

## Åsa Hirsh

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I am an associate professor at the University of Gothenburg and have been an active researcher since 2009. Prior to my academic career, I spent 15 years as a teacher, instructing students aged 13-16 in Swedish and English. My passion for education, both as a teacher and a researcher, has always been deeply rooted in an interest in school processes and how we can continuously improve teaching and education to benefit students.

With a solid foundation in the field of educational assessment from my doctoral studies, my research has focused on how both formal and informal assessment information is used in teaching and school improvement processes. Since 2016, I have been part of the School Development and Educational Leadership research environment at the University of Gothenburg. In this context, I have broadened my research to include school leadership, exploring the roles of principals and school administrations in development processes.

When I first entered this environment from the perspective of teaching and assessment, I was struck by how much educational leadership research tends to overlook what I see as the 'end object' of all actions within the school system: ensuring that education is as beneficial as possible for the students. Leadership and organizational efforts at various levels should ultimately be justified by how they contribute to student outcomes and the broader mission of schools to foster democratic citizens equipped with the values and skills necessary for active participation in society. This has increasingly over the last years become a key focus of my work, emphasizing that leadership and organizational processes cannot be disconnected from the core educational processes happening between teachers and students.

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) has been a central theoretical framework for me since I completed my dissertation in 2013. As both my own research and the theory itself have evolved, CHAT has become increasingly relevant in my work. I have long been involved in research and development collaborations with school professionals, and I find CHAT to be an exceptionally powerful tool for analysing and driving change in complex organizations. It allows for true collaboration and expansive learning with a focus on empowering the agency of school professionals.

One of the most significant projects I have been part of began in 2020 and will continue until at least 2027. This collaboration involves several actor levels working together to create a more equitable education system in Sweden. It started with a partnership between 20 principals leading schools in structurally disadvantaged areas in one of Europe's most segregated cities. Together with a group of researchers from the University of Gothenburg and central school administration officials, we have used CHAT to analyse systemic contradictions and initiate formative interventions. Over time, we have reached a point where political decision-makers are now involved, and major, far-reaching changes are being implemented in ways we couldn't have imagined when we first started in 2020. I am incredibly proud of this work – real change for social justice is happening, and CHAT has been crucial.

In August 2024, I was honoured to be elected as the national coordinator for ISCAR Sweden. I am excited to contribute to the further development and dissemination of CHAT, both nationally and



globally. Below is a selection of my publications where CHAT has played a central role in one way or the other. Some of my most recent work, which describes the long-term research and development collaborations, is currently only available in Swedish. However, my intention is to eventually publish these in international journals as well.

I look forward to fruitful exchanges and collaborations with you, my CHAT colleagues, both nationally and globally in the future.

*Åsa Hirsh*

Hirsh, Å., Liljenberg, M., & Jahnke, A. (2024). Systematisk FoU-samverkan som expansivt lärande [Systematic R&D collaboration as expansive learning]. In Ifous (Ed.), *Fokus Undervisning: att utveckla undervisning inifrån och ut*. Pp. 13–36. [fokus-undervisning-rapport-240528.pdf](https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1536977)

Hirsh, Å., & Bergmo-Prvulovic, I. (2019). Teachers leading teachers—understanding middle-leaders’ role and thoughts about career in the context of a changed division of labour. *School Leadership & Management*, 39(3–4), 352–371. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1536977>

Hirsh, Å., & Segolsson, M. (2017). Enabling teacher-driven school-development and collaborative learning: An activity theory-based study of leadership as an overarching practice. *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership*, 47 (3), 400–420. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143217739363>

The two articles below are the result of the in-depth analysis phase in the expansive learning cycle of the R&D collaboration described in my presentation:

Hirsh, Å., Liljenberg, M., Jahnke, A., & Karlsson Perez, Å. (2023). Far from the generalised norm: Recognising the interplay between contextual particularities and principals’ leadership in schools in low-socio-economic status communities. *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership*, Online print. DOI: 10.1177/17411432231187349.

Liljenberg, M., Hirsh, Å., Jahnke, A., & Karlsson Perez, Å. (2023). School principals’ perceptions of autonomy and control in low-SES communities - navigating local school administration on the front line, *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, Online print. DOI: 10.1080/20020317.2023.2254677