A Global Perspective on Transnational Curriculum: Building Learning Community in Context of Education Reform

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Abstract

This chapter reviews the findings of a case study exploring the development of one school as a learning community in the context of a school reform initiative that focused specifically on the role of leadership in ensuring success. The focus of this phenomenological study was the Lemshaga learning community in Värmdö, Sweden. The attempts to define quality and effectiveness in teaching versus learning, the role of leadership and the challenges faced in drawing generalizable lessons from educational reform initiatives, were examined. In large part the failure of those attempts to arrive at a blueprint was due to the fact that although end goals may be similar, differing cultures and national mandates preclude a one-size-fits-all end product.


**Introduction**

The inspiration and starting point for this study derived from numerous strands, which extended over the last two decades. Influencing those experiences were my concurrent roles as a researcher, a mother and an observer of major social changes taking place in both my home country of Sweden and throughout the rest of the world. Those experiences and observations were also influenced by the work of the Leadership of Learning Network at university of Cambridge (Macbeath & Cheng, 2008).

The case study represented a milestone in my work because it allowed me to stand back from that collective experience, to view through other lenses, something that I have been committed to and advocated, that is the reform perspective known as Carpe Vitam. Lemshaga, the focus of my study, is a Swedish school, which I was instrumental in setting up, and therefore I have a strong attachment to its success. It was my vision at the time to develop a different kind of school, one that could genuinely be described as a learning community and would have something to offer to other schools in Sweden and internationally, and to the system as a whole. In revisiting that as a researcher and not as the founder of the school, my aim was to achieve a distanced, objective view of those aspirations and how they had played out in the intervening years. In so doing, I recognized the need to be sensitive to the difficulty of shedding the subjective skin and adopting the role of informed and objective critic. Nonetheless, by following rigorous procedures in data collection and analysis, I believe that Lemshaga can be portrayed from the collective perspectives and juxtaposition of stakeholder views.

This led me to two research questions, with the recognition that objectivity is an elusive ambition that can only be approximated by adopting the ethics and protocols of
informed and ethically guided research. The research questions, which I set out to explore, focused on the nature and process of a learning community to test the assumption, as contained in a substantial body of research literature, that leadership is a key ingredient of success in any educational reform initiative: 1) How does one successfully generate a learning community in the context of a school reform initiative? and 2) Why is leadership so significant in the development of a successful educational reform initiative?

**Carpe Vitam—“seize life”**

The Carpe Vitam vision was ambitious, creatively dissatisfied, setting high ideals for a different kind of society. It was much broader and more fundamental than just one school. It began with a vision of a new society, a society in which children can grow up to become positive, inquisitive, productive individuals, emboldened with a strong sense of self-belief and security. In this society, economic borders would give way to shared regions of common unities and cultural and national traditions that are celebrated and valued, in which diversity is seen as an asset, rather than a liability. In this society schools and local authorities would work with the larger community to build a shared objective: the creation of successful learning communities.

Integral to this vision was a recognition that education needed to be different and that schools need to create a more dynamic linkage among the key players: the child, the family, the teachers and the policy makers. Playing my part in that vision was expressed through the founding of a school in which those ideals could be put into practice.

**An Ethnological focus**

In my earliest efforts, I believed that if I were to generate change in the wider
context of the Swedish system I should exemplify my ideals in a school in which those values were lived out in day to day practice, with the hope that others would be enabled to share in that vision.

To that end, it was important that Lemshaga should be seen as a school for ordinary children, one that served all children regardless of background and potential. The Lemshaga school is a voucher school, which means it is public school for families with all economic backgrounds within a private initiative. It was established to serve all Swedish children, regardless of their background or potential, and as a setting that best fulfilled its ambitious goals. Lemshaga is a public school outside of Stockholm, founded 1995. At the time of conducting the research, the school had 340 students between ages 3-16. Today, the school has 448 students enrolled with an encompassing membership of approximately 1500.

At Lemshaga, the children work in a learning environment, which emphasizes Sweden’s cultural inheritance and the link with nature, while simultaneously creating an environment that stimulates joy in gaining tangible experience in technology that is essential while living in the global society of today. At the core of the school’s philosophy are a number of objectives, which also stress the school’s commitment to combine the past and the future. Those objectives are:

• To emphasize the rich Swedish traditions while living in today’s global society
• To develop and maintain the identity as creative and visionary organizers of education
• To build upon earlier successes to support the efforts to aspire to doing well in the future
• To realize that human potential has no limits and can always be expanded
• To be sensitive to human needs and to encourage teachers and school administrators to actively contribute to the focus of the Lemshaga learning communities shared goals.

**Education for the family**

A unique creative component of the community is the emphasis it places on the valuable role, which the family plays in a child’s education. Unlike other schools whose curricula stress the needs of the *child*, the Lemshaga community stresses the needs of the *whole family*.

The staff at the school encourages families to take part in the voluntary parents’ program. Once a month, on average, one parent per family takes part in the program in activities such as: building consensus, using the parents’ library or a parents’ evening. Most parents take part in at least one of the school’s many planning groups. The groups consist of eight to ten members made up of representatives of the parents, teachers and members of the local community. The function of the groups is to help define and evaluate the focus of the school on a day-to-day basis.

**Students, Employees, Family and Technology**

The goal of Lemshaga Akademi was to function as a pilot project for educational reform within a global context. Expectations were set high when starting in 1995, especially in respect to how the school had integrated information technology into the curriculum. The school had taken the challenge very seriously, and they developed a unique policy in respect to integration of technology. At that time, it was unique that a three year old was learning with computers.

The school considers that facts, information and knowledge are interrelated and important, but not synonymous. Facts need to be organized to become information.
A world-leading technology-company was partnering with the school by assisting with the latest technology. In return they got to use the school as an educational model within their own organization. After they had seen the process and perspective on learning at Lemshaga, they commented: “Your students have the chance to develop 21st century literacy in truly constructivist ways, not just theoretical learning”.

The National Agency of Education’s Inspection Review in Sweden was carried out November 17-18, 2011: Their comments relating back to the research questions were:

Knowledge: The results from the school’s work with knowledge are of a very high level. Students’ knowledge development is very good and the school provides support for those students that do not achieve the objectives. Leadership: In order to strengthen the pedagogical leadership, it is shared between two principals with well-defined work descriptions; a pedagogical development leader and a pedagogical coordination leader. Pedagogues with specific responsibility/interest for development areas handle the pedagogical issues in the work team.

**Parental participation**

On the school’s intranet, which parents and students have access to, teachers publish weekly letters and an open dialogue is carried out regarding current and priority issues. According to parents, this functions extremely well. Parental operations are also carried out through so-called parent coordinators, two from each class, who meet with the rector and school’s pedagogical development leader once a month. In addition, parents are invited to parent meetings and development conferences as well as to meetings regarding, for example, the school’s various projects. The inspectors have assessed that the cooperation with parents is very good.
The Social Milieu: Roots of Resistance to Change

Central to my investigation was the need to contextualize Lemshaga Akademi’s efforts within a Swedish society, the historical legacy of its people and the social norms and expectations which people bring to the education and schooling. In this way, I hope not only to locate Lemshaga’s development within its cultural context but also to draw some conclusions about the nature of reform processes, examining the inter-relational dynamics that affect those processes. While Lemshaga Akademi was a special case, I was hoping that through this study, I would be able to illustrate the connections between micro level practice and macro level policy making and consider their relevance to other potential settings.

I recognized that I was in dangerous territory in trying to characterize a nations’ people with a set of generic descriptions. Such generalizations are necessarily contentious but are, nonetheless, the subject of a substantial body of literature (Hampden-Turner, 1993)and Trompenaars,1993). Geert Hofstede’s (2001) studies, of national cultures have been widely used to identify seminal traits including Sweden as one of the countries in the world with the smallest ‘power distance’ between leaders and led but at the same time exhibiting a tendency to downplay achievements which exceed or challenge the norm.

Understanding something of the historical background is a useful prelude to discussion of contemporary Swedish society and normative behavior.

The Historical Context—Background

A historical view of the Swedish people depicts them as steeped in tradition. Their character reflects the determination and strength common among individuals whose national history was borne out of a revolt against excessive taxation demands by a ruling
foreign monarch and a desire for the establishment of a sovereign nation. Since 1434, the world has experienced the uniquely identifiable presence of the "Swede" (Lindqvist, 1994). The Swedish value system places a premium on tradition and freedom from subservience to any foreign power. The roots of that system can be traced back to the territorial-unifying reign of Gustav Vasa, whose monarchy coincided with what has come to be known as the Swedish Reformation, and whose influence forever put a stamp on what the Swede perceives herself/himself to be. By the time of his death in 1560, Gustav Vasa had made certain that a national state had been welded together, and that the state had a national political assembly in place to allow the citizens a voice in the government. In addition, he established a hereditary line of succession to rule this young nation. Unfortunately, the elder Vasa’s strengths were not passed on to his offspring. In the years that followed, much family in fighting preoccupied the monarchy and ultimately disturbed the peace valued by the citizenry. It would take a succession of monarchs and many years for the security of the elder Vasa's reign to again return to rock the cradle of this nation still in its infancy (Lindqvist, 1994).

In the meantime, the populace returned to its roots, the country and the security of the farm and the village. For it was in this setting that the ordinary person found the ability to personally take control of his/her own destiny. World events were left to the king and his power bases. The world of the common person was measured not in military victories or Ages of Enlightenment and Freedoms, but rather in rows of crops and head of livestock. "National concerns" for these people included the length of the growing season, the amount of annual rainfall and the number of livestock that survived the winter. In nature could be found all the elements necessary for the common person's
peace, harmony and security. So it was to nature, not to the affairs of the State, that the common person looked for a sense of personal tranquility.

With the coming of the Industrial Age to Sweden, a new social class of workers emerged. No longer connected to the medieval guilds, these workers banded together to form worker trade unions. In the course of their protection for their members, these unions staged strikes and pressed for freedom from exploitation and a demand for better living conditions. In the midst of this co-operative spirit, there also rose a new political party, the Social Democratic Party. So popular was the platform of this new political group that during the decade of 1895-1905, its membership increased by 600% and became for the industrial populace a political voice for their aspirations and hopes. Predicated on a philosophy that the State should protect the populace's physical/social/educational well-being, the government of the early 1900s, strongly influenced by the fledgling Social Democrat ideology, was actively engaged in a policy of assuring the creation and support of numerous social and commercial causes generally far out of the reach of private business (Daun, 1998).

This process of social concern led naturally to a policy of "cradle-to-grave security" and the emergence of the welfare state (Hort, 2014). By 1932, the seeds for a welfare state had been planted and nurtured, and the bouquet had only to be picked. Sweden was to become the most comprehensive welfare state in the world. Central to their plan, the goal of the nation was to have a classless society where everyone was equal. Their policies were focused on a social reform plan aimed at "leveling out social advantage and disadvantage". Although this utopian dream has not yet fully been realized, it is clear that Sweden has almost no poverty and there exists a national respect
for what the Swedes call "lagom", which roughly translated means "sufficiency in life". So powerful is this belief in lagom that Swedes appear to almost religiously subscribe to a self-disciplined lifestyle that eschews excesses and where striving for individuality is looked upon as being socially inappropriate (Wallenberg, 1997).

The Lexin Swedish-English dictionary defines lagom as "enough, sufficient, adequate, just right." Lagom is also widely translated as "in moderation," "in balance," "optimal," "reasonable," and "average." But whereas words like "sufficient" and "average" suggest some degree of abstinence, scarcity, or failure, lagom decidedly carries the connotation of perfection or appropriateness. The archetypical Swedish proverb "Lagom är bäst," literally "Lagom is best," is translated as "Enough is as good as a feast" in the Lexin dictionary.

It is rare, argues Lindqvist (1994), for Swedish people to speak openly against the middle way and for what some Swedes are starting to refer to as a “better way." In contrast to lagom, the better way is an enhanced way of life, which results from a blending of the values basic to Swedish tradition (and its roots to nature and a belief in betterment for all its citizens) with a value for human individuality and individual potential. Advocates of the "better way" assert that this blending would create a positive and dynamic force much like the alliance which was forged a few years ago among the government, the employers and the trade unions in their efforts to build a better economic base for Sweden. Publicly, however, such talk is rare even among the proponents of this approach. It is only in private that one finds evidence of a growing support for this view. For the most part, support for the "better way" would require a courageous departure from the security of the middle way. For a nation dependent on the status quo, it is
understandable why support for lagom prevails in Swedish society and the better way is yet to be realized (Lindqvist, 1994).

It was against this backdrop that Lemshaga Akademi was started. The Carpe Vitam philosophy was one that promoted a better way. It was premised on the view that there was a prevailing tendency among Swedish people to opt for the middle way and that through a different kind of educational process children and young people could learn to think for themselves and while preserving the best of an egalitarian impulse to create opportunities to excel. Initially, the intention was never to start our own school, it was to work with the existing education system. When presenting our vision to the central and local educational authorities, policy-makers, local and global businesses, parents, and teachers, we were told: “If you want others to understand and follow your vision, you must be the one to lead them. You must set the example. Otherwise you will have to preach to unseeing eyes and uncomprehending ears until the day the vision dies and becomes dust. Be the leader and start the school that shows the power of your vision. Show us what to do” (Wallenberg, 1996).

We had an opportunity to see the vision come to fruition. It was important that the idea of the school would be integrated in to the local community and not a separate unit in its own micro-universe. The debate over public schools that are privately run or public schools was not important to us. Building community with family, students, teachers, local and national businesses, policy makers in a partnership with local government was the goal. The vouchers concept made it possible for each municipality to fund the school-system through taxes.

Today there are 448 students at Lemshaga, and it encompasses about 1500
members. Within a short period of time Lemshaga became a national model for education reform and an international example of what can be done when one thinks globally, and acts locally (Skolinspektionen, 2011; Wallenberg, 1996). There was a great deal of interest from local, national and international; media (www.carpevitam.us/library), schools, governments, businesses, in order to see an example of one way of revising the old Swedish Model through education.

However, to make the plan work, considerable thought, planning and preparation by the nation as a whole was required. Compared to the present educational and social welfare system, the plan for a new model was an alternative, which changes the philosophy of welfare from welfare entitlement to welfare responsibility, from educationally dependent to educationally empowered. It was an approach that was steeped in all the good intentions of the original Swedish Model (Hort, 2014). The New Swedish Model (Wallenberg, 1997) was a plan that required everyone to think in terms of redefining the purpose of education and welfare and the demands made on those systems. It was a plan, which required new policies, and especially a new role in a decentralized system between a local government, schools and the family, instead of the central government. Parental involvement was key and the school and family would become an extension of each other. It was a plan that was based on the idea of providing to people in ways that improve their lives both in the present and in the future. It was definitely not a plan that simply takes something away without replacing it with something else. Finally, it was a plan, which emphasized the value of interdependency versus dependency.

It had become clear that Sweden was ready to take on the challenge of a decentralized system. The Carpe Vitam education model became one of the very first in Sweden.
Sometimes it helps to start over

As previously discussed, the current educational system was outdated. It was designed in the 19th century to prepare children for the transition from working on farms to working in factories. That philosophy believed that students were to be passively filled with knowledge as they moved through their years of schooling on the educational conveyor belt. Children were supposed to assimilate only basic knowledge, and all other skills were seen as an unnecessary luxury (Fiske, 1992).

Today’s teaching methods were in need of radical improvement if students were to be verbally and mathematically competent. However, much more than that was needed to attain success in preparing them for the 21st century. In the Information Age of today, the way in which students learn is of equal importance to what they learn. Studies have shown that whilst the majority of adults have long since forgotten what they learnt, they have maintained their ways of learning (Fiske, 1992; Postman, 1996). This habit of passively drilling information instead of actively acquiring knowledge is no longer viable preparation for employment, or for life itself.

Many curricula today lack the basic principle that permeates the workplaces in today’s global society (Senge, 2012). Systems’ thinking is a process that supports today’s delegated decision-making by affording an overview and an understanding of the interaction between what appear to be completely unrelated parts of the system. Systems thinking (Senge, 2012) brings together data and information in order to create knowledge and understanding, as well as a view of the system as a whole. Invaluable as a tool in the entire scope of daily lives, it is a tool that helps to better understand the increasing complexity of the workplace of the Information Age. Systems-thinking is the process
being used in forward thinking organizations to restructure the workplace, and to create work teams that can function across borders, can see the organization as a whole and can take part in delegated decision-making. This is in contrast to the needs of the Industrial Age, where work was often broken down into smaller, simpler components so that results could be more easily predicted and controlled and workers seldom knew or understood the whole picture.

Today, being prepared for a working life with delegated responsibility means being a self-starter with more than the capacity to answer questions and carry out orders. It also means being adequately prepared for today’s joint decision-making and requires a more actively autonomous form of learning.

The students of today should not be simply machines that carry out the orders of a controlling elite. They should not be learning unthinking, repetitive actions, but instead students in knowledge, well-versed in systems-thinking who help to design and control the overriding learning process so that work is carried out correctly from the outset. This is the way in which the “right from the outset” concept of quality, the goal of total quality management, can be achieved.

In today’s economy, it is often the case that those who do not succeed in school quite simply have no chance of getting a meaningful job. The resulting unemployment involves high social and economic costs. Even those who do manage to progress through a conventional education with some success have not necessarily been trained to do anything more than passively respond to orders. They are often not prepared to take an active part in shaping the work process for “right from the outset” quality, or in acquiring the new skills that will be required of them in the future.
The revolutionary changes in the job market require the school-system to widen the curricula in order to create a new, more flexible construct which will enable students to manage the increasing pace of change. This will include the ability to assimilate systems-thinking, working together in teams, taking initiative and active acquisition of the new skills that are required in today’s world of business. Global education needs include the concept of “right from the outset”. With this concept, it is felt that the job must be done properly right from the start for each student. It is no longer acceptable to anticipate that a certain percentage of students will inevitably fail.

However, before changing the way of acting, change is needed in certain deep-rooted notions of children and what they need in order to succeed in their learning. It is needed to progress beyond the commonly accepted idea that children with inherent mathematical or linguistic abilities achieve success in school, whereas children who are less gifted in these areas do poorly. All children need the same opportunity to develop into successful students and individuals, and the expectations need to be raised significantly as to what children are capable of achieving.

**Born to Learn**

In order to make it possible for students to live up to these increased expectations, the replacement of the conveyor belt style system of progression through the grades with “autonomous learning” needed to change. That theory is based on modern cognitive psychology research and draws on the idea of a natural predisposition for learning that every human being is born with (Angelow, 2013).

Autonomous learning is more self-directed learning, and is totally unlike the earlier Swedish system of levels, in which students were ferried through curricula in a
rigid system of year grades within which they completed for high marks (Clark, et al. 2005). They finished one grade in the summer, and were moved together to the next grade in the autumn, virtually without any consideration of the progress that they had learnt during that year.

The system of autonomous learning, on the other hand, makes allowances for every student’s unique learning style, allowing every student to develop at their own pace in an environment which stimulates cooperation. Students are in control of their own learning situation, and do not progress until they are ready to do so. This also draws clear attention to any learning difficulties, instead of allowing them to grow unnoticed, or causing students to be branded as failures. With guidance, students develop an individual learning plan in which progress is being evaluated by themselves, their parents and teachers. (Wallenberg, 1997).

In a system of autonomous learning, the purpose of assessment would not be to pass or fail students at the end of the year, but rather to support them in their progress by helping them to understand what they have gained full control over and what requires further attention. Students’ daily documentation of their own progress can be regularly evaluated with teachers and parents. At suitable intervals, and when students are ready to demonstrate what they have learnt, this documentation could also be supplemented by oral exercises in front of a panel consisting of teachers and fellow students. These oral exercises might be prepared in a written assignment, supplemented by a portfolio of the child’s work.

Students are not only passive “customers” in school; they are also active participants who are primarily responsible for their own results. Older students, once they
have “learnt how to learn”, can teach others and deepen their own levels of understanding. Younger students derive great benefits from the assistance of older students by learning from peers who share more closely related experience bases. It is a partnership of value to all students. At Lemshaga, experience indicated (Wallenberg-Lerner, 2006) that students reacted positively to acting as teachers’ assistants and mentors, and those being taught responded well to the more personal one-on-one contact.

By conferring on students the authority and opportunity to help in teaching, schools will not only gain a valuable resource, but the students themselves will gain in the self-esteem they will need in the dynamic workplace they will encounter once they have left school.

Business has a meaningful role to play in facilitating change. Together with students and parents, the business community is one of education’s most important participants. Mostly, its role has only been financial, especially where higher education is concerned. The business community could play a vital role in the early stages of the education system; preschool and basic school, by helping to define the standards to be included in the curricula which are necessary for an evaluation of the organization of the school and to increase the awareness of the general public of the need for change.

The business community should not only be regarded as a source of supplementary income, but should also be seen as an asset in respect to expert help involving direct participation on school boards, programs for setting total quality in motion, programs of communication to increase awareness in the community and active participation in the classroom.

As a result of companies working in partnership with schools through school-
workplace programs, apprenticeship programs and on-the-job training programs, the business community will experience noticeable savings in readjustment, training, recruiting and improved productivity. When fruitful opportunities open up for those who had not intended to go to university or college, many will consider other choices, especially since companies are now starting to expand their staff development programs. Finally, Sweden’s fragmented education system with its ten years of compulsory schooling, its higher education and business education will become a unified learning system, reducing the time needed for formal attendance in educational institutions, and at the same time providing the flexibility needed for life-long learning.

In general, people are of the mistaken belief that improvements in quality mean higher costs. However, that is not always the case. If everyone in the system; administrators, teachers, parents and students, became involved in improvements; there would be no limit to the quality that could be achieved without any extra costs. Many costs could be avoided by using strategies such as:

- Doing things right – right from the outset
- Creating closer ties between preschools, compulsory basic schools, higher education and business
- Encouraging autonomous learning

"We have met the enemy - and it is us"

Innovative schools are only as good as we demand they should be. The general public could have a much greater influence than it has today if people became more involved in public education. There is nothing that is more important for our collective
future than the quality of our education system.

Irrespective of the way that citizens handle improvements to education, at the national or local level, as private individuals or public citizens, we need to remember the primary importance of three basic points (Wallenberg, 1997):

1. We must concentrate on improving the educational system in its entirety. We need to restructure education to meet the needs of the new economy, not simply to repair a small, faulty component part.

2. We must create choice for parents and students. This involves, but is not limited to, the concept of the “right to choose schools”.

3. We must find a way to make best use of the individuals’ spirit of enterprise. This is a strategy that schools should emphasize from the earliest years of schooling. A strategy for “killing two birds with one stone” is for the government, via the communities, to maintain an overview of school policy and the delivery of education, whilst school functions and services can be bought in from private training and education companies.

One Size Fits All?

Advocates of these more humanistic views argue neither for school effectiveness nor school improvement, but for adopting a more organic learning-centered perspective and improving the nature of environments, which nurture growth and create intelligence (Perkins, 2003).

For Gardner (2011), the goal should be to help a child’s development across a range of multiple intelligences. His best-known work, Frames of Mind (2011), delineates his
theory of multiple intelligences, not the one intelligence generally associated with IQ testing. Gardner is complemented by the Goleman (2006) addition of emotional intelligence to the list of multiple intelligences. His belief, supported by empirical data, is that quality education should not simply address what have come to be termed the ‘basic skills’ but should also foster the creative spirit of the learner.

Comer (1988) a child psychiatrist at Yale university believes that quality school environments should recognize that many children come to school lacking the requisite “social capital” for school success, relative to readiness, experience, and social skills. The “effective” school is, for him, one that strives to create a learning environment that supports both achievement within those domains, and fosters the development of appropriate interpersonal skills. It supports development of the “total child” in respect of intellect, social and emotional growth.

It is in this dynamic global context that education reform is now being discussed. The discussion is based on the language of learning organizations, learning communities, systems thinking, and empowering leadership. Above all, it is a discussion that revolves around the concept of personal mastery and the “spirit” of the learning organization. For Senge (2012) “...organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning. But without it, no organizational learning occurs.” (p.139)

According to Senge (2012), organizations are often less knowledgeable and skillful than their members, and sometimes, “cannot seem to learn what everybody knows” (p.71); but organizations can also have a collective wisdom that exceeds that of their individuals.
Central to the Senge definition of a learning organization is the recognition that the old dogma of planning, organizing and controlling (which, he argues, is more typical of lesser quality organizations) is of less importance in a learning organization than helping learners develop a sense of personal mastery.

“Personal mastery” is the phrase (used)…for the discipline of personal growth and learning. People with high levels of personal mastery are continually expanding their ability to create the results of the life that they truly seek. From their quest for continual learning comes the spirit of the learning organization…. Personal mastery goes beyond competence and skills, though it is grounded in competence and skills. …People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode. They never “arrive”…. (It) is not something you possess. It is a process” (Senge, 2012 pp.141-142).

To this resource base of intellectual capital, Hargreaves (2003) adds a second form of capital- social capital; “Another of a school’s invisible assets is its social capital, a term that covers the character and quality of the social relationships within an organization. Culturally, social capital is the level of trust between head and staff and among the staff, between staff and students and among the student body as a whole.” (Hargreaves, 2003)

**Issues of leadership**

What constitutes leadership in the reform setting is a central question in the investigation. It is widely agreed among those who have studied or written about leadership that the greatest need today is visioning a determination to bring about proactive change and the creation of a self-sustaining learning organization. Others point out that ultimately proactive change and the creation of a learning environment are the
underlying goals for most organizational leaders.

Two specific forms of leadership were highlighted in the literature (Hargreaves, 2003) as being key to organizational improvement. These are ‘transformational’ and ‘situational’ leadership. In a situational leadership setting, the leader helps the group focus on its performance and problem issues in a rational manner, and assumes a number of factors that define successful leadership (Macbeath, 2004). The focus in situational leadership is on the observed behavior of leaders and their group members in various situations, not on any hypothetical inborn or acquired ability or potential for leadership.

Transformational leadership is primarily concerned with how power is shared in various situations experienced by the organization (Macbeath, 2004). Transformational leadership focuses on how a leader empowers others to follow their lead and, when appropriate, supports others in assuming the role of leader. When the intention is for a group to ultimately assume responsibility for its organizational development, transformational leadership is advocated as a powerful approach.

Central to an understanding of transformational leadership is the awareness that no leader can actually empower the organization to achieve its goals. In large part, transformational leadership is the means by which existing potential power within the organization is distributed so that progressively leadership becomes a shared activity among its members. In a school setting transformational leadership is the means by which the successful leader creates opportunities for students, teachers and parents to face their problems and to take the initiative in solving them.

Building Community

The creation of the Lemshaga learning community stemmed from a vision to create
a learning community that aimed to provide a transnational curriculum for any child and all families that shared a similar interest. Transnational curriculum means a perspective from a global and local perspective, and Francois (2010) suggested glocal education as a framework to nurture tolerance for diversity in order to build learning community. He defined glocal education as “education policies and practices that provide students, faculty members, and higher education administrators a melding globalized and localized perspective of the world, through integration of global opportunities and the protection of local assets, traditions, values, and beliefs” (p. 252). Further, Francois (2012), asserted that transcultural integration can foster tolerance for diversity in modern society, because of its implications for transcultural competence, defined as “the ability to engage in intercultural interactions that transcend standards of cross-cultural differences and similarities through alternative space creation that is safer for both integration and questioning” (p. 10).

Lemshaga is anchored in a number of basic principles, including:

- Diversity is Life
- Consensus building is essential to community building
- Process is the every bit as, perhaps even more, important than product
- Common unity is the root to all community
- People excel when they maximize human intelligence and capital
- Systems Thinking is necessary for dynamic consensus building
- Change is good; chaos, or unmanaged change, is not good
• Values-based living is the key to personal and interpersonal happiness
• The Middle-Way has a tendency to breed “learned helplessness” and dependency

Built on these key principles, Lemshaga learning community became a dynamic community, culture driven by its principles, where the family, the school, government and the business community worked together to encourage interdependency rather than dependency among its membership. Its goal was to be transformational rather than static. It encouraged communication skills, emotional intelligence development, full realization of each person’s individual best and letting change and adaptation for change be the process for living, not the master of peoples lives.

Macbeath and Chen (2008) asserted, that in a successful learning community, a strong link between exists between; the degree of teachers’ collective responsibility for student learning, the overall level of professional learning operating within a school; and the strength of leadership on pedagogy. According to Macbeth et al. (2008), “productive school leadership was found to include a high focus on a culture of care, a strong commitment to a dispersal of leadership and involved relationships amongst the school community, and a high focus on supporting professional development and learning community” (p.6).

Unfortunately, the Lemshaga community had to learn the importance of satisfying everyone’s needs the hard way and from experience. Specifically, at the time I was conducting the research, the school had just completed its third principal within a two-year period. The first two principals, although excellent professionals, alienated one or
more segments of the community and had to leave. It seemed that being “old school” administrators and not trained as change agents, they tried to institute policies that favored the segment(s) of the population that most closely paralleled their own concepts of how a reform environment should function. If they were strong community and business oriented, they focused on that approach for the entire population. If they were more family inclusive in their philosophy, they favored giving parents more decision-making authority. In the end, they made some segment of the community happy, but at the expense of the other segments. As a consequence, for much of the time since I had vacated my role as the visionary leader, where I had served as a robust “fanner of the visionary flame”, the organization and morale were in serious trouble and the community almost ceased to function.

Perhaps, if appropriate research had been conducted before the forming of the vision and the start of the school, one could have been more attuned to this issue and made the principal selections more appropriately focused from research on leadership in a reform initiative that must be supportive of all members, not just those traditionally favored.

The prototype

The vision was based on Howard Gardner’s theories of the human multiple intelligences. Gardner (2011) argues that intelligence is categorized into three primary or overarching categories, those of which are formulated by the abilities. According to Gardner, intelligence is: 1) The ability to create an effective product or offer a service that is valued in a culture, 2) a set of skills that make it possible for a person to solve problems in life, and 3) the potential for finding or creating solutions for problems, which
involves gathering new knowledge. At Lemshaga, this was coupled with the pedagogic approach of Reggio Emilia (Thornton and Brunton, 2014). In that approach, the focus is on the child and the teacher is considered a collaborator with the child. The parents are partners and collaborators, and advocate for their children. Visible Thinking learning routines (Ritchart, Church and Morrison, 2011) are well integrated at Lemshaga Akademi to develop children’s self esteem through critical thinking. It is a flexible and systematic research-based approach to integrating the development of students’ thinking with content learning across subject matters.

With an extensive and adaptable collection of practices, Visible Thinking has a dual goal: on the one hand, to cultivate students’ thinking skills and dispositions, and, on the other, to deepen content learning. Thinking dispositions mean curiosity, concern for truth and understanding, a creative mindset, not just being skilled but also alert to thinking and learning opportunities and eager to take them.

The school's curriculum objective was the result of many years of gathering data from other schools from around the world. In compulsory education in Sweden, there is a national guide to be used by all schools. A national educational government agency (skolverket) is producing a standardized test in order to evaluate the graduating grade 9, rather than each individual. As a proof of quality, Lemshaga has always been in the forefront in the nation (skolinspektionen, 2011) according to those tests. As far as evaluation, the school’s main focus has always been more holistic.

**Challenges and lessons learned**

In most successful stories, there are usually failed attempts. If the belief is that people learn from mistakes that was Lemshaga’s experience. At Lemshaga the goal was
to create a vibrant learning community. To that end, the creation of a visionary team was a first step in that process. The second step was to help that team to develop decision-making skills centering on consensus building and empowerment. This, in turn, led to the third step of identifying what leadership styles would prove most effective in fulfilling the goals of the vision. Ensuing trial and error resulted in many failed attempts and temporary periods of angst for those integrally involved in the life of the school and those who observed from a greater distance. Eventually, the concept of transformational leadership was embraced, where the leader saw that extraordinary change required building extraordinary relationships with diverse people with diverse views that can communicate with each other in new ways (Senge, 1990). At that point, after a period of principals being retained and then let go, the visionary team retained the services of two leaders with shared leadership, whose leadership styles were transformational in its focus. This appeared to be the keys to what made a community-wide sense of success take root.

The simple reason why shared leadership by two principals at Lemshaga was better than one, was that when system-thinking applies they can support each other in reflection as well as utilize their own strengths. The administrative and fiscal role of the school should not be more important for a principal than the relationship with the students and their parents (Pearce & Conger, 2003).

Using this working definition of effective leadership in the reform arena, it is also important to understand the dynamics of the setting that was the focus of the investigation at The Lemshaga Akademi.

**Evaluation from vision to reality**

Understanding “what the vision meant in practice” was a primary focus of the
investigation (Wallenberg-Lerner, 2006). How does one ultimately determine “success” of a learning community from a transnational perspective? Any attempt to develop a universal definition for determining “success” in local educational reform initiatives is bound to generate debate.

Macbeath (1999), for example, argued: “Schools which speak for themselves account for the trust invested in them by giving quality accounts, providing evidence for what is deemed to be worthwhile and, as schools, how they measure up to that trust.” (pp. 5-6) This perspective, together with the views directly defining a successful learning community; for example, Senge (2012) and others, served as a guide in identifying what was meant by the concept of ‘success’ and the roles of external as against internal evaluators. On this point, Senge (2012) asserts: “The core challenge faced by the aspiring learning organization is to develop tools and processes for conceptualizing the big picture and testing ideas in practice. All in the organization must master the cycle of thinking, doing, evaluating, and reflecting. Without, there is no valid learning... In a learning organization leaders may start by pursuing their own vision, but as they listen carefully to others’ vision they begin to see that their own personal vision is part of something larger. This does not diminish any leader’s sense of responsibility for the vision- if anything it deepens it.” (pp. 351-352)

Important in assessing Lemshaga’s success was the extent to which the school reflected the tenets of positive reform and leadership as defined above. However, since it was necessary to specifically place that assessment within the Swedish context of reform, it was critical that the investigation viewed Lemshaga not just through a general lens, but also through a Swedish reform lens.
Many educational systems in today’s global society continue to mirror the outdated practices of traditional education (Fiske, 1992). This approach continues to encourages children to engage in values of learned helplessness and a dependency on a welfare system. Traditional Swedish education emphasized teaching, not learning. Getting good grades and high scores on tests is a goal in the traditional school. At Lemshaga the goal was to challenge young people to discover the best in themselves. Grades and tests are important, but helping a child discover his or her own potential and strive to achieve that potential is what made Lemshaga a special type of schooling experience.

Running through responses from the study (Wallenberg-Lerner, 2006) to issues of effectiveness and improvement was a central strand of Lemshaga reform efforts intended to make for happier, healthier citizens. As one student put it: “Coming here is fun, I know it’s supposed to be about learning and getting good grades, but that is not what I mostly think about. I can do things here and not be afraid of failing at anything I try.” The reference to getting “good grades” as “what it's supposed to be about” is a reference to the wider social constituency and not to Lemshaga, as students see asserting their own independence is made possible by an environment in which trying and being allowed to fail is at the heart of what makes this school “good”.

A Teacher/Parent paralleled this view by noting: “At Lemshaga, failure only happens if you are not willing to try. Fear of failing is common in other schools, not at Lemshaga” A co-visionary spoke to this same issue noting that: “...this initiative began with a simple intent, make learning fun, put fun first because no one learns best when afraid.”

The importance of choice as an intrinsic element of a good school is discussed by
one respondent/board member in terms of the contrast with the kind of school she was familiar with as a student, setting her comment in a context in which the option to choose one's own path is a broader social expectation. “When I went to school it was required that we do certain things. Choice was limited and I guess that it never even crossed our minds. Today, kids expect to have choices in everything they do...so why should they not expect to have choices in their school?”

Clearly, different individuals have differing “favorite” views as to what constitutes a good school. At the end of the day, however, one theme prevailed in all of stakeholder responses: Lemshaga is a reform effort intended to transform students into happier, healthier and more empowered citizens. Given the stereotype view that Swedes are a depressed group of people, perhaps embedded in each of these responses is the hope that opportunities afforded by places such as Lemshaga can influence not only the academic aspects of individual learning, but also their deeper psychological needs as well.

**Why seek reform?**

It was clear from both documentary and interview sources that Lemshaga set high aspirations, which may not have been immediately or easily achievable. However, from a variety of perspectives, to do less would not have brought the benefits of reform to the community. The answer to the question 'why seek reform' was that for members of the Lemshaga community, "lagom" (and its belief that “just enough is a banquet”), was seen as no longer tenable for the life in a global society where the concept of "lagom" is synonymous with mediocrity. A business leader and respondent put it in the following terms: “In the business world it’s about competency and demonstration of your ability. Proof of that skill is demonstrated by being able to get and keep a job. Sweden has for
long been a welfare society that undermined a young person’s need to excel. One result of this has been the fact that so many of the brightest students leave Sweden for other markets...I believe that Lemshaga can become a new standard for our country.”
(Wallenberg-Lerner 2006, p.73)

From this viewpoint Sweden is a nation that had come to a crossroads. If “lagom” is allowed to remain as a prevailing ethic, simply maintaining national traditions and values, this comes at the expense of not assuring a vibrant national economy in a competitive and challenging global economic environment. In embracing the need for reform the Lemshaga community had recognized this conundrum and accepted the challenge. Predicated on its desire to create “an extraordinary school for ordinary children”, it had chosen to create a program that endeavors to maximize the “capital gains” advocated by Hargreaves (2003).

A recurrent theme within the interviews was the importance of a bi-directional learning model, in an organizational system that promotes transformational leadership, in which the community celebrates on another's member’s human potential and where interpersonal skills are the foundation for ongoing dialogue; where leadership strives to make decision-making a more open and democratic process and change is viewed not as a threat but as an opportunity for continued growth, where the seeds of intellectual and social capital are sown.

The attainment of Lemshaga's goals is viewed not as a 'fait accompli' but as a process or a journey, which is kept alive by leadership not in an individualistic or heroic sense but as distributed to all members of the community including students. As interviews with student themselves demonstrated, when they are treated with respect, and
space is created for them to think and exercise their own authority, reform is given the impetus and leverage that translates an aspiration into a lived reality.

**The road ahead**

This inquiry began as a journey of discovery. The map for the path I travelled was focused primarily on a place called The Lemshaga Learning Community. The compass was the need to better understand why a particular vision for education reform; the Carpe Vitam vision at Lemshaga metamorphosed into a catalyst for broader educational reform, becoming a focus for not only a community, but a national debate, in its turn generating a number of interesting collateral reform initiatives both locally and internationally. That vision was predicated on the goal of helping to build a society in which children can grow up to become positive, inquisitive, productive individuals, emboldened with a strong sense of security and self-belief. The vision was of a society in which schools and local authorities would work with the larger community to build a sense of shared purpose through the creation of exemplary learning communities.

At the core of that vision was the recognition that for such a society to actually exist, there must first exist a dynamic connectedness among several key elements of that society, the family, teachers, stake-holders in business and social policy makers, working together to forge a spirit of common unity.

Based on that vision, The Lemshaga Akademi was offered as a rallying point for those who also valued that vision. The school was established as an extraordinary school for ordinary children, as an intelligent school, one in which “implicit theories become explicit and are reshaped as new levels of insight emerge” (Macbeath, 2005). The Lemshaga school is a voucher school, which means it is public school for families with
all economic backgrounds within a private initiative. It was established to serve all Swedish children, regardless of their background or potential, and as a setting that best fulfilled its ambitious goals.

The way forward

After two decades of operation, Lemshaga learning community continues to progress towards the fulfillment of its mission, with a frank acknowledgment of the challenges it faces and has yet to overcome. Longevity alone does not explain the reasons for Lemshaga’s continuing success. Questions surrounding the combination of other factors that could explain success provided the impetus for this research (Wallenberg-Lerner, 2006). One factor was shared, or ‘dual’, leadership (Pearce et al., 2003) in which there was shared time for reflection attempt to find the balance between ‘maintenance’ and ‘change’, sustainability and innovation. Central to the inquiry was the desire to explain for the factors, which contributed, to Lemshaga’s perceived success and to try and tease out the complex skein of factors that could explain its ‘how’ and ‘why’ it was widely seen as successful initiative.

The humanistic considerations: unity in a learning community

As noted in the previous chapter, a Lemshaga parent expressed in his own words what it is that makes Lemshaga a success. He described the caring and encompassing nature of the connection between the school and the surrounding community. He focused on the importance of the connection that must exist between the school environment and the otherwise “real” world if the school is to have value in the community outside the walls of the school. Without offering statistical measures to substantiate his case he nevertheless knew intuitively that Lemshaga had provided the stable, safe haven that
allowed his daughter to adapt and adjust to the many changes in her life going on outside the walls of the school, and made it possible for her to maximize her human potentials.

Irrespective of what interviewees might choose to call it, there does exist at Lemshaga a distinctive form of a “learning community”. The findings from this enquiry demonstrated that many strands made up the weave that defined the Lemshaga Learning Community. The record was also clear that often, different sub-groups of the sample voiced differing opinions sometimes even conflicting perspectives, to explain the nature of success in Lemshaga. Nevertheless, the predominant belief at this reform initiative was that Lemshaga had created a tightly woven fabric called a learning community that binds both end users and non end users and served to unify them into one common purpose and set of values.

**The humanistic considerations: leadership**

As noted earlier, leadership was a significant and recurring theme with all stakeholders. At Lemshaga, leadership was consistently viewed in the context of “keeping the vision of Lemshaga alive”. Metaphorically speaking, the role played by leadership in the school was likened to a high performance-racing engine that required key integral elements to be tuned to continuous high performance. At Lemshaga, the quality and ‘fuel’ of leadership was compared to the lubrication and maintenance required by such a high performing engine. Evidence from this study suggested that maintaining leadership in Lemshaga depends in large part on it being shared in nonetheless, those in leadership positions are cautious in their assessment of their performance and see a need for a greater distribution of leadership in the future, particularly with regard to students and their families.
There was a commitment to further sharing of leadership within the school, because it is recognized that positive interpersonal relationships are both cause and consequence of distribution and that such sharing empowers both end users and non end users as they work to develop consensus in the decision-making process. Evident, at least in embryo is a willingness and explicit desire to share leadership as one of the keys to the future of the school. It is the means by which the various interconnected parts of the system can keep friction to a minimum and pay constant attention to assessing, and addressing, the needs of the various parts, which make the whole.

**Conclusion**

This enquiry began with the intention to answer two very broad questions, but in the process clearly gave rise to a number of other questions related to the interface of research and policy, the relevance and applicability of differing methodologies and the role of leadership.

Within that context, the conclusions can be summarized as follows: 1) When success is measured against its ability to fulfill the goals of its stated mission, Lemshaga was proving to be a successful learning community, one that was learning and continued to learn but conscious that it has not yet achieved an end point. In the Lemshaga mission statement, the goal of improving the learner’s and the organization’s capital value was one of the major focus points for this community. To that end the school had placed a high priority on developing the learner’s intellectual and social capital, while simultaneously aiming to maximize the community’s organizational capital.

As a result of the enquiry, the understanding about those dynamics was that in large part they all related to one theme, leadership; and more specifically, to what extent
leadership was exercised in respect to the original vision, at the core of which was the understanding that the degree to which the schools defined and strived to meet their goals determines the future intellectual, social and organizational capital of the community.

Schools may simply reflect the standards and dynamics of the community in which they are located, or they may function in isolation from those communities altogether, or they may play an active role in the revitalization of their community. The latter of these three lies closest to what the Lemshaga learning community aspired to be and to do and has placed its faith in a quality of leadership which will, perhaps in the longer rather than the shorter term, work toward that goal.

Lemshaga’s future has not yet been written. A case study merely a snapshot in time of this one effort to becoming a fully-fledged learning community. Given Lemshaga’s belief that life is about evolution and constant change, which some in the community fondly termed as managed chaos. Lemshaga as seen today is, therefore, unlikely to remain the same in the future, a moving image rather a single well preserved snapshot.

With transformational leadership steering its potential course, the school will continue to evolve to develop a transnational curriculum, and add to what this learning community calls the Lemshaga Akademi.

Is it legitimate to conclude that Lemshaga is therefore proof of ‘best practice’ in education reform? Can replication of this initiative guarantee success in other settings? Should policy makers use the findings of this enquiry to establish new policy debate guidelines? The research lead to the conclusion that Lemshaga does not provide a model, which can simply be transplanted into a different context. It is, however, exemplary of one particularly successful approach to education reform that began predicated upon a
positive academically research validated base. It has developed a plan to create a learning community with transnational curriculum as the central element of its education reform mission, in which learning is seen as safe, adventurous, and valued by all end users, and designed to meet the needs of the community of Värmdö.

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Report no 164.


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