomes” have been conceptualized and used in research relevant for the Norwegian context.

### **2.1 Perspectives on the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes**

The body of research concerning successful leadership in relation to students’ learning can be characterised as multifaceted, although some central common features have been identified. In what Møller and Fuglestad (2006, p. 31) identifies as a “rationalistic tradition” within school leadership research, studies investigating the relationship between school leadership and student learning outcomes have been conducted with a focus on school effectiveness and improvement. In this tradition the position of principal or headteacher serves as a point of departure for the investigation of how leadership may influence students’ learning (Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Bird, Dunaway, Hancock & Wang, 2013, Gu, Sammons & Mehta, 2008; Sun and Leithwood, 2012; Sammons, Gu, Day & Ko, 2011; Mulford and Silins, 2011; Supovitz, Sirindes, & May, 2010; Robinson, Loyd, & Rowe, 2008; Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Leithwood & Kington, 2008; Leithwood and Day, 2008; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008). These studies are predominantly quantitative, although the growing body of research also includes case studies conducted in school settings, where the significance of leadership on student learning outcomes has been found to be effective when it comes to school leadership and improvement (Tubin, 2011; Harris, 2004; Timperley, 2011; Møller and Fuglestad, 2006).

Most of the studies have been conducted in Anglo-Saxon educational systems such as the USA, New Zealand and England, and support the idea that school leaders such as principals (Sammons et al., 2011; Mulford and Silins, 2011; Supovitz et al., 2010; Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Robinson et al., 2008; Timperley, 2011), headteachers (Day et al., 2008; Leithwood and Day, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2008; Gu et al., 2008) or superintendents (Bird et al., 2013) can influence teachers, who in turn affect student learning outcomes and achievements. Despite differences in approaches, the studies can all be interpreted as a concentrated (Kelchtermans and Piot, 2012) or rationalistic (Møller and Fuglestad, 2006) approach to school leadership, where school leaders are found to be significant actors when discussing improvement in educational outcomes (Slater, 2011; Coburn, 2005).

In most studies the indirect significance of school leadership is underscored. One illustrative example could be the work of Leithwood et al. (2008), who based on an extensive literature review, have identified seven characteristics of successful or efficient school leadership they claim to be strongly evident:

1. School leadership is second to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning.
2. Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.
3. The ways in which leaders apply these leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the context in which they work.
4. School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions.
5. School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.

6. Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others.
7. A small handful of personal traits explains a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness (Leithwood, et al., 2008, p. 28-36)

According to these claims, leadership is first and foremost seen as an indirect influence on students' learning. Leithwood et al. (2008) strongly suggest that leadership has a pivotal significance for school development and enhancement of student achievements, and although the importance of classroom teaching is recognised, their conclusion is that 'leadership has very significant effects on the quality of school organisation and on student learning' (Leithwood, et al., 2008, p. 29). Thus, leadership is perceived to be a catalyst for improvement and quality in schools, mediating variables such as quality of instruction, instructional climate, a safe and orderly working climate, staff participation in school wide decision-making, school culture, teacher commitment, collective teacher efficacy, sense of professional community, school goals, organisational learning processes, teacher capacity and experience, and finally, procedures for monitoring pupil progress (Day et al., 2008).

Further, Leithwood et al (2008) argue that school leaders most powerfully influence learning through staff member motivation, commitment, and beliefs concerning working conditions. This claim, however, is contrasted by Robinson, et al (2008) who has conducted a meta-analysis that investigates differential effects of leadership types on the impact of leadership on student outcomes. Based on 22 studies of the relationship between school leadership styles and student outcomes, Robinson et al (2008) found that the effect of instructional leadership on student outcomes was three to four times as great as that of transformational leadership. They concluded that the more leaders focus their relationships, work, and learning on teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes.

Building on the meta-analysis of Robinson et al (2008), Robinson (2010) have identified five leadership capabilities that provide an explanatory power in terms of raised student achievements;

1. Establishing goals and expectations
2. Resourcing strategically
3. Planning, monitoring and participating in teaching and the curriculum
4. Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development
5. Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment (Robinson, et al., 2008; Robinson, 2010).

According to these capacities school leaders must have instructional knowledge, and interpersonal skills such as the ability to inspire, motivate, and build trust amongst their colleagues, as well as knowledge about administrative procedures and processes. Supported by other meta- analyses, such as Supovitz, et al (2010), these capacities have contributed to increased attention towards the knowledge base and skills school leaders need in order to ensure effective instructional leadership in schools, as illustrated by Timperley's (2011) study in five New Zealand elementary schools. Using the five capacities as a theoretical background, Timperley (2011) offers a theoretical framework of which school principals' work can be portrayed and analysed. In this framework she divides these five capacities into three organizing categories: leadership knowledge, relationships, and expectations. By analysing situations where elementary school principals considered themselves to be effective instructional leaders, she argues that there is evidence that all capacities are evident when it comes to raised student achievements, although the strength of each capacity may differ according to school-site, and the work of the individual principal.

The studies investigating school leadership significance for student learning has a common characteristic. They all take the positions of formal school leaders such as principals, headteachers and superintendents as the point of departure for their investigations. This leads to an emphasis on the significance of individual school leaders actions, knowledge and skills in regard to student learning outcomes (Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Bird, et al., 2013, Gu, et al., 2008; Sun and Leithwood, 2012; Sammons et al., 2011; Mulford and Silins, 2011; Supovitz, et al., 2010; Robinson, et al., 2008; Day, et al., 2008; Leithwood and Day, 2008; Leithwood, et al., 2008; Tubin, 2011; Harris, 2004; Timperley, 2011; Møller and Fuglestad, 2006). Yet, an orientation towards distributed features of leadership as effective for student achievements could be identified in the work of Leithwood, et al., (2008), as they argue that ‘school leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed’ (Leithwood, et al., 2008, p. 34). This orientation however, comes with ambiguity as this argument is built around hierarchical patterns of leadership distribution that does not include teachers as leaders. Thus, when arguing that some patterns of leadership distribution are more effective than others, the authors emphasise the position of headteachers: ‘headteachers were rated as having the greatest (positive and negative) influence’ (Leithwood, et al., 2008, p. 35). Hence, their perspective on distributed leadership does not include aspects of distribution of power and authority that goes beyond formal school leader positions, or what Spillane (2006) phrases as the leader plus perspective where more than one leader are involved in the same tasks. Gunter (2012) therefore argues that most studies investigating the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes does not take into consideration that distributed leadership can also entail a distribution of power and authority that goes beyond formal leaders (Gunter, 2012).

The question of power distribution has been put forward in studies of cultural and relational factors that constitute leadership in schools (Spillane, et al., 2004; Spillane, 2006; Gronn,

2003; Woods, Bennet, Harvey & Wise, 2004; Coleman, 2012; Harris, 2007; Mayrowetz, 2008; Bolden, 2011; Møller, 2009; Klar, 2012; Vennebo and Ottesen, 2012; Helstad and Møller, 2013). The main aim of these studies has been to create an understanding and illustrate how leadership is played out and distributed within schools and organisations, in order to build both analytical as well as theoretical knowledge about distributed leadership as a concept. However, in this vast amount of research, conceptualisations and usages of distributed leadership as a term are not consistent, as will be further elaborated in the following section of this chapter.

## **2.2. Conceptualization and usage of “Distributed leadership”**

The concept of distributed leadership is now widely recognized as a departure from the traditional view of leadership as something imparted to followers by leaders from above (Spillane, 2006; Gronn, 2003; Pearce and Conger, 2003; Keltermans and Piot, 2012).

Nevertheless, the vast body of literature about distributed leadership indicates that the term is used and conceptualized in various ways among scholars. Bolden (2011), with reference to Oduro (2004), traces the theoretical origin for distributed leadership as far back as 1250 BC, while Harris (2009) argues that distributed leadership as an idea, can be traced back to the mid-1920s. Gronn (2000) on the other hand cites Gibb as the first author that refers explicitly to distributed leadership in the 1950s. Although there are differences of opinion about the theoretical origin of distributed leadership, there seem to be consensus about the prominent era for distributed leadership from the mid-1990s and up until today. Today there is a vast and continuously increasing body of research on distributed leadership (Gronn, 2000; Bolden, 2011).

In a review of theory and research about distributed leadership in organisations, Bolden (2011) identifies a normative and a descriptive tradition within this field of enquiry. In the

normative traditions, distributed leadership is considered to incorporate shared, democratic, dispersed, and other related forms of leadership. Distributed leadership also tends to be considered as a means for enhancing the effectiveness of, and engagement with leadership processes such as in the works of Leithwood, et al (2008), Leithwood and Day (2008), and Day et al. (2008). The descriptive tradition, on the other hand, argues that distributed leadership offers an analytical framework through which one can assess and articulate how leadership is and is not distributed throughout organisations (Bolden, 2011; Gunter, Hall & Bragg, 2013; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane, 2006). Opposed to the normative tradition, writers within this tradition (Spillane 2006; Spillane, et al., 2004; Gronn, 2003) argue that while leadership may be shared and/or democratic in certain situations this does not necessarily mean that leadership is distributed, due to the fact that “distribution” of leadership also require a distribution of decisions and power (Gronn, 2003; Spillane, 2006; Keltermans and Piot, 2012; Helstad and Møller, 2013; Vennebo and Ottesen, 2013).

Mayrowetz (2008) elaborates more on differences within these two traditions and distinguishes between 4 usages of distributed leadership as a concept in research. First, in the same sense as Bolden (2011), he describes the usage of distributed leadership as a theoretical lens for looking at the activity of leadership. Second, there are writers (Johnson, 2004; Storey, 2004) who interpret the descriptive tradition of distributed leadership as a notion that “the activity of leadership is practiced through the interaction of multiple individuals as a prescriptive message for leadership to be shared throughout the school in a more democratic way” (Mayrowetz, 2008, p. 428). Hence, this second usage of the term, argues that distributed leadership can enhance democracy in schools. Then, as a third approach to distributed leadership, there are writers who argue that distributed leadership can lead to efficiency and effectiveness in schools (Elmore, 2003; Camburn, Rowan & Taylor, 2003, Leithwood, et al., 2008; Leithwood and Day, 2008). Finally, Mayrowetz (2008) points to writers who use the

concept of distributed leadership as a mean for human capacity building (Harris, 2004). This usage of the term, promotes the notion that “by having multiple people engaged in leadership, these individuals will all learn about themselves and the issues facing the school” (Mayrowetz, 2008, p. 431). Thus within this latter usage, distributed leadership is seen as equate to maximizing the human capacity within the organisation as distributed leadership is conceptualised as a form of collective leadership through which teachers as well as formal leaders develop expertise by working together.

Yet, another conceptualization of distributed leadership is posed by Gunter, et al (2013) who have identified four positions within scholarly works about distributed leadership: a functional descriptive, a functional normative, a critical and a socially critical position. Within this framework functionalism is about improvement, and the narratives created through research focus on targets, training and plans such as the work of Leithwood, Mascal and Strauss (2009) and Timperley (2011). A vast body of the literature within functional research is descriptive, with an emphasis on what is happening in everyday practice. Thus, the functional descriptive position within this framework seem to be in line with what Bolden (2011) describes as a descriptive tradition, or the usage of distributed leadership as a theoretical lens for looking at leadership activity (Mayrowetz, 2008). Further, functional research also holds a normative position that provides models and rationales for practitioners to improve their practice (Gunter, et al., 2013) more in line with a normative tradition (Bolden, 2011) or the usage of distributed leadership as a mean to promote efficiency and effectiveness in schools (Mayrowetz, 2008). The critical position and the social critical position within Gunter et al’s (2013) framework are both said to have functional origin and sympathies, but raises critical questions to claims for and about distributed leadership in a way that opens up the perspective on distributed leadership towards debates about power, such as the work of Gronn (2003). However, the critical position as well as the social critical position does not reflect using

distributed leadership as a mean to enhance democracy or human capacity building, but rather, scholarly work within these last two position critiques both these lines of literature.

So, although there seem to be consensus amongst scholars about distributed leadership reflecting a departure from the traditional view of leadership as something imparted to followers by leaders from above, this brief presentation of approaches to the term in scholarly works indicates that there is variety in both conceptualizations and usage of distributed leadership in research and literature. The same could be said about learning outcomes, although this term does not share the same historic development regarding neither origin nor theoretical framing.

### **2.3 Conceptualizing Learning outcomes**

In her cross-case analysis of policymakers, teachers and scholars, Prøitz (2013b) has identified contradictory conceptualisations of learning outcomes in research, in Norwegian educational policy, and amongst teachers working in Norwegian secondary schools. Although the term “learning outcomes” has a brief history, there still seems to be a lack of consensus among scholars as to the term’s definition. In her review of literature concerned with the concept of learning outcomes, Prøitz (2010) traces the term learning outcomes back to the 1970s. In the 70s, it was taken up both by social constructivists and behaviourists, and consequently the term was given a somewhat contradictory content. From a constructivist perspective, learning outcomes was conceptualised as ‘essentially what one ends up with, intended or not, after some sort of engagement’ (Eisner, 1979, p. 101), and constructed in the interplay between student, subject, and teacher. Contrary to this, a conception of learning outcomes as predictable implications of students’ learning was posed from a behaviouristic perspective (Prøitz, 2010; 2013b). In the current decade, yet another approach to learning outcomes has emerged, where the attainment of defined learning outcomes is used as a

measure of institutional effectiveness (Ewell, 2005; Prøitz 2010). According to Prøitz (2013c) it is this latter conceptualisation of learning outcomes that has gained dominance amongst policymakers in subsequent Norwegian governments. Further, she argues that this conception of the term also dominates amongst scholars, as illustrated by the body of literature about the significance of school leadership for student learning outcomes and school effectiveness and success (Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Bird, et al., 2013, Gu, et al., 2008; Sun and Leithwood, 2012; Sammons et al., 2011; Mulford and Silins, 2011; Supovitz, et al., 2010; Robinson, et al., 2008; Day, et al., 2008; Leithwood and Day, 2008; Leithwood, et al., 2008; Tubin, 2011; Harris, 2004; Timperley, 2011; Møller and Fuglestad, 2006). However, Prøitz (2013b) analysis also shows that there are alternative conceptions of the term in play amongst scholars and teachers, which are contradictory to this dominant position. The most prominent of these conceptions is found amongst teachers working in Norwegian secondary schools. Prøitz (2013a) exploratory study of grading practices has revealed that there are tensions between the grading practices within the different school subjects and the universal “scripts” for grading practices emphasised in the National curriculum (Prøitz, 2013a), where teachers emphasise elements that are not included in the National curriculum in their grading practice which underscores a more unpredictable and constructivist conceptualization of learning outcomes.

## **2.4 Summing up**

Still, although extensive literature exists on both individual and distributed approaches to leadership, and an increasing amount of literature relates school leadership to student learning outcomes, there are few empirical studies illustrating *how* school leadership is understood and executed in relation to student learning outcomes in schools outside Anglo-Saxon educational systems (Slater 2011). Further, there are few studies that investigate how school leadership is

connected to student learning outcomes in schools characterised by a high degree of leadership distribution (Robinson, 2008). Consequently, there still is a lack of knowledge about how school leaders and teachers situated within a tradition of delegation and distributed leadership, such as Norwegian primary and secondary education, think about and work towards student learning outcomes. The aim and main research questions guiding the studies in this thesis are consequently developed to meet this void in the research literature.

### **3. Interpretive and analytical framework**

In the following chapter I will elaborate more on the interpretive presuppositions and theoretical concepts that constitute the overarching analytical framework for this analysis. This thesis is rooted in constructivism with the presupposition that we live in a social world, characterized by the possibilities of multiple interpretations. A consequence of this presupposition is neglecting “brute data” whose meaning is beyond dispute, or assuming that words can have univocal and unambiguous meanings (Yanow, 2000, p. 5-6). Rather, this thesis sees our social reality as socially constructed and a result of collective meaning making and interaction. This position comes with ambiguity, and according to Wagenaar (2011), “obscurity”, as the writing and debates among interpretive theorists have generated a “vocabulary richly studded with exotic “isms”, such as social constructivism, meaning realism, holism, essentialism, foundationalism, and perspectivism” (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 7). A more thorough description of what is meant by constructivism in this thesis will therefore be provided, as well as a description of the presumptions that this philosophical position entails.

#### **3.1. Constructivism, social reality and policy**

An often used phrase to describe constructivist ontology is that constructivism sees reality as socially constructed (Wagenaar, 2011; Burr, 1995). Yet, what does this entail? To say that the world is socially constructed does not mean that reality doesn't exist, but rather, that a universal, absolute reality is unknowable (Hatch, 2002). As humans “we have no access to a mind-independent world that functions as a point of reference to our descriptions and interpretations of the everyday reality we perceive, experience, and move about in” (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 179). Consequently, what we can access and investigate in research are individual perspectives, versions or constructions of reality. Thus, there is not one objective reality that can be investigated, but rather, there are multiple realities that are inherently

unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience and interpret the world from their own points.

Although human experience and interpretations are individual, elements in individuals' interpretations are often shared across social groups. As such, the construction of reality has a social nature, where interpretations (Yanow, 2000), or versions (Wagenaar, 2011) of reality are communicated and shared through language. This social dimension of language is what constructs social reality (Wagenaar, 2011; Yanow, 2000; Burr, 1995).

This thesis concentrates on the construction of a specific policy issue, namely the relationship between school leadership and student learning outcomes. As such, it follows into a constructivist tradition of interpretation engaged in mapping out the variety of meaning in a policy sector. More specifically, it raises questions about *how* meaning is constructed in various contexts within the Norwegian educational sector, and further, it questions *what* these various meanings and interpretations of school leadership and learning outcomes entail. The thesis therefore focuses on how the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes is expressed in *public narratives* (Somers and Gibson, 1994). In the following, the narrative approach framing the analysis will be further elaborated.

### **3.2 Narratives**

Following what has been phrased as the interpretive turn in the late 1970ies and through the 1980ies, narratives became both the scope and methodic angle in the social sciences (Yanow 2000). Grounded in constructivism research attention was turned to how socially shared resources of rhetoric and narrative are deployed to generate recognizable, plausible, and culturally well-informed accounts (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Czarniawska, 2004, 1998, Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). However, within qualitative research the term “narrative” still comes with ambiguity with regards to what the

term refers to. The following section will elaborate more on how the term narrative is understood and used in this project.

### ***3.2.1 What is a narrative?***

Within the vast body of literature about narratives in social science research, there is no straight forward answer to the question “what is a narrative”. In this thesis, the term narrative and the term story are used interchangeably. I take Polkinghorne’s (1995) description of a narrative as a story as a point of departure. In a story, events and actions are put together and organized as a whole, by means of a plot. In short, plot refers to the way a narrative is told; first, by establishing the beginning and end of a storied segment, and second, by how elements, events and scenarios are temporally or causally connected in the narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995; Berger, 1997; Søreide, 2007). In that sense, plot serves as a conceptual scheme by which central meaning of individual events are expressed and displayed. Narrative explanations relate events to human projects, as they explain actions and practices by reference to the beliefs and desires of actors (Bevir, 2006). In this way, narratives exhibit an explanation rather than demonstrating it (Polkinghorne, 1985; Bevir, 2006).

This conception of narrative emphasizes the interconnectedness between language and human action. Narratives are not seen as reflections of experiences, but rather, narratives are the linguistic structures that give meaning to experiences. Through this process of “making sense” of experience, telling stories becomes a meaning making activity. As such, “narratives integrate experiences, beliefs, practices and values into meaningful sequential and temporal order” (Søreide, 2007, p. 28). Hence storytelling is a process of organizing experiences and meaning making. This understanding of narratives presupposes that society has a way of shaping, reshaping, or otherwise influence stories on its own terms, in the sense that, individual narratives are situated within particular interaction and within specific social,

cultural and institutional discourses (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009). This thesis takes the presupposition that narratives serve different purposes in the formation of the social, cultural and institutional discourses that forms the contextual dimensions of the storyteller.

Accordingly, narratives can be perceived as operating on different levels of human sense making.

Somers and Gibson (1994) distinguish between three such narrative levels: ontological, public and meta-narratives, where *ontological narratives* are stories told by the individual to make sense of their personal lives. *Public narratives* are those sets of stories about groups or persons that are “attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual” (Somers & Gibson, 1994, p. 62). They can be presented by the media, researchers, documents, politicians or other persons. *Metanarratives* refers to overarching stories such as dominant ideology or national identity within a national state. The narratives presented in this thesis are examples of public narratives as they are expressed in documents, and by school leaders and teachers. The narrative presented in Study 1 is an example of what Roe (1994) explains as *policy narratives*, while the narratives presented in Study 2 and 3 are examples of *organizational stories* (Czarniawska, 1997, 1998). Although policy narratives and organizational stories are constructed in different contexts, both concepts are regarded as public narratives in this project. In the following I will outline more closely the concepts of policy narratives and organizational stories.

### **3.2.2 Policy narratives**

In Study 1 I analyze how policy texts narratively constitute the significance of school leadership for pupils’ learning outcomes. Policy texts, such as national White Papers are infused with what Roe (1994) explains as *policy narratives*. He defines policy narratives as “stories (scenarios and arguments) which underwrite and stabilize the assumptions for

policymaking in situations that persist with many unknowns, a high degree of interdependence, and little, if any agreement” (Roe, 1994: 34). Hence, policy narratives are accounts, scenarios and arguments that form the basis of policy making as they both underwrite and stabilize assumptions for policymaking through establishing, certifying, fixating and making steady the grounds for policy decision-making. Through policy narratives reality can be either simplified or complexified. Policy narratives can therefore be seen as one of the principal ways practitioners, bureaucrats, and policymakers articulate and make sense of uncertainty.

Through the interplay between simplicity and complexity, Roe (1994) points to the need for stability in goals and objectives, and institutional memory in policymaking. The more complex and uncertain things seem at a micro level, the greater the perceived need for explanatory narratives that simplify and can be operationalized into approaches of decision-making and action. From a governing perspective policy narratives consequently have a “key role in establishing and fixing the assumptions for decision making under conditions of high ambiguity” (Roe, 1994: 37) Policy narratives links agents, actions, visions, contexts and practices in a way that reduces complexity and that is perceived as coherent and meaningful, and at the same time rule out alternative understandings (Søreide, 2007). Through policy narratives a production of “truths” in way of giving a specific description of the world, the problem at hand and a solution to this problem is possible.

Further, as accounts of arguments that communicate ideas, beliefs and evidence that justify policy and governing practices in a specific context, policy narratives persist with an objective to make their addressees assume or do something (Gunter, 2012). As such they can set out to either maintain the status quo or transform the wider culture in which they operate. Policy narratives therefore serve an important function by way of stabilizing and fixating the grounds for decision making as well as legitimizing those governing decisions that are made. By ruling

out alternative understandings, policy narratives are able to persist with stability although they might be empirically or narratively contested (Roe, 1994). Although public policy narratives are not directly implemented into practice, they are important as explanations that justify and legitimize a preferred practice (Roe, 1994; Czarniawska, 2004).

### ***3.2.3 Organizational stories***

From the previous it is clear that narratives are situated within particular interactions and within specific social, cultural, and institutional contexts and practices (Søreide, 2007; Somers and Gibson, 1994; Gubrium and Holstein, 2009). One set of public narratives can be identified as organizational stories (Czarniawska, 1997, 1998, 2004). In Study 2 and 3 I analyze such organizational narratives posed by school principals and teachers in order to illuminate how they relate the work of school leaders to student outcomes.

Organizational stories serve different functions within the organizations they occur. First, these narratives serve as important communicative acts between the members of an organization as they underscore and facilitate socially shared resources, relations and “feelings of belonging” amongst the members of the organization. Second, they make organizational culture and moral more explicit to each organizational member and thus have a function to give a collective understanding of the rationale of an organization. As a consequence of the prior two functions, organizational narratives also function as a rationale to strengthen workers commitment (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009; Czarniawska, 1998; Ball, Maguire & Brown, 2012; Nielsen, 2001). Organizational narratives illuminate how human intentions both influence and are influenced by the context in which they make sense. As such they give access to individual experiences as well as organizational values and culture and are therefore valuable sources for research.

Organizational narratives are not one set of stories. In every organization there will be a myriad of narratives, of which some are personal, whereas others are public. As such, organizational narratives can be concerned with and infused by both personal and social conditions. Personal conditions refer to feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions, while social conditions draw attention to the existential conditions, the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and otherwise, that form each individuals context (Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007). The analysis in this thesis has focused on the social conditions in the school leaders' and teachers' organizational narratives.

The organizational narratives analyzed in Study 2 and 3 are all stories that reflect upon organizational routines. Organizational routines always have both ostensive and performative aspects (Spillane, Parise & Sherer, 2011). Ostensive aspects represent the 'ideal or schematic form' of a routine (Spillane et al., 2011, p. 591), while the performative aspects refer to the specific actions of a routine, or how the routine is actually executed in practice. As narratives, the stories analyzed and presented in Study 2 and 3 are accounts that shed light on how principals and teachers justify and legitimize leadership practices within the schools in which they operate (Czarniawska, 2004). These are narratives that are produced and formulated to address particular interpretive communities, both near and distant, in a way that advocate a particular version of reality that is related to what is at stake for the teachers and principals. In that sense they are accounts that reflect the ostensive aspects in the routines they describe.

Although the organizational narratives produced by teachers and principals working in Norwegian lower secondary schools are attached to the same national educational context as those produced by bureaucrats and departmental advisors in policy documents, the organizational narratives may not be confirmatory to dominating policy narratives. Rather, they may be contradictory as they set out to justify and make sense of practice in interpretive communities regarded as more significant for the authors of those narratives. In this way

organizational narratives can serve as *counter-narratives*, that is, “stories that run counter to the controversy’s dominant policy narratives” (Roe, 1994, p. 3).

## **4. Data and Methodology**

In this chapter I first outline the methodological approach in the overall study. The intent of this chapter is to tie the analysis conducted in Study 1, 2 and 3 together as well as to elaborate in more detail on how the analysis has been conducted. The data material in this project has been gathered from policy documents and fieldwork in the form of semi-structured interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). I describe the selection of documents and participants and the interviews in particular. Thereafter I present how I have conducted the narrative analysis and the analytical tools used in the analysis. Last I address issues of reflexivity, such as my position as a researcher, validity, and the ethical considerations that have been made throughout this project.

The thesis holds an interpretive research design and focuses on processes of meaning construction in policy documents and among actors in the field of school leadership and teaching. As noted in the introduction, the aim of my study is to illuminate how socially shared resources of rhetoric and narrative generate accounts about the relationship between school leadership and pupils learning outcomes. Methodologically, the overall study is grounded in constructivism (Czarniawska, 2004; Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Ball, 2000; Ball, et al., 2012; Yanow, 2000, 2006). In this perspective, the main objective for me as a researcher is to investigate how meaning is constructed and how various accounts of “truths” about the phenomena being studied are created. Further, this perspective also includes me as a researcher as an active agent in the meaning-construction process.

### **4.1 Selection and collection of the empirical material**

As illustrated by the design overview presented in the introduction (page 7), the empirical material in this study consists of various sources of data, which have all been selected through

different strategic considerations. In the following, the rationale behind the selection of each of the data sources will be given.

#### *4.1.1 Selection of policy documents for Study 1*

This analysis aims to illuminate dominating voices and how they construct a certain narrative about the issue of interest (Roe, 1994). Therefore, national policy documents were regarded as an important source of data, as they were reckoned to enable an investigation of how the dominating policy narrative about the relationship between school leadership and student learning outcomes is constructed. Policy texts, however, exist in a variety of forms and at different levels within the Educational system and policy in Norway. Further, policy documents also serve different purposes and have various statuses as they concern both local and national issues, and are addressed to local and national authorities. At a national level, policy documents are rarely the products of singular authors, but rather they are produced through negotiation and compromises among different actors representing various and sometimes conflicting interests. Nevertheless, national policy documents, like white papers mainly appear as having one dominating voice (Ball, 2000; Mausesthaugen, 2013c).

White papers are texts that serve as key reference points for government discourse at a national level (Ball, 2000). These documents are initiated by the government and usually they are written by bureaucrats outlining the present political will and priorities. As such they provide a basis for discussion for Parliament which subsequently gives signals back to the government and relevant ministries, which then make decisions about further follow-up. In that sense, White papers are not legally binding, but more so, provide a foundation for future legislation (Mausesthaugen, 2013c). Three contemporary White Papers addressing key issues regarding quality, teaching and leadership in primary and secondary education were chosen in order to investigate the current most dominating narrative about the relationship between

leadership and learning outcomes. White Paper no. 31 (KD, 2008) “*Quality Education*”, White Paper no. 11 (KD, 2009) “*The teacher, the Role and the Education*” and White Paper no. 19 (KD, 2010) “*Time for learning*” were found to be those white papers that in a relatively narrow timespan all addressed issues of leadership, teaching and learning, and how these features were seen as influential on school quality. The theme for each of the White papers is more thoroughly described in Article 1 (see appendix).

Even though the primary focus in Study 1 is Norwegian educational policy, and despite the fact that government produces a vast amount of national White papers and other policy texts, understanding national policy requires a scope that goes beyond national borders as policy ideas and ideologies travel (Grek, 2009; Ozga and Jones, 2006; Gunter, 2012; Rizvi and Lingaard, 2010). The impact of supra-national agencies on Norwegian educational policy has increased as comparative data such as results from PISA- and TIMMS- tests are now a source of authority for assessing national educational reforms (Aasen, 2007; Karseth & Sivesind, 2010; Sugrue, 2006; Grek, 2009). Further, comparative investigations initiated and led by the OECD, such as the *Improving school leadership activity* (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008) or the more recent *Governing complex Education Systems* (OECD, 2014), both in which Norway has been taking active part, have resulted in descriptions of challenges for school leaders as well as government that cut across national borders. Consequently, and with regards to the topic of the thesis, I also chose to include the first volume of the reports from the OECD *Improving school leadership activity: Improving School Leadership: Policy and Practice* (Pont et al., 2008) in the document analysis. The main focus of this report is on the professional work of school leaders and leadership in schools. However, the report also includes a line of recommendations for national policy makers and governments as it reports on results from 22 different educational systems and explains why school leadership has become a key priority in educational policy internationally.

The chosen documents have an inter-textual quality in the sense that they “communicate” with each other in different ways. First, the Norwegian documents and especially White Paper no. 31 in particular, has more than 30 references to the OECD report. Second, both White Paper no. 19 and White Paper no. 11 set out to give responses to several of the many challenges posed in White Paper 31. Finally, White Paper no. 19 builds on the recommendations and arguments posed by White Paper no. 31 and White Paper no. 11. Combined, these four documents provided an extensive amount of text with a total number of 399 pages (OECD report: 173 pages, White paper no 31: 86 pages, White paper no 11: 90 pages, and White paper no. 19: 50 pages).

#### ***4.1.2 Schools and participants for Study 2 and Study 3***

The nature of leadership work differs due to varying structural conditions such as school size, municipality administration, and geographic location, and further due to cultural conditions reflected in organisational routines (Møller et al., 2005; Spillane, Parise, & Sherer, 2011). As the thesis intend to investigate public narratives which acknowledges individuals’ experience as socially, culturally and organisationally constructed (Somers and Gibson, 1994; Czarniawska, 2004), the possibility that the narrative accounts were influenced by the organisation of which they occurred was taken into consideration. I therefore found it important to get access to participants representing some of the variety of lower secondary schools in Norway today. The variation criteria I took into consideration were: geographic location (urban/rural), type of school (lower secondary/combined schools) and school size, as these are variations that are addressed as explanatory for variation in both leadership practice (Møller et al. 2005) and student outcomes in Norwegian schools (Leuven, Oosterbeek and Rønning, 2008).

It should be noted that before making any contact with schools or participants requesting their participation in the study, the project was approved by the Data Protection Official for Research (NSD) (see appendix). Getting access to schools and participants however, proved to be a more challenging endeavor than first anticipated. Challenges such as lack of response to e-mail contact, tight schedules among school leaders and withdrawal from participation resulted in a relatively long time-span for collecting the interview data, reaching from early spring 2011 through spring 2012.

I used different approaches when making contact with the schools. In one larger municipality I had to include the school administration at municipality level in order to get information distributed to schools. Here information about the project and requests to voluntary participation were sent out to 27 schools by e-mail. However, none of the schools responded to the e-mail contact. I therefore contacted all the schools directly by phone. Six principals volunteered to participate in the study, but two of them later withdrew their participation, due to a tight schedule. In order to get access to schools that were not located in cities, and especially smaller schools and municipalities, I contacted one of six providers of educational programmes in school leadership, approved by the Directorate for Education and Training. This particular provider was selected as it recruits school leaders working in small and densely populated municipalities in the Western part of Norway. In the beginning of February 2011 I was able to present the study at a seminar for 30 newly recruited principals, and two of the principals volunteered to participate. In the fall of 2011, however, one of them withdrew their participation. I therefore chose to recruit a new rurally located school. This particular school was recruited through phone contact with applicable schools located in smaller municipalities on the Western coast of Norway. With this school the total number of schools came up to six. This is a fairly small number of organizations, which limits the possibility to make generalizations based on the empirical material gained through the interviews (Hatch,

2002; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Silverman, 2011). Empirical generalization is not an aim in this study, and as the interviews were conducted simultaneously with the recruitment of new participants I found that the descriptions of organizational working processes and routines that were of interest for the analysis were surprisingly similar between the schools. Following the recommendations from Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) I therefor found that the six schools provided an empirical basis satisfactory to conduct the analysis.

In total the schools, briefly presented in the table below, represent combined and lower secondary schools in the Western part of Norway. They are located in three different municipalities, one larger city and two more rurally located. In consideration of anonymity (Hatch, 2002), all schools and participants are given pseudonyms.

*Table 2: Overview of schools*

	Everglade	Weston	Hillside	Downtown	Northwood	Chester
Location	Rural	City	City	City	City	Rural
School type	Combined	Lower secondary	Combined	Lower secondary	Combined	Lower secondary
Size	Small	Middle	Large	Middle	Large	Middle
Participants	Principal Teacher	Principal Teacher	Principal Teacher	Principal Teacher	Principal	Principal Teachers (2)

In five of the schools both the principal and one of the teachers participated in the study. At *Northwood* none of the teachers wanted to participate in the study. I therefore chose to include two teachers at *Chester*. By doing so, the number of principals and teachers was equalized, and the number of teachers representing city schools and rurally located schools came out more balanced. An overview of the participants is presented in the table below:

Table 3: Overview of participants

	Everglade	Weston	Hillside	Downtown	Northwood	Chester
Principal	<i>Anne</i>	<i>Elisabeth</i>	<i>Sarah</i>	<i>Liv</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Peter</i>
Experience	>5 years	<15 years	5-15 years	5-15 years	> 5 years	<15 years
Teacher	<i>Alice</i>	<i>Evelyn</i>	<i>Sylvia</i>	<i>Leon</i>	<i>Patrick</i>	<i>Claire</i>
Experience	<15 years	5-15 years	5-15 years	>5 years	<15 years	5-15 years
Teaching Subjects	English Special ed.	Math	Math Social science	Math, Religion Science	Norwegian Special ed.	Science Technology Social science

#### 4.1.2.1 Interviews

The empirical data from the school context is based on semi-structured qualitative interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The intent of the interviews was to provide data that would enlighten how the principals and teachers understood and articulated the relation between school leadership and learning outcomes in stories of working processes related to organisational improvement, learning, teaching and competence development. The interviews evolved around 5 themes: teaching, quality insurance, student assessment, professional development and leadership. As such the interviews were conducted with a clear intent and structured in order to produce knowledge about a topic or problem determined by me as a researcher (Brinkmann, 2013; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2005, 2009; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Fog, 1998; Hatch, 2002; Silverman, 2011; Lillejord and Søreide, 2003).

Due to practical considerations as well as the intent of the study; gaining knowledge about how teachers and school leaders interpret their professional work, knowledge and organisational routines, I chose to conduct the interviews at the workplace of the participants.

A week before each interview, written information about the project, an informed consent-form and some examples of questions that I wanted to discuss (see appendix) were sent to the participants by e-mail. The consent-form was signed by the participants and handed to me prior to each individual interview. I had also prepared a list of questions that I introduced in

the conversations (see appendix). The data material contains narratives about how the principals and teachers organize their work, what tools they use, and how they understand their work in relation to pupils' learning outcomes. The conversations evolved around organizational routines regarding teaching, quality insurance, pupils' assessment, professional development and leadership as these themes are explained as key elements in school leaders work in relation to student learning and achievements (Robinson et al., 2008; Møller et al., 2005). The intent in the interviews was to illuminate school leaders and teachers narratives about organizational routines. I therefore focused on phrasing questions and responses so that different perspectives on organizational practice could be expressed.

Each interview lasted between 45 to 90 minutes and was recorded digitally. The interviews were then exported to Express Scribe and transcribed by me. All participants were given the opportunity to read the transcripts, but none of them wanted to do so. The analysis is based on transcripts which amounted to 91 pages (1,5 spacing, 12-point Times New Roman) from interviews with principals, and 86 pages from interviews with teachers, 177 pages in total.

#### **4.2 Narrative analysis and analytical tools**

The intent of the following subchapter is twofold. First, I provide a more thorough and transparent description of how the narrative analysis has been conducted in the three studies. Second, the description of the analysis will show how research questions, and analytical questions, as presented in table 1 in the introduction are aligned throughout the three studies.

Through the analysis of the policy documents and the interviews three "*representational narratives*" (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009) have been constructed. Representational narratives are stories constructed by researchers as an example of what Somers and Gibson explain as "*conceptual narrativity*" (Somers and Gibson, 1994, p. 62). That is, explanations constructed by social researchers. In this project, the three narratives about the relationship between

school leadership and learning outcomes have all been constructed by me as a researcher, based on the empirical data (included the policy documents). Hence, the narratives posed in this thesis are not accounts of “the truth” about the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes. Rather they serve as third level interpretations (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) or representational narratives that illustrate how the relation between leadership and learning outcomes is constructed in various contexts. The narratives have been constructed by the use of both conceptual and analytical tools. In Article 2 and 3 I describe specifics of “the Norwegian approach” to distributed leadership, in order to analyze how different aspects of school leadership are distributed in the school principals’ and teachers’ narratives. In the following I will elaborate on the analytical tools and dimensions that have been used throughout the analysis and how the analysis has been conducted.

#### ***4.2.1 Analytical dimensions***

A critique of interpretive methods in general is that they are “messy”, in the sense that there is a lack of explicit methodological statements such as stepwise prescriptions on how the research has been conducted in research writings. A lot of interpretive methods, such as ethnographic and participant-observer methods have rather been learned and developed through some kind of apprenticeship, trial and error or “learning by doing” (Yanow, 2006). Such processes have also been a part of this project, and different approaches to the data material have been tried out before I made the decision of doing a narrative analysis. It therefore should be noted that the following presentation of the analytical steps is presented as a more linear and stringent process than the actual process of interpretation.

There are several writings about narratives that offer guidelines for how to conceptualize and analyze the internal organization of stories (Clandinin and Connolly, 2000; Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998; Czarniawska 1997, 1998; Berger,

1997; Reismann, 1993; Roe, 1994). In this analysis the narratives in the three studies have all been identified through a stepwise analytical approach inspired by Lieblich et al's (1998) four analytical dimensions: categorical, holistic, content and form. These four dimensions are to be seen as two continuums: categorical-holistic and content-form, that intertwine and inform each other in the reading of the material. How I interpret the content of these four dimensions has been addressed in the methodology section in each of the three articles (see Article 1-3 for elaboration). To make the analysis more transparent I will therefor rather draw attention to how I combined the dimensions in the different readings throughout the analysis.

#### ***4.2.2 The readings***

In each of the three studies, the analysis has been conducted as a stepwise process referred to as “readings” of the material. I conducted three readings in each of the studies, and each of these three readings was divided into analytical steps guided by analytical questions. In the following the different readings and their analytical steps will be presented.

##### ***4.2.2.1 The first reading: What are learning outcomes?***

The first reading set out to identify how the term “learning outcomes” was used in the different sets of data, and further how the term was narratively related to other terms such as learning, results and quality. This reading was divided into three analytical steps in each of the studies and intertwined the dimensions of categorical and holistic reading as presented in the following table:

Table 4: Analytical steps in the first reading

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
<b>1. Step</b>	<b>Categorical</b> Word search using keywords followed by categorization	<b>Categorical</b> Word search using keywords followed by categorization	<b>Categorical</b> Word search using keywords followed by categorization
<b>2. Step</b>	<b>Categorical</b> Analytical question: What factors are described as having an impact on learning outcomes? Thematically organization	<b>Holistic</b> Analytical question: How are the terms narratively related?	<b>Holistic</b> Analytical question: How are the terms narratively related?
<b>3. Step</b>	<b>Holistic</b> Analytical question: How are the terms narratively related	<b>Word count</b> demonstrating the frequency of each search term	<b>Word count</b> demonstrating the frequency of each search term

As demonstrated in table 4, the first analytical step in the first reading was a categorical reading (Lieblich et al., 1998) of the material, using learning outcomes (læringsutbytte), and related terms such as learning (læring), results (resultat) and quality (kvalitet) as key-words. Using the search function in Word, all phrases where either of the key-words was present were underlined and then excerpted into separate tables, one for each key-word. The following table, outlines the use of keywords, and exemplifies excerpts derived from the data in the different studies.

Table 5: examples from the categorical reading in study 1-3

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Keywords	Learning outcomes (læringsutbytte) Learning results (læringsresultater) Results of learning	Learning outcomes (læringsutbytte) Learning results (læringsresultater) Quality (kvalitet)	Learning outcomes (læringsutbytte) Results (resultater) Learning (læring)
Examples	The knowledge we have about student learning outcomes is mainly based on international test, national test, screening tests and final exams in lower secondary and secondary schools (KD 2009, 16)	So I look at learning outcomes. It is what the students are left with (Liv) And it's clearly so that good results on the final exams can tell us something about how the education has been (John).	... it can be a very good teaching program, but it doesn't necessarily lead to a good learning outcome (Patrick) It's because of the national tests in reading where the results were very bad (Alice)

In Study 1 the second analytical step was conducted as a categorical reading where the excerpts were thematically organized and categorized in three broad categories: 1) descriptions of what learning outcomes are, 2) descriptions of factors that have impact on learning outcomes, and 3) descriptions of actors that are responsible for the quality of the learning outcomes. The aim was to answer the question; “What factors are described as having an impact on learning outcomes?” and set out to provide a more nuanced investigation of the different aspects and impact factors found in each category. This was done by dividing the three broad categories into more narrow sub-categories and descriptions.

In Study 2 and 3 the second analytical step of the first reading had a more holistic approach where focus was on how the terms were narratively related, focusing on themes and narrative features within the different categories.

In study 1 the third and last analytical step in the first reading was more holistic and focused on how the terms were narratively related (in the same manner as in the second analytical step in Study 2 and 3).

In study 2 and 3, the third and last analytical step consisted of a counting of the search terms demonstrating the frequency of each term in the principals’ and teachers’ narratives, both individually and combined. This is exemplified by table 6 below.

*Table 6: Word count in Study 3*

	Learning outcomes	Results	learning	Assessment for learning
Interviewer	15	15 (22)	1	5
Alice	1	14	7	5
Evelyn	2	21	13	2
Sylvi	8	7	2	0
Leon	6	17	3	0
Claire	3	20	7	5
Patrick	3	13	2	3

As illustrated in table 6, the word count demonstrated what terms the participants preferred and how the usage of some of the terms were related to both the questions I raised in the interviews and the participants stories about working processes and developmental projects within their schools. For example, the word count in Study 3 illustrates how the teachers use the term “results” much more frequently than the term “learning outcomes”, and further how the term “learning” is mostly used related to the “Assessment for learning” project that is part of the instructional developmental work in all the participating schools.

*4.2.2.2 The second reading: What do school leaders do?*

The second reading set out to illuminate how the roles of principals and school leaders were described. This reading was divided into two analytical steps and also combined categorical and holistic approaches (Lieblich et al., 1998). As the analysis set out to identify key components in principals’ work, and how principals were positioned within the different processes in the schools, the analytical approach also shifted between a focus on content and form (Lieblich at al 1998; Czarniawska, 1998).

*Table 7: Analytical steps in the second reading*

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
<b>1. Step</b>	<b>Holistic</b> Analytical questions: How is the work of school leaders described? What are the challenges facing school leaders in contemporary society?	<b>Categorical</b> identifying key tasks and responsibilities attached to the role of principal	<b>Categorical</b> identifying key tasks and responsibilities attached to the role of principal
<b>2. Step</b>	<b>Holistic</b> Identifying leadership working processes and how the position of school leaders was narrated and positioned within these process descriptions.	<b>Holistic</b> Identifying leadership working processes and how the position of school leaders was narrated and positioned within these process descriptions.	<b>Holistic</b> Identifying leadership working processes and how the position of school leaders was narrated and positioned within these process descriptions.

In Study 1 the first analytical step of the second reading had a holistic approach guided by two analytical questions: “How is the work of school leaders described?” and “What are the challenges facing school leaders in contemporary society?”

In Study 2 and 3 the first analytical step of this reading had a more categorical approach and identified key tasks and responsibilities that were attached to the role of principals and school leaders, as illustrated in table 8:

*Table 8: Key tasks in school leaders’ work (Study 2 & 3)*

Key task for school leaders	
Study 2	Study 3
Assess quality	Provide information about results to teachers and others
Assess competence	Follow up on evaluations
Make plans	Analyze results
Formulate goals	Talk to teachers
Analyze results	Distribute recourses
Evaluate results with teachers	Meetings with school owner
Initiate developmental projects	Meetings with teachers at common assemblies
Facilitate expertise development for teachers	Follow up on teachers who struggle
Strategic recourse management	“keeping the potato warm”
External communication	Gain knowledge about teachers’ expertise
Write scripts for pedagogical work	Facilitate expertise development for teachers
Follow up on means	Inspire and initiate
Update and develop subject knowledge	Listen to the teachers
	Develop own expertise
	Visit classrooms
	Quality assurance
	Provide external expertise when needed

In all three studies the different task-areas, challenges and responsibilities that were identified were summarized in analytical memos.

In the second analytical step, the aim was to identify working processes with relevance for school leadership and how school leaders were positioned within these processes. This analytical step had a holistic approach in all three studies, identifying dominating conceptions and descriptions of school leaders’ work and responsibilities.

4.2.2.3 The third reading: Narrative plots relating school leaders' working processes to students' learning outcomes.

In the third and final reading, the aim was to investigate how school leaders positioned themselves (Study 2), or where positioned by others (Study 1 and 3) in relation to pupils' learning outcomes. In order to identify the plot in the different stories, the reading had a holistic – form approach and focused on sequential connections in the stories. The following section will elaborate more on how the narrative plots were identified.

As highlighted in chapter 3, the term plot refers to the basic means by which events are brought into a meaningful whole within a narrative (Polkinghorne, 1985; Berger, 1997; Søreide, 2007). These connections can either be temporal or causal and creates narrative structure, which is the sequencing of events within the story being told. Temporal connections reflects on the timeline of events (Berger, 1997), whereas causal connections infer some kind of causality between events or themes where one event or theme effects or leads to another (Czarniawska, 1997).

In this third reading I looked for linguistic features where either temporal or causal connections where implied by phrases such as “because”, “due to”, “first”, “then”, “following”, etc. as illustrated in table 9 below:

Table 9: Identification of plots

Connection of events	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Causal	In order to maintain Norway's competitive and innovative ability and welfare, an enhanced level of knowledge and skills amongst students is necessary (KD 2008, 6) Research has shown that school leaders can make a difference in school and student performance if they are granted autonomy to make important decisions. (Pont, et. al 2008).	Now I try not to lead so much of the pedagogical work that goes on in our common assemblies because I want this to be more distributed within the leader team (Elisabeth).	I can't say for certain that it is what causes it, that we focus on it. There can be variations over time too. So it's not easy to say, but I think that it one of the causes why we have good results (Evelyn). If you initiate, and if you ask, and if you are willing and a little bit enthusiastic, then you get it (Leon)
Temporal	In increasingly globalized and knowledge-based economies, schools must lay the foundations for lifelong learning while at the same time dealing with new challenges such as changing demographic patterns ... (Pont et al 2008, 20)	I have given them time to discuss it in our common assembly, and to try out ideas back and forth. And then they were supposed to try it out in the classrooms, followed by a reflective phase where we have looked at how it worked out (Anne).	We had a common assembly where the results were presented and then we went into groups and discussed; What should we do? What should focus on? And then this was brought back to the "plangroup" and they have worked out a plan based on the results from the .... Test (Clair)

Further, narrative plots were identified by the means of analytical memos summarizing the key elements in what was described as school leaders' work. Eventually, the identification of plots within each study was guided by analytical questions as presented in table 10:

Table 10: Analytical questions in the identification of narrative plots

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
<b>Analytical questions</b>	What are the challenges facing school leaders in contemporary society? How is leadership connected to student learning outcomes? What are the elements connecting school leadership to student learning outcomes?	How are principals' working processes related to student learning outcomes? What are the elements connecting school leadership to student learning outcomes?	How are principals' working processes related to student learning outcomes? How is leadership connected to student learning outcomes in the scripts of organizational routines? What are the elements connecting school leadership to student learning outcomes?

From the rather extensive description of the analysis presented above it becomes quite evident that my role as an interpreter has been pivotal throughout this study. In the following I will therefore draw attention to reflexivity.

### **4.3 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is crucial in all research as it answers to questions about whether the researcher has demonstrated that the research at hand is trustworthy and whether the research problem has theoretical and/or practical significance (Silverman, 2011). As such, attention to reflexivity means reflections upon how social phenomena and our role as researchers are constructed in the production of knowledge embedded in a research project (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). In the following two issues will be further elaborated: my role as a researcher and validity.

#### ***4.3.1 My role as a researcher***

The representational narratives and interpretations presented throughout the three articles as well as in this extended abstract have all been constructed by me as a researcher, on the basis of the empirical data. However, interpretive methodologies presume that we live in a social world characterized by multiple interpretations where it is not possible for the analyst to stand outside the issue being studied. Thus all interpretations are infused by policy and also the professional and personal beliefs, values, and meanings of the researcher. The knowledge acquired through interpretation is therefore subjective as it reflects the education, experience and training of the researcher, as well as her familial and communal background (Yanow, 2000).

With regards to the issue being addressed in this thesis, I am a Norwegian and have been living in Norway all my life, taking part in the educational system as a student as well as a

professional for more than 30 years. I have worked as a teacher in primary education for seven years. In addition I have worked as a leader of a day care facility for schoolchildren (SFO) for two years, as Head of kindergarten for one year, and as a pedagogical and administrative advisor for the leader team in a Kindergarten for one year. These experiences have provided me with a “local knowledge” (Yanow 2000, p. 27) of the Norwegian teacher and educational leader professions. My knowledge gained as a teacher and a leader has strengthened the analysis and interpretation of the material, as I am familiar with the field of primary and secondary education and also the terms and language that are used within the profession. However, my local knowledge has also sometimes been a challenge, and in the following three concerns in particular will be addressed.

First, from a constructivist perspective the researcher is always considered an active agent in the meaning-construction process. However, active agency can take on various forms and should be taken into consideration in order to obtain a rich and valid empirical material (Yanow, 2000; Wagenaar, 2011; Hatch, 2002). In the interview setting I experienced that some of the participants referred to my previous experience as a teacher in phrases such as “You know how it is” or “You know the field”. In these cases I chose to make my interests as a researcher more explicit and told them not to see me as a teacher, but rather as a curious researcher wanting to know more about how they worked. I found this necessary in order to obtain as much explicit information as possible from the informants’ point of view, and not to rely on my prior knowledge about “how things are done” in teachers’ and school leaders’ daily routines. Second, local knowledge entails the danger of neglecting important aspects of the data as I might be too familiar with the scripts of routines or processes and therefore does not find them significant in the analysis (Hatch, 2002). Finally, there was a danger of me “going native” in the sense that it would be easy for me to accept and use second- order interpretations instead of challenging these interpretations through further analysis (Kvale and

Brinkmann, 2009). Throughout the analysis, I attempted to balance these concerns by the construction of representational narratives rather than naturalistic, personal accounts of the participants' life-stories (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009), and by using analytical tools and having theoretically informed discussions both with fellow researchers and in the presentation of the articles and thesis. Throughout these presentations and discussions, I have attempted to make the description of the analysis transparent in order to visualize my interpretations and my position as researcher.

#### ***4.3.2 Validity***

There are several forms of validity that can be assessed to discuss the validity of the knowledge developed through this project. Given the nature of the research design, validity does not reflect on whether the findings are “true” or not in an ontological sense, but rather, whether the findings provide “trustworthy” knowledge (Silvermann, 2011). Validity is addressed in the choices of methodological aspects and theoretical perspectives, in the way findings are presented, in the ethical reflections and in the researchers' ability to make the study consistent and transparent (Olsen, 2003). Consequently, validity is reflected throughout the research process as a quality of researcher craftsmanship (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) and not only addressed in this subchapter.

High standards and thorough analysis must be pursued throughout the research process for the findings to be trustworthy (Hatch, 2002; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Silverman, 2011, Fossåskaret, Fuglestad & Aase, 1997). This thesis does not set out to show possible implications of different interpretations of learning outcomes, school leadership, or the relationship between the two, for policy formulation or action. Nor do I aim to negotiate, mediate, or intervene to bridge the differences in the different narratives investigated. I aim to contribute to empirical knowledge on how these differences reflect different ways of seeing

the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes. Being explicit and transparent in terms of selection and analytical approach have therefore been of high importance throughout the research process, and is attempted to be carefully addressed throughout this chapter.

One way of assessing the epistemic validity of narrative analysis is to assess how reasonable the theories, concepts or categories the research embodies are, and whether analytical assertions are in accordance (Bevir, 2006). This consideration replies both to the theoretical and analytical tools in the analysis, and how narrative concepts and terms are operationalized. Such aspects have been emphasized throughout my work, and are exemplified and made transparent in the descriptions of analytical concepts in the theoretical presentation and through a transparent description of the analytical process in previous sections of this chapter.

Communicative validity is another way of assessing the validity of narrative analysis. That is, validating the interpretation or analysis through confronting the sources and obtaining their agreement and consent. Communicative validity is ascribed to several interest groups or communities, such as informants, professionals, fellow researchers and society in general (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Throughout the research process, interpretations and findings have been discussed with both participants and fellow researchers. For example, I have asked follow up questions to informants, and discussed my more preliminary interpretations with them in the interview setting to ensure that my interpretations are relevant. Further, I have presented and discussed the analysis and results with groups of teachers. I have also presented papers and discussed research problems, design, analysis and findings with colleagues and fellow researchers throughout the research process. I have discussed my research with researchers both within and outside the field of education and in both international and national contexts. These presentations and discussions have been important in order to enhance validity, and to identify challenges and concerns that are very specific to the

Norwegian context. The latter has been somewhat challenging, writing for an international audience.

#### **4.4 Ethical considerations**

Within all research that involves human beings there are three basic concerns that should be attended to for a research project to be ethically prudent, namely informed consent, confidentiality and the impact on participants (Hatch, 2002; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Silverman, 2011, Fossåskaret, Fuglestad & Aase, 1997). The relationship between interviewer and informant should also be emphasized in qualitative interview research. In the following I will present and discuss the ethical considerations that have been of concern in this project.

This project is approved by the NSD (Data Protection Official for Research) before I contacted the participants. Written information about the projects' aim and objectives was sent to participants before the data collection started, as part of preparations for the interviews. Hatch (2002) points to the school setting as at risk when it comes to voluntary participation, as pupils, teachers and also school leaders can be exposed to pressure (with or without intention) and not be given the full right to refuse participation. I therefore took this concern into special consideration and made sure that participation in the study was voluntary for both school leaders and teachers. All participants were given written information about the project by e-mail before signing a consent-form. Additional information about the timeline of the project and possible consequences of their participation was given orally, before conducting the interviews. This included information about the opportunity to withdraw from the project at any time during the research process.

Ethical considerations also involve taking necessary precautions in order to maintain participants trust throughout the research process. In this project I have interviewed principals and teachers that work in the same school. This could possibly challenge the trust in the

relation between me and the participants, as they might worry about “being talked about”. I took this matter into special consideration and tried to build trust in the relationship between myself and the participants in several ways. First, I chose to interview the school leader in each school before talking to the teachers. This way I tried to avoid situations where the teachers would think of the interviews as supervision, or a possible topic in the conversation with their principals. Further, I focused on the collective working processes within the schools rather than the individual practice of teachers and leaders and formulated questions that used phrases such as “the leaders” (ledelsen), you (plural form, “dere” in Norwegian), “the teachers” (lærerne), when asking about how they worked. I also avoided questions that could be regarded as personal or private. Still, during the interviews I experienced that all the participants brought up personal issues, and in one instance one of the participants wanted a segment of about two minutes of our conversation withdrawn from the interview. In the segment we discussed something that the participant experienced as too personal to be included in the interview. When the same “situation” also was brought up by another participant, I decided to delete the segments where the matter of concern was discussed from the transcripts in both conversations.

All participating schools and individuals have been anonymized in the presentations of the empirical data in articles, paper presentations and in this extended abstract. The informants and schools are given pseudonyms and the municipalities involved have only been described by general characteristics and have not been mentioned by name.

Finally, ethical considerations should also concern questions of if and how the researcher’s interpretations and the knowledge produced might potentially change the way participants and the larger society interpret themselves. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) refer to these questions as ethics at a macro level. Ethics at a macro level raises questions about whether the outcome of the research have been beneficial, and to whom, and in general if it has given more

knowledge to the object that should be of interest to practice, policy and research. These are issues that are brought up in chapter seven where I point to possible implications for research, as well as leadership practice, that can be drawn from this project.

## **5. Key findings in the three Studies**

This thesis has shown that the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes is narrated by policy documents, school leaders and teachers as an indirect route, where school leadership is connected to student learning outcomes through instruction, teaching and learning. In all three studies, school leadership and student learning outcomes are narratively connected through elements such as working environment, quality assessment, teaching and learning. Although the elements in the three narratives are the same, the three narratives connects school leadership to student outcomes in different ways, as the three plots made in the narratives are connected due to explanations attached to differing rationales, and further the conceptualization of both leadership and learning outcomes differs. In the following I will elaborate further on these differences.

### **5.1 Differences in the narrative plots**

The three narratives relate school leadership to student learning outcomes by different rational accounts: the first study builds on research-based accounts of school leaders' effect and influence, while the other two build on accounts of structural and cultural working conditions within schools. In the policy documents, the narrative is constructed by a plot where the elements are connected by causal explanations. In this plot school leadership is connected to student learning outcomes in a causal chain, where influence and effect follows a hierarchical structure. As a consequence the most significant actor in this narrative is the individual school leader, whose actions, priorities and competence is seen to influence all the elements following further down in the hierarchy.

In the school principals' and teachers' narratives, on the other hand, leadership is connected to student outcomes by temporal explanations. In these plots leadership is not narratively

connected to learning outcomes by arguments of causal effects, but rather as temporal sequences of events in the schools' internal working processes. In these processes the school principals narrate the teachers as the ones making instructional decisions. This consequently makes teachers and not school leaders the most significant when it comes to student learning, as teachers' decisions and teaching practices may not be ascribed to school leader influence, but rather be informed by school and teacher culture, teacher identity and competence.

The teachers' narrative makes a significant distinction between internal and external elements in the working processes. In this narrative, the internal working processes within each school are emphasized as significant for student learning. However, one external element – the context of each individual student – is narrated as more significant for student learning than any of the other elements. Thus, student learning is mainly explained as dependent on elements that are beyond both teachers' and school leaders' control. Consequently, students themselves are the most significant when it comes to student learning outcomes within this narrative.

## **5.2 Different conceptions of school leadership**

The three narratives conceptualize school leadership in differing ways. In the narrative that runs across the policy documents, leadership is ascribed to the work, priorities and decisions made by those attaining formal leadership positions in schools, such as principals and department headteachers. In this narrative leadership is explained in accordance with a transformational tradition (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005), where school leaders are put front and center of attention and where power and authority follows the formal position these leaders have within their organizations. Accordingly, the narrative present leadership within what we might call a factory design (Darling Hammond, 1997), where the acts of school

leaders are seen as having an explanatory effect on both organizational success and student achievements.

As a contrast, the school principals' and teachers' narratives, narrate leadership as conjoint action, expressed as dynamic relationships between formal leaders and teachers, and amongst teachers. Thus in these two narratives leadership is conceptualized in a more distributed way, as a multifaceted and relational process of shared responsibility, authority, power and trust. In both the school principal narrative and the teacher narrative the significance of school leadership is hard to ascribe to the work of formal leaders as both teachers and school leaders describe instructional leadership first and foremost attached to the work of teachers. In the teacher narrative leadership is narrated as a collective activity in which they *all* take part. Here the sequencing of the working processes regarding instructional decisions, changes in teaching practice, student assessments or teachers' professional development starts out with teachers' initiatives. These initiatives are then brought to the leader team. Thus, in this narrative, the work and decisions of formal school leaders are narrated as responsive to teachers' initiatives and practice rather than initiating or leading teachers' practice.

### **5.3 The concept of learning outcomes**

The analyses show that the term learning outcomes is not defined in a concrete manner in any of the three narratives. In the narrative that runs through the policy documents, learning outcomes is narrated as generic and school subject related knowledge that can be measured and documented through tests and grades. Accordingly, learning outcomes provides a measure for school efficiency and success. In both the school principal and teacher narratives on the other hand, a vague approach to learning outcomes as a term is evident. In these narratives learning outcomes are conceptualized in a constructivist sense and narrated as what one ends up with after some sort of educational engagement. In the school principal narrative

learning outcomes is conceptualized broadly, including both measurable and non-measurable elements. In this narrative learning outcomes is described as “what the students are left with”, including both social competencies and knowledge and skills related to school subjects. This constructivist conceptualization of learning outcomes is also emphasized in the teacher narrative. However, in this narrative, the predictable and measurable features of learning outcomes are even more downplayed, and emphasis is put on the contextual elements surrounding each individual student as significant for what students achieve and what constitutes their outcomes.

## 6. Discussion

As described in chapter five, this study has shown that the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes is narrated as an indirect route where teachers collaborative working environment, teaching and classroom practice are essential elements in all three narratives. As the narrative plots include the same elements that previous research have identified as effective for enhancement of student achievements (Day et al., 2008; Day et al., 2009; Leithwood, et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2008; Robinson, 2010; Timperley, 2011) in the explanation of the relationship between school leadership and student outcomes, this study could to some extent be understood as confirmatory to the narratives created by the dominating body of research investigating school leadership significance for student learning outcomes (Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Bird, et al., 2013, Gu, et al., 2008; Sun and Leithwood, 2012; Sammons, et al., 2011; Mulford and Silins, 2011; Supovitz, et al., 2010; Robinson, et al., 2008; Day, et al., 2008; Leithwood and Day, 2008; Leithwood, et al., 2008). However, rather than demonstrating that school leadership *is* connected to student learning outcomes such as with the meta-analysis conducted by Mulford and Silins (2011) and Robinson et al. (2008), the representational narratives constructed in this project poses as explanations of *how* school leadership is connected to student outcomes. This opens the possibility of differing and somewhat contesting explanations and understandings of both leadership and learning outcomes and the relation between them (Bevir, 2006; Yanow, 2000).

In this thesis such varieties are expressed by the differing rationales behind the narrative plots connecting the elements in the three public narratives. Also, both school leadership and learning outcomes are conceptualized differently in the narratives. The following discussion will evolve around these variances, as they are seen as essential in order to understand how

the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes is made sense of in the governing of and the practice within schools.

### **6.1 The construction of the narrative plots**

The dominating policy narrative identified in Study 1, narrates the relationship between school leadership and student learning outcomes as a hierarchical, one-way chain of influence. In this plot the connections between the elements are explained in a causal manner, where school leaders are narrated as influential or having an effect on elements that occur lower in the hierarchy. Infused with statements such as: “there is a positive correlation between teachers’ scientific and didactical competence and pupils’ learning outcomes” (KD, 2009, p. 9), or “the impact of school leaders on student learning is generally mediated by other people, events and organizational factors such as teachers classroom practices and school climate” (Pont, et al. 2008, p. 33), the policy narrative illuminated in Study 1 poses as an illustration of what Ozga (2000), phrases as “evidence-based policy making” (Ozga, 2000, p. 2). Connections between the elements in the plot are made by reference to research confirming either correlation or effect between the elements such as the works of Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins (2006), Leithwood and Riehl (3003), Mulford, Silins & Leithwood (2004), or Hallinger and Heck (1998), or by reference to various reports formulated by the OECD. In this way, the narrative poses as supportive to a policy direction where school success and student achievements can be a measure for school leadership.

In the school principal- narrative and the teacher- narrative (Study 2 and 3), on the other hand, the analyses show that the elements in the plots are connected by temporal explanations. Here, leadership is not related to student outcomes as effect or influence, but rather narrated as activities incorporated in collaborative working processes, such as when Sarah explains the work of the “philologists department” in her school (Article 2, p. 14), or when Sylvia explains

how they evaluate the results on national tests (Article 3, p. 17). Thus the connections between the elements in the school principal- narrative and the teacher- narrative do not pose as causal connections. More so, they are narrated as temporal sequences of events in the internal working processes inside the schools, and are explained by structural conditions and the professional culture within the schools (Kelchtermans and Piot, 2012).

In this way the three narratives relate school leadership to student learning outcomes by different rational accounts: one building on research-based accounts of school leaders' effect and influence, and the other two building on accounts of structural and cultural working conditions within schools. However, these differences do not only relate to the construction of the narrative plots, but also to how the concept of school leadership and the concept of learning outcomes are interpreted and explained in the narratives.

## **6.2 Differing perspectives on school leadership**

Although the three narratives presented in this thesis do not pose as representations of how leadership is executed within Norwegian lower secondary schools, they are all accounts that shed light on how leadership practice is conceptualized, justified and legitimized (Czarniawska, 2004). As such, the three narratives presented in this thesis, pose differing perspectives on school leadership, which conceptualize and legitimize leadership in different ways. Consequently, school leaders working in Norwegian lower secondary schools are faced with diverging justification and expectations towards leadership practice.

In the policy documents, leadership is described as something imparted to followers by leaders from above (Spillane, 2006; Gronn, 2003; Pearce and Conger, 2003; Keltermans and Piot, 2012). Accordingly, activities in schools are narrated with a causal link to the leader, and the positions of teachers and students are narrated as recipient followers rather than active, decision-making agents. By the narration of a hierarchical linearity, school leadership is

presented as a factory design (Bascia and Rottman, 2011; Darling- Hammond, 1997) where decisions about development of procedures and practices are left to managers located at the school leader level and above. In this design, school leadership can be traced back to the individual school leader, and characterized by personal traits (Leithwood, et al., 2008) or capabilities (Robinson, et al., 2008; Robinson 2010; Timperley, 2011) of school leaders. In research literature, this is referred to as a transformational perspective on leadership, where writers such as Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) explain the nature of transformational leadership as *a leaders* ability to develop visions for the organization, develop commitment and trust amongst workers and ability to facilitate organizational learning. Further, they claim that transformational leadership can be traced in leadership behaviors such as setting direction, helping people, and redesigning the organization.

This can be said to be a concentrated or rational perspective on leadership where the acts of school leaders are seen as having an explanatory effect on both organizational success and student achievements (Gu, et al., 2008; Sun and Leithwood, 2012; Bird, et al., 2013; Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Day et al. 2008). Accordingly the execution and success of leadership is regarded as measurable and a personal responsibility that the individual school leader can be held accountable for (Gunter, 2012; Pont et al., 2008). In this way, this perspective on school leadership legitimizes governmental supervision and governing of schools and school leaders through an accountability system such as the Norwegian national quality evaluation system.

Then, in both the school principal- narrative, and the teacher- narrative, leadership is ascribed to working processes within the schools. Here leadership is conceptualized as conjoint action (Gronn, 2003), expressed as dynamic relationships between formal school leaders and teachers, and amongst teachers. Leadership is generally narrated as a team effort in both the school principal- and the teacher- narratives, and not ascribed to the work and practice of individual leaders. Rather, leadership is described as a dynamic dialogue between formal

school leaders and informal leaders which includes a division of labour as well as distribution of power, trust and authority (Gronn, 2003; Spillane, 2006; Keltchermans and Piot, 2012; Helstad and Møller 2013; Vennebo and Ottesen, 2012). In this way, both school leaders and teachers narrate school leadership in a way that is different from the view of leadership as something imparted to followers by leaders from above (Spillane, 2006; Gronn, 2003; Pearce and Conger, 2003; Keltermans and Piot, 2012).

In both the teacher-narrative and the school principal- narrative distribution of leadership includes both a distribution of power as well as a distribution of trust. This distribution can be explained by structural conditions such as school size, location, and number of staff.

However, in both narratives the distribution of trust, power and authority are explained due to cultural working conditions. That is, in both narratives school leadership is justified due to ideas and interpretations about how thing ought to be done within Norwegian primary and secondary schools (Kelchtermans and Piot, 2012, Spillane et al, 2011). According to Møller (2009) Norway has a long tradition of framing school leadership as *primus inter pares*, or first among equals (Møller, 2009, p 171). Hence, school leaders have first and foremost been regarded as first among equals among members of the teaching staff, resulting in a “flat hierarchy” in schools. In addition it has resulted in a uniform and academic teacher education (Tolo, 2011). In this flat hierarchy the distribution of leadership in schools also involves members of the teacher staff, who are expected to take on significant responsibility and make decisions concerning instruction and classroom practice (Hopfenbeck, Tolo, Florez, & El Masri, 2013; Lillejord et al, 2014). So, when the teachers and school leaders narrate instructional decisions and leadership as related to teachers practice this may partially be explained by a cultural condition of Norwegian school leadership, where principals are less involved in instructional tasks than in other educational systems within the OECD (Carlsten, Caspersen, Vibe, & Aamodt, 2014).

Whether leadership is explained by structural or cultural conditions, the perspective on school leadership in the school principal-narrative and the teacher-narrative, legitimize a leadership practice where teachers can benefit from a high degree of autonomy and trust when it comes to instruction and teaching practice. As such, both these narratives legitimize a leadership practice where teacher autonomy is upheld (Helstad & Møller, 2013; Hopfenbeck et al, 2013; Lillejord et al 2014; Tolo, 2011; Mausethagen, 2013c). This interpretation of leadership blurs a distinction between distribution of leadership and the work of professional learning communities that are founded on dialogue and mutual respect (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006; Stoll, 2011). Further, this conceptualization of leadership, troubles the causal links to formal leaders, as autonomous groups of staff, and teachers and students self-motivation, constitute norms for professional practice that make the influence of formal leaders not needed, or avoidable (Gronn, 2003).

This tension is illustrated in the teacher-narrative (Study 3) where organizational routines are narrated as a sequential ordering of events. Here point of departure is taken in evaluations and decisions made by the teachers, and the position of formal leaders is narrated as being at the final stage of a longer process. Consequently, in the teacher-narrative, the work of formal leaders is first and foremost related to administrative tasks, responsive to teachers' instructional decisions and practice. This leadership practice can be identified as coordinated distribution (Spillane, 2006, p. 60), where leadership involves activities that are performed in a particular sequence. However, the sequential ordering of events challenges the conception of instructional leadership as something distinct from the professional practice of teachers.

The conceptions of leadership posed in the three narratives illuminated in this project legitimize leadership in different ways. Consequently, school leaders working in Norwegian primary and secondary schools are faced with several tensions that need to be balanced. First, from a governing perspective school leaders are faced with profound expectations towards

having a significant impact on student learning outcomes and the working environment in schools (Study 1). These expectations are met by teacher and school leader expectations towards facilitating a working environment where teachers are given autonomy, authority, trust and power to take on significant responsibility when it comes to instruction and teaching practice. Second, when teachers are given the opportunity to engage in instructional leadership, school leaders are faced with a challenge of making formal leaders work visible, influential, needed and unavoidable in the professional practice of teachers (Grimen, 2009). Tensions created by differing perspectives, however, does not only relate to the understanding of the concept of school leadership, but also to the concept of learning outcomes. The following section will elaborate more on these differences.

### **6.3 Opposing interpretations of learning outcomes**

In the narratives, the concept of learning outcomes is described in different ways. In Study 1, learning outcomes is narrated as generic and school subject related knowledge that can be measured and documented through tests and grades. Accordingly, learning outcomes in this narrative is perceived as a measure of school efficiency and success in line with Ewell's (2005) conceptualization of the term. The conceptualization of learning outcomes in this narrative is also in line with what Prøitz (2013b) has identified as a dominating approach to learning outcomes amongst governmental policymakers as well as amongst scholars. However, according to Prøitz (2013b), dominance does not necessarily reflect on the extensiveness of this understanding of the concept, but rather the currency that this understanding of the term has gained. Although, learning outcomes are conceptualized as result- oriented, full-ended and measurable in national (Prøitz, 2013c) as well as supranational policy (Pont et al., 2008), differing understandings of learning outcomes as a concept are in play in groups of significant actors within the Norwegian educational sector.

Some of these differences are illustrated in the somewhat vague approach to learning outcomes as a term illuminated in the school principal-narrative and the teacher-narrative. In these narratives concrete descriptions of what the term refers to are replaced by phrases and expressions such as “what we are left with after a learning session” (Article 3, p. 12) or “something broader than learning results” (Article 2, p. 13). Thus school leaders and teachers conceptualize learning outcomes in a more constructivist manner, where learning outcomes are what one ends up with after some sort of engagement (Eisner, 1979). The narratives presented in Article 2 and 3 indicate that in both the school principal-narrative and the teacher-narrative emphasis is put on experiential, unpredictable and non-measurable features of learning outcomes, such as the students experienced learning outcomes, or the ability to make informed choices later in life. In this way, learning outcomes are narrated as partly dependent on the student, partly on the subject at hand, and partly on the teacher (Eisner, 1979; Prøitz, 2013b). This can indicate that the understanding of learning outcomes as predictable, measurable and static, is faced with differing and more complexifying understandings of learning outcomes amongst school leaders and teachers.

An important distinction between the teacher-narrative and the school principal-narrative can be made with regards to how the significance of students’ results as a measure for school quality is narrated. Whereas the school principal- narrative describes measurable learning results as part of learning outcomes and closely related to school leaders’ understanding of quality, quality and learning outcomes are not connected in the same manner in the teacher-narrative. Rather, in the teacher- narrative a contradiction of the connection between results and quality is apparent by arguments such as: “It can be a very good teaching program, but it does not necessarily provide a good learning outcome” (Article 3, p 12). In this narrative more weight is put on contextual elements surrounding each individual student such as culture, parents’ support, class environment, individual resources, motivation and the will to learn.

The variances in the explanations and understandings of learning outcomes may be partially explained by tensions between professionals within school, as they are faced with increased emphasis on accountability and policy initiatives to enhance external control in order to ensure “quality” in education (Ozga, 2009; Mausethagen, 2013a). By narrating learning outcomes as subject related, measurable and documentable knowledge, the narrative illuminated in Study 1 builds up an argumentative account that supports control mechanisms such as national test, as they are seen to provide knowledge about learning outcomes. Then, in the teacher- and school principal- narratives emphasis is put more to building, rather than on external quality measures and control, as these explanations are more attached to notions of teachers’ professionalism as caring and student centered (Mausethagen, 2013b). The variety of interpretations of learning outcomes could therefore be explained by a tension between two competing discourses within current Norwegian education; accountability and teacher professionalism (Mausethagen 2013c).

This discursive explanation of the varieties in conceptualizations of learning outcomes implies that learning outcome is a contextual term. As this thesis shows, interpretations of learning outcomes are attached to the practices that are in play in the various contexts engaged with the term (Czarniawska, 1998). The practice of the various contexts engaged with learning outcomes may differ significantly from each other due to various settings of professional expertise, as they engage with and warrant knowledge in various ways (Knorr Cetina, 2001). For example, in the teacher narrative, learning outcomes are explained as dependent on contextual factors that are beyond the teachers’ control, while in the policy narrative learning outcomes are more directly connected to teachers’ personalities and teaching practices. Consequently, the implications of understanding learning outcomes as a contextual term go further than implying that words means different thing to different people (Yanow, 2000). It is

also connected to different professional practices and different understandings of the relationships between the relevant actors.

The varieties in interpretations of both school leadership and learning outcomes also illustrate the contextual features of narratives (Czarniawska, 2004; 1998; Gubrium and Holstein, 2009). While the policy narrative presented in Study 1 operates at a national level, the narratives presented in Study 2 and 3 are more locally situated and therefore outline more organizational practice within schools. However, the narratives presented serves the same functions for the narrators as they all set out to justify and legitimize governing and leadership practice within schools. The following section will therefore draw attention to narrative functions before questioning the dominance of the policy narrative.

#### **6.4 Questioning the dominance of the policy narrative**

From a governing perspective, the narrative illuminated in Study 1 meets the need to reduce complexity in order to express governmental goals and at the same time stabilize the assumptions for decision-making (Roe, 1994). By building an account of linearity and causality, the narrative therefore serves an important function as it reduces the range of legitimized and justified options for school leaders and teachers (Braun, Maguire, & Ball, 2010; Ball, et al., 2012; Honig and Coburn, 2008) without telling school leaders and teachers in detail what to do. However, the same function could also be attached to the school principal- and teacher-narratives. As examples of public narratives that are attached to organizational culture (Keltchermans and Piot, 2012; Knorr Cetina, 1991), professional competence (Stoll, 2011) and professional discourses (Mausethagen 2013b), the narratives posed by school leaders and teachers function as opposing accounts to the policy narrative. The school principal- and teacher- narratives do not follow the causal understanding of the connections in the plots and therefore increase complexity and ambiguity with regards to the

understanding of the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes. At the same time these narratives open for diversity in the professional work of school leaders and teachers. The narrative illuminated in Study 1, however, poses as a dominant narrative within policy in the analysis. According to Roe (1994) such policy narratives stabilize the assumptions for decision making, as they rule out alternative understandings and thus reduces complexity attached to the problem at hand. The analyses in Study 2 and 3, however, indicate that the policy narrative illuminated in the policy documents does not reflect how the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes is interpreted by school leaders' and teachers.

As a narrative, the constricted line of influence posed by the policy documents does not transform into action or directly influence practice, but rather signals a normative preference as it justifies a certain type of practice (Gunter, 2012; Roe, 1994). This could also be said about the school principal- and the teacher- narratives as well, as they both pose as public narratives attached to cultural and contextual formations and organizational routines within Norwegian lower secondary schools (Czarniawska, 1998; Spillane, et al., 2011). In this way, this thesis has illuminated three sets of assumptions that pose contradicting normative preferences for school leadership practice in the Norwegian elementary school. But are public narratives posed by school leaders and teachers to be reckoned as narratives with the same forces of justification and legitimacy as the narrative identified in the policy documents?

According to Roe (1994), the answer to that question is no, as the narratives posed by the school leaders and teachers in this study are to be reckoned as *counter narratives*. That is "stories that run counter to the controversy's dominant policy narrative" (Roe, 1994, p. 3). In this thesis such contradiction of the policy narratives' arguments have been identified with regards to interpretations and explanations of school leadership and learning outcomes, and also in the narration of the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes in

the school principal- and teacher- narratives. However, refutation of decision makers' arguments are not sufficient to alter either the decision makers perceived need to act, nor the dominant narrative by which these acts are legitimized. Policy narratives have a tendency to continue to persist with the same degree of strength and stability although they are empirically contested (Roe 1994). In order to challenge or replace a dominating policy narrative, school leaders' and teachers' therefore need to construct a counter narrative that in the same manner as the policy narrative reduces complexity and is equally predictive with regards to implications and effects.

Ball (2000) on the other hand, argues that policy is not made at a superior level and then implemented to the levels below. Rather, policy is made as a discursive practice, or through a selection of arguments and meaning. Further, policy is expressed through texts, practice, and as in this thesis, narratives. Accordingly, policy is made by a large number of actors who engage in different practices and thus, policy is constructed, de-constructed and reconstructed due to the actors and contexts that engage in a specific political issue (Ball, et al., 2012). In this case the contexts are represented by Norwegian educational documents and Norwegian lower secondary schools. As policies enter these two contexts, the narratives consequently are influenced by the knowledge-, and meaning- construction, and practice of the professionals who are engaged in making policy within these contexts (Ball, 2000; Ball et. al., 2012; Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 1992). In this view, policy narratives are not only formulated by policymakers, but also by professionals working in schools. In the same manner as the dominant policy narrative in Study 1, the narratives identified in Study 2 and 3 are shaped and influenced by contextual dimensions that will constraint, pressure and enable policy enactment in schools. This way, all three narratives displayed in this thesis is to be reckoned as equally constraining and convincing accounts of how to interpret the relationship between school leadership and student learning outcomes.

This opens up the possibility for the coexistence of multiple, equally forceful yet conflicting understandings' within the Norwegian educational sector, which increases both complexity and ambiguity in the policy issue at hand. Writers, such as Roe (1994), and Yanow (2000), therefore recommend that interpretive analysis such as the ones in this thesis, should contribute by constructing meta-narratives or plausible accounts in which all parties involved can agree. The following section will therefore discuss if the construction of a meta-narrative about the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes is possible based on the studies and analyses in this thesis.

### **6.5 Troubling the construction of a meta-narrative**

According to Roe (1994), narrative analyses can contribute to the public discourse by constructing a meta-narrative in which opposite opinions and interpretations can meet in a form of consensus. As meta-narratives can reestablish the grounds for decision-making, as well as provide recognition to opposing views, the construction of such narratives might facilitate the grounds for governing as well as legitimize professional practice (Roe, 1994; Czarniawska, 2004). However, given the empirical basis of this thesis, and braved by the notion of discursive perspectives on policy making (Ball, 2000; Ball, et al., 2012; Bowe, et al., 1992; Braun, et al., 2010; Ozga, 2000), I will argue against such a construction.

First, this thesis has shown that the conception of both school leadership and student learning outcomes differs significantly amongst policy-makers, school leaders and teachers. These differences are fundamental for the interpretation of the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes posed by the three narratives. As such, the thesis has illuminated significant diversions of interpretations and understandings amongst actors in the Norwegian educational sector that need to be reconciled in order to generate a meta-narrative in which all parties involved could agree.

Second, the narratives constructed in this thesis are all representational (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009) rather than naturalistic narratives, in the sense that they have all been constructed by me as a researcher on the basis of my empirical findings. Further, as narratives they are not accurate accounts of practice, neither governing, school leadership practice, nor teaching. My second argument against constructing a meta-narrative is therefore that such a narrative should build on more accurate accounts of practice. So, rather than building on narratives that justify practice, it should build on narratives that are generated from observations and investigations of how policy makers, school leaders and teachers engage with learning outcomes in their everyday practices, and how leadership is executed within schools.

Third, this thesis is based on a limited set of agents in the educational sector. In the Norwegian educational sector there are also other significant actors involved that have not been included, such as school owners, parents and students. From the narratives generated through this analysis, an impression of students as active agents is increasingly built according to the closeness the narrators has to engagement with student learning. Further, this thesis is based on interviews with teachers and school principals working in schools located in the Western part of Norway. Although the schools included in this analysis to some extent represent the variety of Norwegian lower secondary schools, local differences may also be explained due to school ownership and the nature of the relationship between municipal school owners and schools (Skedsmo, 2010; Seland, Vibe & Hovdhaugen, 2013). So, by recognition of the contextual features of narratives, I would therefore argue that the voices of a broad variety of school owners, parents and students, also should be included in an attempt to formulate a narrative in which all parties involved could agree.

Finally, as narrators, policy makers, school principals and teachers are professionals attached to differing epistemic cultures (Jensen, Lahn & Nerland, 2012; Knorr Cetina 1991). The

differences in the way the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes is narrated may therefore be partially explained due to differences in the way the actors involved engage with and warrant knowledge. As public narratives, the policy- and organizational narratives presented in this thesis draw on and feed in to significant cultural understandings of the world (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009). As the construction of a meta-narrative would require a detachment from the significant cultural features incorporated in the narratives presented in this thesis, there is a danger of such a narrative being read a “vehicle or medium for carrying and transmitting a policy message” (Ozga, 2000, p. 33). On the basis of this analysis I would not recommend such a detachment, but rather, acknowledge the possibility for cultural diversity, ambiguity and equivocality that lies within a democratic policy sector (Ozga, 2000; Ball, 2000; Ball, et al., 2012; Bowe, et al., 1992; Braun, et al. 2010), such as the Norwegian educational sector.

## **7. Concluding remarks and implications for further practice and research**

This thesis set out to address how the relationship between school leadership and students' learning outcomes is narrated by actors in the Norwegian educational sector, and further, the thesis set out to identify perspectives on school leadership and conceptualizations of "learning outcomes in public narratives presented in policy documents, by Norwegian school principals and teachers. The thesis has shown that in all three narratives the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes is narrated as an indirect route, where school leadership is connected to student learning outcomes through instruction, teaching, and learning. As such the thesis seems confirmatory to the increasing body of research on school leadership significance for student learning and school success. However, through the project significant differences in the rationale behind the narrative plots, as well as the interpretations of both school leadership and student learning outcomes have been illuminated, as teachers and school principals narrate school leadership practice and student learning outcome in a way that differs from both policy documents and the current most dominating research on school leadership significance for student learning and school success.

In this way, this thesis suggests that neither empirical research nor policy ideas are imported into practice. Rather, policy ideas and empirical evidence are reframed and negotiated as they enters different national and local contexts, according to the actors engaged with the specific idea or practice at hand.

### **7.1 Implications for leadership practice**

As narratives, the three accounts of the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes presented in this thesis are not accurate accounts of practice, neither governing,

school leadership nor teaching. Rather, the narratives presented signals “ideal scripts” for this relationship. Implications for practice should therefore be made with precaution. However, from the analysis it is possible to outline some challenges facing school leaders that need to be balance in order for them to meet the expectations narrated in these various accounts.

First, the thesis shows that school leaders are faced with conflicting expectations of what they should do in order to enhance student achievements. From a policy perspective, school leaders are expected to facilitate changes in school through implementing ideas and decisions made by local and national government. At the same time, they are expected to facilitate change through an open and accepting working climate. Both the school principal- and the teacher-narratives describe such open and accepting working climates. However, these descriptions open for the bottom-up processes where teachers make decisions about change and improvement, and not only top-down implementation of ideas and decisions made at a superior level.

Further, from a governing perspective, school leaders are expected to introduce and mediate evidence-based teaching practices by implementing them in their own schools. This perception of how knowledge is distributed in schools is opposed by the teacher narrative where school leaders are expected to accept and trust teachers’ expertise and competence when it comes to instructional leadership and teaching. These expectations legitimize a practice where it is hard to make clear distinctions between school leadership and the professional practice of teachers.

Finally, both the school principal- and teacher- narratives frame instructional leadership within organizational routines where teachers’ agency is significant. Consequently, both narratives explain instructional leadership in a way that justify a leadership practice where autonomous groups of teachers constitute norms for professional practice that make the influence of formal leaders unnecessary, or avoidable. In previous research instructional

leadership has been identified as more effective for student learning than any other leadership style (Robinson, et al., 2008). This thesis suggests that the conceptualization of leadership in Norwegian school principals' and teachers' narratives, troubles the close relationship between leadership practices and student learning outcome in this research, as Norwegian teachers are narrated as more involved in instructional leadership than the school leaders. This shows that ideas about leadership and relationships between leaders and teachers should not be imported without adaptation to the national educational system, culture and positions.

## **7.2 Implications for further research**

The relationship between school leadership and student achievements has been scholarly investigated and an increasing body of evidence confirming school leaders' significance for school effectiveness and student achievements has been built. However this thesis suggests that the evidence of school leaders' effect and significance for student learning outcomes should be the object for further investigations and debate. The narratives illuminated in this thesis indicates that the evidence created by previous research are contested by school principal- and teacher- narratives about what this relationship looks like in Norwegian elementary and lower secondary schools. As such, this thesis seems to put weight to Slater's (2011) critique of research into this field of enquiry for being dominated by research within Anglo-Saxon school systems, which is not necessarily valid in another context where e.g. the accountability systems are softer.

Further, this thesis suggests that there are contesting understandings of the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes even within the Norwegian educational sector. Given the significance of the actors included in this project, the varieties of interpretations presented in this thesis are important in order to understand how the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes is made sense of in governing

as well as in practice in schools. Still, other actors such as students, school owners and parents whose interpretations have not been included in this thesis may also provide important perspectives that need to be both articulated and visualized in order to comprehend how the relationship between school leadership and learning outcomes is made sense of within the Norwegian educational sector.

Finally, in this thesis the narration of leadership practice within schools indicates that delegation of leadership in Norwegian lower secondary schools also involves a distribution of power, trust and authority when it comes to instructional leadership as well as classroom practice. In order to understand and claim evidence of school leadership effects on student learning outcomes this distribution of authority, trust and power needs to be explored in more depth, as this has not been the case in the current most dominant body of research evidence.

## Literature:

- Aasen, P. (2007) Equality in Educational Policy. A Norwegian Perspective, in *International Studies in Educational Inequality, Theory and Policy Volume 2: inequality in Education Systems*, Teese, R., Lamb, S. and Duru-Bellat, M. (eds.), 127-142. Springer.
- Ball, S., Maguire, M. & Brown, A. (2012) *How schools do policy. Policy enactments in secondary schools* London and New York: Routledge.
- Ball, S. (2000) What is Policy? Texts, Trajectories and Toolboxes, in Ball, S. (ed.) *Sociology of Education. Major Themes* London and New York:Rutledge Falmer, 1830-1840.
- Bascia, N., & Rottmann, C. (2011) What's so important about teachers' working conditions? The fatal flaw in North American educational reform *Journal of Education Policy* 26: 6, 787-802. doi: 10.1080/02680939.2010.543156.
- Berger, A. A. (1997) *Narratives in popular culture, media, and everyday life* London, Thousand Oaks, CA & New Dehli: Sage.
- Bevir, M. (2006) How narratives explain in *Interpretation and Method empirical research Methods and the Interpretive Turn* Yanow, D. and Schwartz- Shea, P. (2006) Armonk, New York, London, England: M. E. Sharpe, 281-290.
- Bird, J. J., Dunaway, D. M., Hancock, D. R. & Wang, C. (2013) The Superintendent's Leadership Role in School Improvement: Relationships Between Authenticity and Best Practices, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 12: 1, 77-99. doi:10.1080/15700763.2013.766348.
- Bolden, R. (2011) Distributed Leadership in Organisations: A Review of Theory and Research. *International Journal of Management Reviews* Vol. 13: 3, 251-269. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00306.x.

- Bowe, R., Ball, S. J. & Gold, A. (1992) *Reforming Education & Changing Schools. Case studies in policy sociology* London and New York: Routledge.
- Braun, A., Maguire, M., & Ball, S. J (2010) Policy enactments in the UK secondary school: examining policy, practice and school positioning, *Journal of Education Policy*, 25: 4, 547-560. doi: 10.1080/02680931003698544.
- Brinkmann, S. (2013) *Qualitative Interviewing Understanding Qualitative Research*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Burr, V. (1995) *An introduction to social constructionism*. London: Routledge.
- Camburn, E., Rowan, B., & Taylor, J. E. (2003) Distributed leadership in schools: The case of elementary schools adopting comprehensive school reform. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 25: 4, 347-375. doi:10.3102/01623737025004347.
- Carlsten, T. C., Caspersen, J., Vibe, N.; & Aamodt, P. O. (2014) Resultater fra TALIS 2013. Norske funn fra ungdomstrinnet i Internasjonalt lys. Arbeidsnotat 10/2014. Nordisk institutt for studier av innovasjon, forskning og utdanning.
- Clandinin, D. J., Pushor, D. & Orr, A. M. (2007) Navigating Sites for Narrative Inquiry, *Journal of Teacher Education* 58: 1, 21-35. doi:10.1177/0022487106296218.
- Clandinin, D. J. & Connolly, F. M. (2000) *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Fransisco: Jossey-Brass.
- Coburn, C. E. (2005) Shaping Teacher Sensemaking: School Leaders and the Enactment of reading Policy, *Educational Policy* 19:3, 476-509. doi:10.1177/0895904805276143.
- Coleman, A. (2012) The significance of trust in school based collaborative leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*, 15:1, 79-106. doi:10.1080/13603124.2011.578755.
- Czarniawska, B. (2004) *Narratives in Social Science Research* London, Thousand Oaks, CA & New Dehli: Sage Publications.

- Czarniawska, B. (1998) *A Narrative Approach to Organization Studies* Qualitative Research Methods Vol. 43 London, Thousand Oaks, CA & New Dehli: Sage Publications.
- Czarniawska, B. (1997) *Narrating the organization. Dramas of institutional identity*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press .
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997) *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Day, C., Sammons, P., Hopkins, D., Harris, A., Leithwood, K., Gu, Q., Brown, E., Ahtariodou, E. & Kingston, A. (2009) *The impact of School Leadership on Pupil Outcomes*. London: DCSF/NCSL.
- Day, C., Sammons, P., Hopkins, D., Leithwood, K. & Kington, A. (2008) Research into the impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes: policy and research contexts. *School Leadership and Management* 28:1, 5-25. doi:10.1080/13632430701800045.
- Day, C., Leithwood, K., & Sammons. P., (2008) “What We Have Learned, What We Need to Know More About.” *School Leadership & Management* 28 (1): 83–96. doi:10.1080/13632430701800102.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000) *Handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Eisner (1979) *The education imagination. On the design and evaluation of school programs*. London: Macmillian Publishing Co., Inc New York, Collier Macmillian Publishers London.
- Elmore, R. F. (2003) A plea for strong practice. *Educational Leadership*, 62: 3, 6-10.
- Ewell (2005) *Applying learning outcomes to higher education: An overview*. Paper prepared for the Hong Kong University Grants Committee. National Center for Higher Education Management Systems
- Fisher F. & Gottweis H. (2012): *The Argumentative Turn Revisited: Public Policy as Communicative Practice*. Durham, N. C: Duke University Press.

- Fog, J. (1998) *Med samtalen som udgangspunkt: det kvalitative forskningsinterview*. København: Akademisk Forlag A/S.
- Fossåskaret, E., Fuglestad, O. L. & Aase T. H. (1997) *Metodisk feltarbeid. Produksjon og tolkning av kvalitative data*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget AS.
- Grek, S. (2009) Governing by numbers: the PISA “effect” in Europe. *Journal of Education Policy* 24:1, 23-37. doi:10.1080/02680930802412669.
- Grimen, H. (2009) *Hva er tillit?* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Gronn, P. (2003) *The New Work of Educational Leaders. Changing leadership practice in an era of school reform*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Gronn, P. (2000) Distributed properties: a new architecture for leadership. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 28: 3, 317-338. doi:10.1177/0263211X000283006.
- Gu, Q., Sammons, P. & Mehta, P. (2008) Leadership characteristics and practices in schools with different effectiveness and improvement profiles. *School Leadership & Management*, 28: 1, 43-63. doi:10.1080/13632430701800078.
- Gubrium, J., & Holstein, J. (2009) *Analyzing Narrative Reality* Los Angeles, London, New Dehli, Singapore: Sage publications.
- Gunter, H., Hall, D. & Bragg, J. (2013) Distributed Leadership: A Study in Knowledge Production *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 41: 5, 555-580. doi:10.1177/1741143213488586.
- Gunter, H. (2012) *Leadership and the Reform of Education*. Bristol and Chicago: The Policy Press.
- Hallinger, P. & Heck, R. (1998) “Exploring the Principals’s Contribution to School Effectiveness: 1980-1995”. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 9: 2, 157-191. doi:10.1080/0924345980090203.

- Harris, A. (2009) Distributed leadership: What we know. In *Distributed Leadership: Different Perspectives*. Edited by Harris, A. (2009) Dordrecht: Springer, 11-21.
- Harris, A. (2007) Distributed leadership: conceptual confusion and empirical reticence. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*, 10: 3, 315-325. doi:10.1080/13603120701257313.
- Harris, A. (2004) Distributed leadership for school improvement: Leading or misleading. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 32: 1, 11-24. doi:10.1177/1741143204039297.
- Hatch, A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Helstad, K. & Møller, J. (2013) Leadership as relational work: risks and opportunities *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*, 16: 3, 245-262. doi:10.1080/13603124.2012.761353.
- Honig, M. I., & Coburn, C. (2008) Evidence-based decision making in school district central offices: Towards a policy and research agenda, *Educational Policy* 28:4, 578-608. doi:10.1177/0895904807307067.
- Hopfenbeck, T., Tolo, A., Florez, T. & El Masri, Y. (2013), "Balancing Trust and Accountability? The Assessment for Learning Programme in Norway: A Governing Complex Education Systems Case Study", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 97, OECD Publishing.
- Jensen, K., Lahn, L. C. & Nerland, M. (eds.) (2012) *Professional Learning in the Knowledge Society*. The Knowledge Economy and Education Vol. 6. Rotterdam, Boston, Taipei: Sense Publishers.

- Johnson, B. (2004) Local school micropolitical agency: An antidote to new managerialism. *School Leadership and Management* 24: 3, 267-286.  
doi:10.1080/1363243042000266927.
- Karseth, B., & Sivesind, K. (2010) Conceptualising Curriculum Knowledge Within and Beyond the National Context. *European Journal of Education*. Vol 45:1, 103-120.  
Doi:10.1111/j.1465-3435.2009.01418.x.
- Kelchtermans, G. & Piot, L. (2012). Living the Janus Head: Conceptualizing leaders and leadership in schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In Flores, M. A, Carvalho, A. A., Ferreira, F. I. & Viaca, T. (eds) *Back to the Future: Legacies, Continuities and Changes in Educational Policy, Practice and Research*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Klar (2012) Fostering department chair instructional leadership capacity: laying the groundwork for distributed instructional leadership *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice* 15: 2, 175-197.  
doi:10.1080713603124.2011.577910.
- Knorr Cetina, K. (2001) Objectual practice, in Schatzki, T. R., Knorr Cetina, K. & von Savigny, E. (eds.) *The practice turn in contemporary theory*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Knorr Cetina, K. (1991) Epistemic cultures: Forms of Reason in Science. *History of Political Economy* 23: 1, 105-122.
- Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Det kvalitative forskningsintervju*. Oslo: AdNotam Gyldendal.
- Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2005) Confronting the Ethics of Qualitative Research *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* 18:2, 157-181. doi:10.1080/10720530590914789.

- Kunnskapsdepartementet (KD) (2010) Stortingsmelding nr. 19; *Tid for læring*. [Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. White Paper no. 19 (2009-2010): «Time for learning»].
- Kunnskapsdepartementet (KD) (2009) Stortingsmelding nr. 11; *Læreren, rollen og utdanningen*. [Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. White Paper no. 11 (2008-2009); «The teacher – the role and the education»].
- Kunnskapsdepartementet (KD) (2008) Stortingsmelding nr. 31; *Kvalitet i skolen*. [Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. White Paper no. 31 (2007-2008); “Quality Education”].
- Leithwood, K., Mascall, B. & Strauss, T. (eds.) (2009) *Distributed Leadership According to the Evidence*. New York: Routledge.
- Leithwood K. & Day, C. (2008) The impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes. *School Leadership & Management* Vol 28:1, 1-4. doi:10.1080/13632430701799718.
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A. & Hopkins, D. (2008) Seven strong claims about school leadership. *School Leadership & Management* 28:1, 27-42. doi:10.1080/13632430701800060.
- Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A. & Hopkins, D. (2006) *Successful School Leadership: What It Is and How It Influences Pupil Learning*. Research Report Number 8000, NCSL/ Department for Education and Skills, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, England.
- Leithwood, K. & Jantzi, D. (2005) A Review of Transformational School Leadership Research 1996-2005 *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 4: 3, 177-199. doi:10.1080/15700760500244769.
- Leithwood, K. & Riehl, C. (2003) *What We Know About Successful School Leadership*. Laboratory for Student Success, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

- Lejano, R. P. (2006) *Frameworks for policy analysis: Merging text and context*. New York: Routledge.
- Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R. & Zilber, T. (1998) *Narrative Research. Reading, Analysis, and Interpretation*. Applied Social Research Methods Series. Volume 47. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.
- Lillejord, S., Børte, K., Ruud, E., Hauge, T.E. Hopfenbeck, T. N. Tolo, A., Fisher-Griffiths, P., Smedby, J-C. (2014): Former for lærervurdering som kan ha positiv innvirkning på skolens kvalitet. En systematisk kunnskapsoversikt. Oslo. Kunnskapscenter for utdanning.
- Lillejord, S. & Søreide, G. E. (2003) Tell me your story. Using Narratives to understand Indigenous Knowledge. *Indilinga. African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems* Vol 2/2003.
- Leuven, E., Oosterbeek, H. & Rønning, M (2008) Quasi-experimental estimates of the Effect of Class size on Achievement in Norway. *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 110(4), 663-693. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9442.2008.00556.x.
- Mausethagen, S. (2013a) Talking about the test. Boundary work in primary school teachers' interactions around national testing of student performance. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. Vol 36, 132-142.
- Mausethagen, S. (2013b) A research review of the impact of accountability policies on teachers' workplace relations. *Educational research review*, 9: 1, 16-33.
- Mausethagen, S. (2013c) *Reshaping teacher professionalism*. An analysis of how teachers construct and negotiate professionalism under increasing accountability. PhD thesis. Centre for the Study of Professions, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences

- Mayrowetz, D. (2008) Making Sense of Distributed Leadership: Exploring the Multiple Usages of the Concept in the Field *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44: 3, 424-435. doi:10.1177/0013161X07309480.
- Moos, L., Krejsler, J. & Kofod, K. (2008) Successful principals: telling or selling? On the importance of context for school leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice* 11: 4, 341-352. doi:10.1080/13603120802183913.
- Moos, L. & Møller, J. (2003) Schools and leadership in transition: the case of Scandinavia. *Cambridge Journal of Education* 33:3, 353-371. doi:10.1080/0305764032000122014.
- Mulford, B. & Silins, H. (2011) Revised models and conceptualisation of successful school principalship for improved student outcomes. *Successful school principalship* 25:1, 61-82. doi:10.1108/09513541111100125.
- Mulford, W., Silins, H. & Leithwood, K. (2004) *Educational Leadership for Organisational Learning and Improved Student Outcomes*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Møller, J. (2009) Approaches to school leadership in Scandinavia *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 41:2, 165-177. doi:10.1080/00220620902808244.
- Møller, J., Eggen, A., Fuglestad O.L., Langfeldt, G., Presthus, A.M., Skrøvset, S., Stjernstrøm, E. & Vedøy, G. (2007) «Successful Leadership Based on Democratic values» in *Successful Principal Leadership in Times of Change. An International Perspective* Day, C., & Leithwood, K. (2007) Dordrecht: Springer
- Møller, J. & Fuglestad, O.L. (2006) *Ledelse i anerkjente skoler*. Universitetsforlaget
- Møller, J., Eggen, A., Fuglestad O.L., Langfeldt, G., Presthus, A.M., Skrøvset, S., Stjernstrøm, E. & Vedøy, G. (2005) Successful school leadership: the Norwegian case *Journal of Educational Administration* 43: 6, 584-594. doi:10.1108/09578230510625683.
- Nielsen, K. S. (2001) *Fortellinger I organisationer. Narrativ praksis*. Denmark: Gyldendal

- Oduro, G. K. T. (2004) Distributed leadership in schools: What English headteachers say about the “pull” and “push” factors. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Manchester, 16-18 September
- OECD (2014, 03.12.2014) Governing Complex Education Systems. Downloaded from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/governingcomplexeducationssystemsgces.htm>
- Olsen, H. (2003) Veje til kvalitativ kvalitet? In *Nordisk Pedagogik 1/2003*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Orton, J. D, & Wieck, K. E. (1990) Loosely Coupled Systems: A Reconceptualization *The Academy of Management review*, 15: 2, 203-223.
- Ozga, J. (2009) Governing education through data in England: from regulation to self-evaluation *Journal of Education Policy*, 24: 2, 149-162.  
doi:10.1080/02680930902733121.
- Ozga, J. & Jones, R. (2006) Travelling and embedded policy: the case of knowledge transfer *Journal of Education Policy* 21:1, 1-17. doi:10.1080/02680930500391462.
- Ozga, J. (2000) *Policy research in educational settings. Contested terrain*. Buckingham. Philadelphia: Open University Press
- Pearce, C. & Conger, J.A. (2003). *Shared Leadership: Reframing the Hows and Whys of Leadership*. London: Sage.
- Polkinghorne, D. (1995) Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis, in Hatch, J. A. & Wisniewski, R. (eds.) *Life history and narrative*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Pont, B., D. Nusche, & H. Moorman (2008) *Improving school leadership, volume 1: Policy and Practice*. Paris, France: OECD.
- Prøitz, T. S. (2013a) Variations in grading practice – subjects matter *Education Inquiry* 4: 3, 555-575.

- Prøitz, T. S. (2013b) Conceptualisations of learning outcomes in education – an explorative cross-case analysis of policymakers, teachers and scholars. Thesis submitted for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor. Faculty of Educational Sciences. University of Oslo. September 2013.
- Prøitz, T. S. (2013c) Learning outcomes as a key concept in policy documents throughout policy changes *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 1-22  
doi:10.1080/00313831.2014.904418
- Prøitz, T.S. (2010) Learning outcomes: What are they? Who defines them? When and where are they defined? Springer *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability* Vol 22: 2, 119-137. doi:10.1007/s11092-010-9097-8.
- Reissman, C. K. (1993) *Narrative analysis* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rizvi, F. & Lingaard, B. (2010) *Globalizing Education Policy* London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Robinson, V. M. J. (2010) From Instructional Leadership to Leadership capabilities: Empirical Findings and Methodological Challenges, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 9: 1, 1-26. doi:10.1080/15700760903026748.
- Robinson, V. M. J., Loyd, C. & Rowe, K. J. (2008) The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the different effects of leadership type. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44:5, 635-674. doi:10.1177/0013161X08321509.
- Roe, E. (1994) *Narrative Policy Analysis. Theory and Practice*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sammons, P., Gu, Q., Day, C. & Ko, J. (2011) Exploring the impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes Results from a study of academically improved and effective schools in England. *International Journal of Educational Management* 25: 1, 83-101. doi:10.1108/09513541111100134.

- Seland, I., Vibe, N. & Hovdhaugen, E. (2013) *Evaluering av nasjonale prøver som system*. Report 4/2013 Nordisk institutt for studier av innovasjon, forskning og utdanning.
- Silverman, D. (2011). *Interpreting Qualitative Data. Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and interaction*. London. Thousand Oaks. New Delhi. Sage Publications Ltd.
- Sivesind, K., & K. Bachmann (2008). Hva forandres med nye standarder? Krav og utfordringer med Kunnskapsløftets læreplaner. In G. Langfeldt, E. Elstad, and S. Hopmann (Eds.), *Ansvarlighet i skolen. Politiske spørsmål og pedagogiske svar* (pp. 62–93). Fagernes: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag.
- Skedsmo, G. (2011) Formulation and realisation of evaluation policy: inconsistencies and problematic issues. *Educational Assessment Evaluation and Accountability* 23, 5-20. doi: 10.1007/s11092-010-9110-2.
- Slater, C. L. (2011) Understanding Principal Leadership: An International Perspective and a narrative Approach. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership* Vol. 39:2, 219-227. doi: 10.1177/1741143210390061.
- Somers, M., & Gibson, G. (1994) Reclaiming the epistemological “other”: narrative and social construction of identity, in: *Social theory and the politics of identity* edited by C. Calhoun. Oxford: Blackwell, 37-99
- Spillane, J., Parise, L. M. & Sherer J. Z. (2011) Organizational Routines as Coupling Mechanisms: Policy, School Administration, and the Technical Core *American Educational Research Journal* Vol 48:3 456-619. doi:10.3102/0002831210385102.
- Spillane, J. P. (2006) *Distributed Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, John Wiley & Sons. Inc.
- Spillane, J., Halverson, R. & Diamond, J. B. (2004) Towards a theory of leadership practice: a distributed perspective. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36:1, 3-34. doi:10.1080/0022027032000106726.

- Spillane, J. P. 2003. "Educational Leadership." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 25:4, 343–346. doi:10.3102/01623737025004343
- Stoll, L. (2011) Leading Professional Learning Communities, in *Leadership and Learning* Robertson, J. & Timperley, H. (eds). London: Sage Publications, 103-117.
- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006) Professional learning communities: a review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change*, 7:4, 221-258. doi:10.1007/s10833-006-0001-8.
- Storey, A. (2004) The problem of distributed leadership in schools. *School Leadership and Management*, 24: 3, 249-265. doi:10.1080/1363243042000266918.
- Sugrue, C. (2006) A Critical Appraisal of the Impact of International Agencies on Educational Reforms and Teachers' Lives and Work: the case of Ireland? *European Educational research Journal* 5:3 & 4, 181-195. doi:10.2304/eeerj.2006.5.3.80
- Sun, J. & Leithwood, K. (2012) transformational School Leadership Effects on Student Achievement. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 11: 4, 418-451. doi:10.1080/15700763.2012.681001.
- Supovitz, J., Sirinides, P. & May, P. (2010) How principals and peers influence teaching and learning *Educational Administration Quarterly* 46: 1, 31-56. doi:10.1177/1094670509353043.
- Søreide, G. E. (2007) *Narrative construction of teacher identity* Dissertation for the degree doctor philosophiae (dr. philos.) university of Bergen. Norway
- Telhaug, A. O., Mediås, O. A., & Aasen, P. (2006) The Nordic Model in Education: Education as part of the political system in the last 50 years. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 50: 3, 245-283. doi:10.1080/00313830600743274.
- Timperley, H. (2011) Knowledge and the Leadership of Learning, *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 10: 2, 145-170. doi:10.1080/15700763.2011.557519.

- Tolo, A. (2011) Hvordan blir lærerkompetanse konstruert? En kvalitativ studie av PPU-studenters kunnskapsutvikling. Dissertation for the degree of philosophia doctor (PhD) University of Bergen, Norway 2011.
- Tubin, D. (2011): From principals' Actions to Students' Outcomes: An Explanatory Narrative Approach to Successful Israeli Schools, *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 10:4, 395-411. doi: 10.1080/15700763.2011.610556.
- Vennebo, K. F. & Ottesen, E. (2012) School leadership: constitution and distribution *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and practice* 15:3, 255-270. doi:10.1080/13603124.2011.624642.
- Wagenaar, H. (2011) *Meaning in action. Interpretation and dialogue in policy analysis*. Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe
- Weick, K. E. (1976) Educational Organisations as Loosely Coupled Systems *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 21: 1, 1-19. doi:10.2307/2391875.
- Woods, P. A., Bennett, N., Harvey, J. A. & Wise, C. (2004) Variabilities and Dualities in Distributed Leadership: Findings from a Systematic Literature Review *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership* 32: 4, 439-457. doi:10.1177/1741143204046497.
- Yanow, D. (2006) Thinking Interpretively: Philosophical Presuppositions and the Human Sciences in Yanow, D. and Schwartz- Shea, P. (2006) *Interpretation and Method empirical research Methods and the Interpretive Turn* Armonk, New York, London, England. M. E. Sharpe, 5-26.
- Yanow, D. (2000) *Conducting interpretive policy analysis* Qualitative Research Methods Vol. 47 Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications.