

Educational Governance Research 1

Lejf Moos
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Editors

School Boards in the Governance Process

 Springer

Educational Governance Research

Volume 1

Series Editor

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Educational Governance Research

Aims and Scope

This series presents recent insights in educational governance gained from research that focuses on the interplay between educational institutions and societies and markets. Education is not an isolated sector. Educational institutions at all levels are embedded in and connected to international, national and local societies and markets. One needs to understand governance relations and the changes that occur if one is to understand the frameworks, expectations, practice, room for manoeuvre, and the relations between professionals, public, policy makers and market place actors.

The aim of this series is to address issues related to structures and discourses by which authority is exercised in an accessible manner. It will present findings on a variety of types of educational governance: public, political and administrative, as well as private, market place and self-governance. International and multidisciplinary in scope, the series will cover the subject area from both a worldwide and local perspective and will describe educational governance as it is practised in all parts of the world and in all sectors: state, market, and NGOs.

The series:

- Covers a broad range of topics and power domains
- Positions itself in a field between politics and management/leadership
- Provides a platform for the vivid field of educational governance research
- Looks into ways in which authority is transformed within chains of educational governance
- Uncovers relations between state, private sector and market place influences on education, professionals and students

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Chapter 1

Comparing Educational Governance

Lejf Moos and Jan Merok Paulsen

Abstract The focus of this book is educational governance at the local school district level seen in a cross-cultural perspective, which is based on national survey studies of local school boards in the Nordic countries, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

The overarching research question that has guided our studies is: *How are transnational influences and national policies transformed into local policy cultures when they meet the school boards?* In all the Nordic countries, the municipalities are equivalent with the school district level. But the point is that school districts play a similar role as the interface between state policies and the schools.

In this chapter, we briefly introduce our perspectives on the transnational influences, as they can be seen in the case of the OECD. This serves as a basis for discussing the need for looking into local conditions for educational governance that meet the transnational influences. We argue that policy borrowing should be based on robust and thorough knowledge of the context of the policy provider and also of the policy borrower. We also introduce the content of the book: the country reports and thematic chapters.

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1.1 Transnational Influences

We know from research literature that the influences from transnational agencies, especially the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), have been very visible over the last 20 years, so we wanted to find out in what ways these influences have been interpreted and translated into national political cultures and policies in our countries (Antunes 2006; Lawn and Lingard 2002). One transnational document seems to have been more influential than other: *Governance in Transition – Public Management Reforms in OECD Countries* (OECD 1995). It was produced following a well-known OECD ‘soft governance’ strategy, named the ‘peer learning’ method: Member countries have reported trends in their public management to the organisation, where the complex picture is clarified and simplified, as trends and tendencies across countries are categorised into a smaller number of main themes or categories: (1) devolving authority, providing flexibility; (2) ensuring performance, control and accountability; (3) developing competition and choice; (3) providing responsive service; (4) improving the management of human resources; (5) optimising information technology; (6) improving the quality of regulation; (7) strengthening steering functions at the centre; (8) implementing reform; and what’s next. The themes are not meant to be regulations or orders, but advices from the OECD to the member countries: National Ministries can take, transform or leave them (Moos 2009a). Knowing the OECD neo-liberal political preferences, the theme titles are extremely clear and informative.

1.2 Local and National Context

However, the advices have met country cultures, systems, traditions, and politics, and they have thereby been transformed into new shapes and forms. The ‘New Public Management’ (NPM) was not born at this moment, but it was certainly baptised, blessed and registered as a full-fledged child of the OECD with this report, and it has been adopted and transformed in many different shapes (Hood 1991). We are in a special situation, as the Nordic countries have for hundreds of years been regarded to be a much unified culture. It is so often repeated that the notion of ‘Nordic-ness’ seems to be an important aspect of dominant Nordic discourses. We are not sure that this is a correct image, so it is important for us to look into the actual politics and practice to see if this is the case, or if parliaments, ministries and practitioners at many levels have produced national and local ways of public governance. The US case is of course different, but we include it because the difference can, we think, make our analyses, arguments and discussions clearer and sharper.

There are several reasons for this specific research agenda. First, we know that there is substantial variation across different national systems in the degree of decentralism (i.e. the distribution of power sources between the state and local districts and institutions), which again may affect educational work and outcomes in

different ways (Moos 2013d). But we know too little about the processes through which these sources of local autonomy are put into practice by school boards. Moreover, it is evident that the nature of local policy making in the school boards is heavily affected by the local cultural and societal context in which the school boards are situated. We have been strongly motivated to explore deeper this interplay between context and policy making at the local level. Second, local democracy is a core component in the national systems subjected to the study, and we wanted to explore if local discourses expressed by school boards differ from national policies and transnational influences (Moos 2013c).

When we look at the transnational inspiration, it is clear to us that a number of well-known, mostly economical, theories can help us understand and explain the OECD influences and the national impacts, where they meet diverse perspectives, cultures and politics. The NPM is in many ways neo-liberal as the very core of the NPM is to adjust public sectors to a new international understanding of the roles and functions of the states in governing the institutions and sectors in the public sphere. Many countries have through the history treated public government as a political set of relations: election, division of state power into legislative, judiciary and executive powers. Decisions in the legislative sector were based on political judgements and interests. Over the past 40 years, more countries have entered the global competition and thus the global marketplace, where decisions are based on marketplace logics: profit, competition, consumers' free choice, etc. (Pedersen 2010).

Economic theories like principal-agent theory, scientific management theory, transaction-cost theory and rational choice theory are clearly recognisable in the political arguments, in the NPM and in the OECD report.

For example, the traditional Nordic discourse describes a participatory democracy and a comprehensive schooling with strong local community roots, and we assume that this policy culture is contested by transnational demands for accountability, standardisation and enhanced indirect steering from the stat level (Blossing et al. 2013). In the USA, on contrary, the school districts have been more autonomous than in the Nordic countries, at the same time as federal authorities currently intend to implement common core standards across states and districts, which again create tensions at the local school board level. Third, it is evident that transnational influences and national policies go through a transformative model when they meet the implementation level at local school districts. However, the shapes and forms of the various transformation processes and the impacts on school leaders, teachers, and students are under-investigated. Fourth, the members of school boards are mostly elected from within the municipal board; they represent political parties, while in the USA members are elected amongst the school district stakeholders.

Education and its governance are part of the general public sector and thus also subject to general changes and restructurings. This is the case with the size and number of local authorities: If they are too small, they are merged with other, small authorities in order to be more effective and efficient. This argument is of course economic and not political. This is the case in some Nordic countries, but in other places the argument of local culture prevails over the economic argument. In some places we see intermediate levels, agencies and authorities are restructured and even

closed down. The municipal level, which is by tradition the school district level in all Nordic countries, when it comes to primary and lower secondary education, is being bypassed in some cases, so that the traditional chain of governance is broken or bypassed by the state going directly to institutions (Moos 2013b).

In the municipal administration, we also see different restructurings that may mean having less, but bigger and more encompassing political committees or boards and a longer distance from politicians to institutions. Some of these restructurings carry new responsibilities to the political board and in some cases take away traditional ones, meaning that board members have got new tasks and responsibilities. So structures and functions of school boards are changed in Nordic systems, but differently. In some case new model, imported from business life, is implemented into the public sector, like in Denmark (Pedersen 2005). Now the municipal board is named the Concern, the management of a number of schools is named Company and the internal management of a school site is the Work Place.

1.3 Comparing Educational Governance

The first part of the book contains country reports from all involved countries. We produce and publish them in order to underscore one of our theoretical and pragmatic stand points: The national educational systems are the primary unit of analyses. The structures and cultures within the nations are complex and many faceted, but in some ways more coherent than bigger units, like the Nordic area. It is often claimed that we are very homogenous within this area, but we find that this is only partly true: In many respects there are rather big differences. We want to be able to point to the differences as well as the similarities and to shed more light through comparing them with each other.

Comparisons are employed as tools for research on policy and education and by policy makers themselves (Steiner-Khamsi 2010). Comparative researchers use comparisons to sharpen their optique in order to get a clearer picture of practices and politics, and policy makers refer to them when setting policy agendas based on international evidence, best practice, or international standards when they ‘borrow policies’ (Moos 2013a).

It is thus very important to gain a better understanding of the institutional context (Leithwood and Riehl 2003) and the historical and societal background in and against which educational leadership is situated, since leadership thinking and practices, as well as individual and community social capital (Bourdieu 1990), are formed by the society, culture and context of which they are a part. They are shaped by policies, discourses and literature but also by national/local values, traditions, structures and practices.

Methods of comparison in research have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention recently (Carney 2008; Steiner-Khamsi 2006, 2009, 2010; Walker and Dimmock 2002). This could be due to the increasing influence that globalisation is having on societies and education. Relations between national states and systems are becoming

increasingly interconnected and globally influenced, and it could be argued that comparisons are gaining influence for the same reasons: Amongst other agents, globalisation is furthered by transnational agencies¹ that use ‘soft governance’ to advice or encourage reflection on ‘peer pressure’ (OECD) or ‘open method of coordination’ (European Commission) (Antunes 2006; Lange and Alexiadou 2007; Lawn and Grek 2012; Lawn and Lingard 2002; Moos 2009b).

Therefore, research on educational governance needs to encompass analyses of the political, societal, cultural and institutional context of governance. Research also needs to analyse the broader context and historical processes in which governance is embedded: the practice, structure, values and norms of the local and greater communities that emerged over time and are still present as a sounding board for new perceptions, impressions and influences. International comparisons act as mirrors – just like educational outcomes or best practice – so that policy makers can reflect on the level of educational outcomes in their own systems and decide on their own reforms. More often than previously, we see policy makers argue with the need to comply with global or international standards or best practices, such as PISA. However, as Gita Steiner-Khamsi argues (2010, p. 332), policy transfer is not a passive process. It is mediated, shaped and given form by local policy makers, so the traveling reform undergoes many modifications depending on the political situation. Thus, buzzwords such as accountability, equity and standards are global ‘fluid signifiers’ that are given content and meaning in context. This means that, unless we refer to local contexts, structures, cultures and values, any comparisons made in an international research project will be complicated, intricate, senseless and absurd:

Without contextual comparison it is impossible to understand the political and economic reasons why traveling reforms are borrowed. (Steiner-Khamsi 2010, p. 339)

In order to pursue Steiner-Khamsi’s argument – that borrowing policies is not a passive process because local policy makers and practitioners modify it – it is necessary to refer to the neo-institutional theorist Kjell Arne Røvik (2011). He invokes the metaphor of a virus infection when identifying the ways in which the generic structure of political ideas – viruses – generic structures are changed or mutated in the interactions with local culture and values. One way in which management ideas (policies) are mutated is through a translation process, during which actors more or less deliberately (yet actively) attempt to transfer and implement management ideas (policies) by neglecting, omitting, reinforcing or altering aspects of the idea: ‘General and abstract ideas may be concretized, mixed with local traditions and sometimes shaped into sharp management tools’ (ibid. p. 642). Translation may occur through rules of copying, subtraction (neglecting or omitting aspects), adding (elements of local culture) or alteration (completely reshaping). We shall make use of these insights in the last, concluding chapter.

¹For example, WTO, World Trade Organization; OECD, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; GATT, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade; IMF, International Monetary Fund; EU, European Union (especially ‘the Inner Market’ and the ‘Europe 2020’ statement); and the World Bank.

We have constructed images of the national contexts for school boards that are sensitive to societal, social, political, cultural and governance differences as well as similarities between our countries, in the country reports. They are in themselves good analyses of the school board position and relations and school board members' notions of their tasks, values and possibilities, and they also serve as the reference material for the thematic chapters.

1.4 The Method and the Country Reports

The study is a web-based survey. In Denmark, Norway and Sweden, we used the same questionnaire. In Finland, the core of the questionnaires contained the same questions as the other, so comparisons were possible. In all countries we had a robust and representative response rate. The first analyses were described in the country reports.

The five country reports are structured around the same frame, stipulating the perspectives being analysed – the order of the themes was made in each country group:

1. *Where*: As this is a Nordic project, we are looking for similarities and differences between the educational governance systems: The national educational system, changes to the system and the governance system are analysed.
2. *Who*: The school boards themselves, age, gender, experience, education, etc.
3. *What*: This category contains the tasks, duties, assignments, etc., that school boards are supposed to carry out and want to carry out: economics, strategically, educational and personnel management. What is described in the regulations or job description, what is expected on top of this but maybe not explicated and what do they themselves think is their work area.
4. *With whom*: What kind of networks do they belong to, in what capacity (leaders or participants), how important are the networks for the school board members? What kind of relations do they enter into, with whom? In this category we also find organisation and structures that school boards participate in or relate to. The technologies, personnel, context and culture (Hatch and Cunliffe 2006).
5. *Why*: What is the purpose or aim of the activity/relation? What kind of values are underpinning or driving the activities or relations? Whom do those values belong to (meaning: do school boards consent to them)?
6. *How*: In this category we distinguish between diverse forms of influences/power that school boards are subject to and are making use of (Moos 2011).

1.5 Thematic Chapters

By analysing the country cases, build on parallel surveys in all involved countries, we find that on one hand they share important similarities, at the same time as they, along with other dimensions, are significant dissimilar descriptions.

These aspects are explored in cross-country, thematic cases with authors from all participating countries of each chapter. The themes have emerged from analysing data across countries and looking for important similarities and differences in the functions, relations and understandings of school board chairs and members. Comparing across countries and cultures gives us more clarity and insights in the function of individual systems.

Researchers from all involved Nordic countries wrote the thematic chapters. Here are abstracts from all thematic chapters:

Chapter 6: Educational Governance: Politics, Administration and Professionalism.

Contemporary restructuring of (Nordic) educational governance systems brings new relations between state, local authorities and schools and thus between politicians, managers and educational professionals. With inspiration from transnational agencies – primarily the OECD – new chains of governance are being created. Decentralising of elements of governance is being mixed with recentralisation of other parts; some couplings are being loosened on economies, human resource management and operations while, at the same time, couplings on educational content aims and accountabilities are being tightened. This tendency has also made many municipalities to restructure the municipal political and administrative system into a more steep hierarchy.

Restructurings also influence the work of school boards and their relations to administrators and educational practitioners. School boards are increasingly responsible for the greater part of the life of childhood and adolescence and therefore also need to be taken care of by many institutions. New power balances are created between diverse forms of influences: Structural, discursive and social technologies are used in new combinations and with priority to different groups of stakeholder. It seems that management and consumers are being prioritised, while politicians and educational professionals lose influence in new neo-liberally inspired forms of New Public Management.

Chapter 7: Control and Trust in Local School Governance. Educational policy makers in many countries have increasingly used standardisation and quality assurance as tools in order to steer schools, teachers and school leaders more tightly. The present chapter analyses the possible tensions embedded in these streams and how they are mediated by the local government level. Theoretically the analysis is based on two different conceptions of governance and control.

The first is rooted in institutional organisation theory and is referred to as ‘thick governance and control’: implying governance in the form of mobilisation of internal and implicit control factors between the one who governs and those who are governed. The second conception derives from the public choice theory and is referred to as ‘thin governance and control’. This approach considers the relationship between the one who governs and the governed as a pure principal-agent relationship where both are individually utility maximising rational agents that are controlled by external and explicit pressures and influences. Thin governing and control has gained increased importance as the rule rather than the exception for national governments. However, at school level there is still an

anticipation of ‘thin’ normatively integrated control, and the analysis models mediation of these tensions by school boards at the local level.

Chapter 8: The School Board Between Power and Influence. The decentralised Scandinavian school structure with the municipal school committee as a central factor between the municipal council and other school interests gives the school board a central role in the implementation of the centrally decided school legislation from the parliament. Therefore it is a central question in modern Scandinavian schooling what are the ways of influence and what power mechanisms are in play throughout the schooling system.

The chapter will investigate what power and influence mean in a school board context. We will conduct comparisons across countries and look into which influence and power relations there are between the school committee as the central focal point and the schools’ most important interests. Therefore, we will look at the relations between the board and the national parliamentary level, the superintendent/the municipal administration, the chair of the board, the principals/schools, and lastly the parents and the students. These relations between the board and its stakeholders will be analysed in the terms of power and influence in this chapter.

Chapter 9: The Role and Influence of School Boards on Improving Educational Quality: Ensuring educational quality is high on the policy agenda in many countries, especially efforts regarding enhancing students’ learning outcomes.

In the Nordic countries, the local school authorities are in charge of developing systems to assure and enhance school quality. This chapter discusses how the members of the school boards perceive their role and function and position. Based on a survey, we report on the extent to which they are satisfied with student achievements, their expectations towards the work of the superintendent and principals as well as their own work related to improving school quality. We examine how the school board members see their own opportunities to influence decisions about the school practice, and if the knowledge and capacity in different professional groups are to fulfil tasks and responsibilities.

In this chapter we will argue that the new governing modes and accountability processes imply new roles and relationships between national authorities and local levels of school governing being established. One example is quality assurance and the use of quality reports. During the last decade, the focus on establishing systems for quality assurance is accentuated. Quality assurance system, in the sense of quality reports, is stated in Education Act in each country. How reporting and the feedback system is organised differs but in all Nordic countries quality insurance is an important task for the school board.

Chapter 10: Multilevel Governance. Contemporary education is embedded in larger communities: municipality, region, nation-state and transnational as well as international communities. Schools are therefore important players in transnational as well as national politics; thus, they are included in chains of governance and cultures. First, transnational policies and demands are evidently filtered through policy cultures when they meet the national level, which explain variation in implementation patterns within the Nordic countries. Second, national

policies are mediated through local structures and policy preferences (shaped by local history and culture) in their way towards school principals and teachers.

Therefore, governing schools can be analysed as multilevel governance systems, a concept denoting both vertical and horizontal governing relations – between institutions on different levels and between formal and informal actors. The concept describes how governing de facto takes place in the public sector, and this perspective encompasses more than the formal actors involved. Rather multilevel governance highlights the importance to study the socioeconomic and cultural context in which the stakeholders and political actors are situated – in order to capture educational governance in practice in its richness. This present chapter analyses tensions between the levels and the actors, why these have emerged and how they are dealt with.

The last chapter – *Globalisation and Europeanisation of Nordic Governance* – sums up and concludes on the findings and arguments of all chapters.

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Part I
Country Reports

Chapter 2

School Boards in Denmark

Lejf Moos, Klaus Kasper Kofod, and Ulf Brinkkjær

Abstract The Danish state is successively moving towards global competition and European collaboration and, consequently, numerous changes are being made to the public sector and the way it is governed. Relations between the state and public institutions are becoming less defined by democratic, public sector governance and more defined by business-like, market place governance. As well as this, new forms of governance are emerging. Another significant change is the trend towards treating schools as freestanding, self-governing institutions that are monitored directly by the ministry and not indirectly by municipalities. Simultaneously, municipal administration is becoming increasingly hierarchical. This move to the three-layered corporate model, in which power is made more hierarchical but is less subject- or cause-oriented, is viewed by some as professionalisation. The transformation of the public sector produces new relations, positions and influences. An example of this is the task and composition of political boards and their future expectations. School boards are engaged in adjusting structures and finances and educational concerns.

Our theoretical bases for analysing positions and relations are neo-institutional theories (March 1995; Meyer and Scott 1983; Røvik 2007) and post-structural theories on educational governance (Foucault 1983, 1991; Pedersen 2005).

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2.1 Where: Reforms of the Danish Educational System

Denmark has 6.5 million inhabitants and a high rate of employment for both men and women. Danish society used to be characterised by *democracy* and *equality* (a little power distance) and an *inclusive* attitude towards other cultures (a little uncertainty avoidance) (Hofstede 1980). Over the past decade, the image of a firm, homogenous culture may have changed as Denmark has experienced an influx of people with a native language other than Danish.

Fifty years ago, the main source of income shifted from agriculture to industry, and now it is changing from industry to information and knowledge production.

In the 9-year period between 2001 and 2010, the Act on the Folkeschool was amended 18 times.

The most significant change is that, before 2006, the ‘aim clause’ emphasised preparing pupils for participation in a democracy, whereas, since 2006, the clause has pointed more towards making students employable in a competitive economic market.

Following this decision, a number of relatively new tools and social technologies for accountability were introduced. Parallel to the reforms from the Ministry of Education, we have witnessed a number of reforms from the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of the Interior: the restructuring of the public sectors. This latter reform has been more influential for the political board and superintendent level than the educational reforms.

Over the past 30–40 years, Denmark – like most other Western states – has changed from being a primarily welfare state to being a competitive state (Pedersen 2010). This is not the result of a ‘natural’ development or inherited from social forces. It is because global and transnational influences are becoming a fundamental part of globalisation. In the years following the Second World War, we witnessed the emergence of welfare states, where areas of civil society were taken over by the state in an attempt to protect citizens and thus further social justice, political equity and economic equality as a means of reproducing the population. Full employment was a major social democratic/welfare state goal, and the public sector was seen primarily as serving citizens; in other words, citizens were supported in times of unemployment or illness, and they also received free education, health care and cultural services.

From the 1970s, transnational agencies¹ were the driving force behind the opening of national economies to global competition (this increased from the mid-1990s onwards). The economic aims shifted from growth by means of full employment and increased productivity (of the labour force and technology) towards growth by means of international trade and investment. National governments operated increasingly through their membership of international organisations on regional markets.

¹For example, WTO, World Trade Organization; OECD, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development; GATT, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade; IMF, International Monetary Fund; EU, European Union (especially ‘the Inner Market’ and the ‘Europe 2020’ statement) and the World Bank.

From 1970 onwards, governments successfully oriented economics towards neo-liberalism, which relies on the principles of rational choice, increased market influence and minimal state intervention (namely, deregulation, privatisation and outsourcing). Citizens are increasingly seen as participants of the labour force, with full responsibility for their situation, and as consumers (Bauman 2001). The public sector is viewed primarily as serving production and trade in the national, innovative system. The state influences the availability and competencies of the labour force and of the capital (Pedersen 2010).

The new ways of managing public sectors are in line with these emerging neo-liberal economic politics: New Public Management (NPM) (Hood 1991). Fundamental to this very broad and diverse tendency are the notions of marketplace and management; e.g. the idea that the public sector is best governed in the same way as the private sector, i.e. by competition and consumer choice as well as managerial transparency. One example of this is free school choice across both school and day care institution's catchment areas and municipalities.

2.1.1 Decentralisation of the Educational Governance System in Denmark

The regulation of the Danish school systems has changed in many ways over the last two decades. At the beginning of the 1990s, there was a strong and general move to decentralise finances, personnel management and other areas from a state level to a local (municipal) level and, in many cases, even to a school level. These changes were introduced at a time when several countries were experiencing difficult economic situations, especially at a national level. At the end of the 1990s, a re-centralisation of school target setting and evaluation was also observed (Tanggaard 2011).

A few examples can illustrate this, including the increased role for parents at school level (in organising school boards), parents' free choice of school as well as the influence for parents at the school level by organising school boards and also parents' free choice of schools, 'management by objectives' and result-oriented system, which focused on the professional ability and responsibility at different levels in the steering system, especially on teachers and principals. It was argued that, if the state decentralised tasks to schools, it could cut down on local education administrative staff (Torfing 2004). In 2007, a restructuring of public management was made when 171 municipalities were merged into 98 larger units.

As municipalities have been merged into larger units, many large municipalities have established a new middle layer: districts. A superintendent can govern 4–5 districts, whose leaders each take care of 5–6 schools and other institutions. Within the new municipalities, many schools have been shut down or merged into departmental schools: in 2011, there were 1,317 folkeskoler (primary and lower secondary schools, students aged 6–15), compared with 1,708 in 1996, which represents a decrease of 23 %.

Whenever the educational system is decentralised, the balance between professional and political power on all levels in the system is changed. Principals and teachers have more responsibility and must demonstrate their ability, as evaluation becomes an important instrument for governing: 'In using more control and in seeing the educational system as being in a global competition, the politics of education will be more and more reactive in its scope' (Official Journal C 318 2008/C 319). In a period of intense re-centralisation of the school's content (both the syllabus and accountability), schools find themselves in charge of finances, human resources and day-to-day management, and, at the same time, the municipalities have become an important factor in the ministry's 'quality assurance system'.

A municipality has to base its operation on objectives and frameworks established by the government and parliament. However, there is a certain amount of discretion allowed in determining how the operation should be organised in order to achieve these objectives, for example, which resources should be used, how it should be organised, how the premises should be designed and, to some extent, what staff should be employed. Regardless of how a municipality decides to run and organise its work, it must guarantee all children and students the same standard of education.

In the Nordic countries, legislation introduced at the beginning of the 1990s abolished all detailed task lists concerning the work of leading educational officials in municipalities (Official Journal C 302 2009). The municipality can decide for itself how to best organise the administration for education. Over the past few decades, the deregulation of the political board and the superintendent was one of several decisions made in parliament regarding different aspects of the school system, from preschool to vocational education. These governmental bills and regulations are supposed to be implemented in the municipality and, in this respect, are responsibilities for the local political board and the superintendent.

2.1.2 The Contemporary Picture of Educational Governance

Political boards and superintendents are seen as major agents in the contemporary national quality assurance system. However, it is difficult to establish their precise function because of many changes in the governance of public sectors and education over the past 20 years.

As the sole country in the project, Denmark has two school boards. Firstly, it has a political board representing the municipal council, which consists of members of the municipal council represented according to each party's relative weight in the council for the given political term. The task of this political board is to decide on the overall policies for school and education within the municipal's jurisdiction. Secondly, Denmark has a local school board with parental majority and with the principal as the school board's secretary, as well as representatives of teachers and students. The function of this board is to establish overall principles for the organisation of teaching, the cooperation between school and home, the communication of students' results to parents, the work distribution between teachers and

the common arrangements for the students (“Lov om folkeskolen” 1993, § 42–44; Moos 2003).

The Political board and the superintendents used to be positioned in the middle of a straight line, a chain of governance from national to institutional level: from the political board (Parliament) and the administrative agency (Ministry) at national level to municipal level. The first level is the political board (Municipal Council) and administration (Municipal Administration), and the second level is a school board and superintendence. Finally, at the institutional level, there is a school board for each school with parental majority and a school leadership. In the middle of this chain, one will find the superintendent, who is positioned in the municipal administration and thus accountable to municipal principles and national regulation, while servicing and monitoring schools.

The Danish educational system is part of, and thus influenced by, transnational tendencies, but it is also built on Danish structures and culture, and so, in its own way, it is unique. Traditionally, municipalities have been important factors in the governance of public sectors, and, according to the Danish ‘free/independent school’ tradition, decentralised educational governance has been an integral part of the Danish educational self-understanding and, to some extent, of the practice.

This is in line with the systemic evaluation regimes that have been established throughout all Nordic countries, in which local government, schools, teachers and pupils are subjected to external evaluation and self-evaluation (Day and Leithwood 2007). Moreover, the state uses active financial resource allocation in combination with reporting procedures as an indirect control instrument, where municipalities have to report their use of financial costs and human resources to state agencies on a yearly basis. Finally, accountability is strengthened by making results from national tests and evaluations available on special websites.

Taken together, the present governance model appears to be a joint regulatory enterprise between the state, through a range of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ steering instruments and quality control, and the municipality sector, through direct ownership and decentralised decision-making power. There is a ‘mixed mode’ of regulation that is important for understanding the current context of superintendent leadership in different municipalities in Denmark (Moos 2009).

2.1.3 From ‘2-Layers’ Towards ‘3-Layers’: Public Governance and Self-Governance

As mentioned above, a structural reform in 2007 reduced the number of municipalities from 271 to 98 because Parliament wished to have at least 30,000 inhabitants in each municipality (Interiour 2005). This brought about new relations and positions as well as governance chains: many municipalities are now structured as concerns/groups with a steep hierarchy and a unified string of management.

Approximately 60 % of all municipalities combine a traditional structure (described above) with a new businesslike/enterprise structure. Only four political boards, each with its own director, govern all institutions (Christoffersen and Klausen 2012a). This means that each board is responsible for a broader field of activities; for example, in the survey, we can see combinations of school, preschool, and leisure-time institutions, social affairs, Danish education for immigrants, adult education and culture (Moos 2011).

In many municipalities, new layers of middle management emerge, for example, district leaders, who lead 4–6 schools.

In 1999 and 2007, vocational schools and general upper secondary schools (respectively) were restructured. They were previously governed by regional councils, but they are now self-governed institutions with direct links to the Ministry. This arrangement is similar to the governance of free/independent schools. In 2011, there were 509 basic, freestanding schools (an increase of 18 % when compared to the 429 schools in 1996). In 2011, 580,000 students attended folkeskoler and 96,000 attended freestanding schools, representing 14.2 % of all students (Bang 2003).

The overall picture has become more complex than it was 20 years ago, as there are now several main chains of governance: the public chain from government by municipal agencies (whether two or three layered) and the enterprise model, in which schools are made self-steering, reporting directly to the ministry. This can be seen as decentralisation of power over local management of finances, staff and operations from national level to an institutional level, but also as a move to circumvent local, municipal influences and interference. This builds on long a tradition with independent schools, when it comes to free, primary schools, and on new tendencies also seen in the governance of higher educational institutions, such as universities, when it comes to higher secondary schools. This ‘bypass’ of municipal democracy in the municipal councils and administration is a trend that is also seen in initiatives and regulations to govern the curriculum and quality assurance from the national level.

2.1.4 The Survey

The following analysis is based on a national study of all Danish school board members and chairs from 2012 with a response rate of 60.2 % for chairs and 42.1 % for members. Grounded on a response rate analysis, we can say that the material is valid for Denmark. The survey is part of the Nordic study.

2.2 Who: Members and Chairs of the Political Board

Gender: The majority of chairs are male (73 %), while the distribution of members (55 % male and 45 % female) is closer to the national average distribution.

Age: Distribution of age of chairs is very equal, while members are generally younger than chairs.

Years of age	20–48 (%)	49–57 (%)	58– (%)
Members	46	32	22
Chairs	32	32	36

On the board: 55 % of chairs have been on the board for 6 or more years, while only half as many members have served for this amount of time. *Years in politics* is more complicated. ‘Novices’ (0–10 years in politics), 63 % members and 44 % chairs; ‘experienced’ (11–15 years in politics), 13 % members and 27 % chairs; and ‘seniors’ (more than 15 years in politics), 35 % members and 28 % chairs. This means that the majority of chairs are in the ‘novices’ and ‘seniors’ category, while the majority of members are in the ‘experienced’ category. One reason for this uneven image could be the political priority given to the chairpersonship by the Socialist People’s Party (see below).

Employment: The proportion of publicly employed policy board members is much higher than the national average – 57 % for members and 65 % for chairs as compared to 43 %² – and the number of privately employed members is lower than the national average. The overwhelming proportion of municipal politicians are publicly employed. Almost half are employed in the education sector.

Education: The educational level of members and chairs is slightly higher than the national average,³ since the percentage having completed basic school education is lower (approximately 20 % compared to 30 %) and the percentage having completed higher secondary is higher (20 % compared to 10 %). The percentage having completed tertiary education is almost the same (around 60 %).

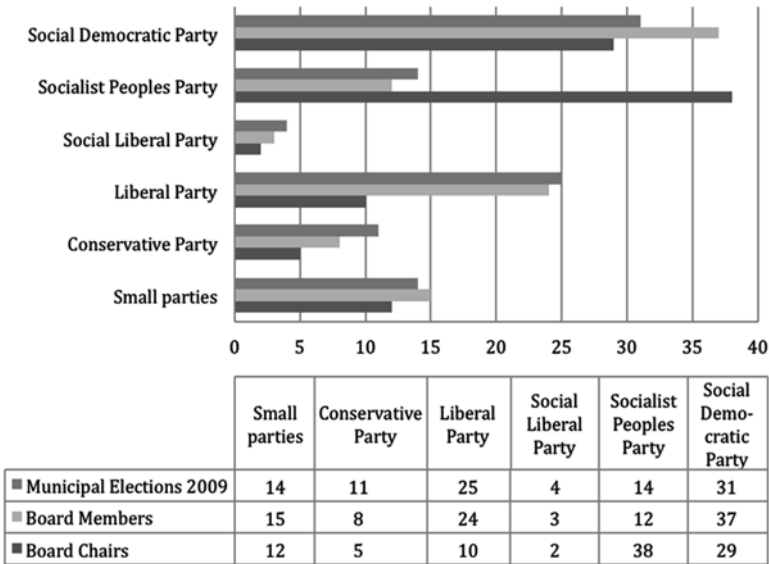
Political representation: Members of the political board are politically appointed by the city council and by the members of the city council following a rule of proportionality. This means that political parties are represented on city councils and on political boards according to the distribution of votes they receive in the election. Therefore, in principle, the composition of the political board reflects the election result. Formally, the board elect their chair; however, in reality, these elections are governed by the agreements negotiated by the political parties when the city council is constituted following the election: if no single party receives the majority required to govern (which often is the case), they negotiate and agree on coalitions that distribute positions (which party gets the mayor,

²Nyt fra Danmarks Statistik, Dec. 2012: <http://www.dst.dk/pukora/epub/Nyt/2012/NR657.pdf>. The numbers are corrected by removing students and retired people, etc. approximately equal to the national numbers out of employment (30–40 % of the total population).

³<http://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/befolkningens-uddannelsesnivea/befolkningens-hoejstfuldfoerte-uddannelse.aspx>. December 2012.

which party gets the chair, etc.). So the composition of the board is, in principle, decided by the voters, but the chairs are decided by the political coalition. Sometimes the result is surprising. In this graph, we see that the number of votes in the municipal election of 2009 (that created the board in our survey) is similar to the member composition, roughly following the pattern given by voters. The proportionality system slightly favours the Social Democrats and slightly disfavors the Conservative Party.

Political Representation



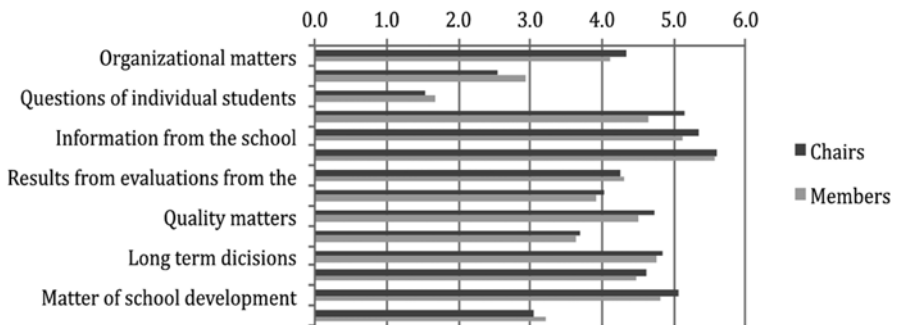
The most interesting figures, however, are the distribution of chairs: according to the poll, the Socialist People’s Party has more than doubled its influence, the Social Liberal Party has halved its influence, and the Liberal Party has reduced its influence by two thirds. This is surprising because Social Liberals and Liberals used to see education as a major battlefield of political values, whereas, until 2009, this was not the case with the Socialist People’s Party. However, they succeeded in winning almost 40 % of the chairs in the coalition negotiations with only 18 % of the votes.

Why joined the School Board: When asked why they accepted a position on the political board, two main reasons stood out. Firstly, that education was their personal interest – and often occupation – and a high priority for their political party (approximately half of the members and chairs answered this). Secondly, that these positions provided them and their political party with an important opportunity to influence the development in the municipality (approximately one third of the members and chairs answered this).

2.3 With Whom: The School Board as an Institution on the Municipal Level

The issues most frequently processed on the school board are ‘economy, resources and budget issues’, ‘information from the school administration’ and ‘information from the superintendent’. These priorities can be explained by the fact that the school board is primarily an economic board that listens to the information from the administrative managers. It is very seldom that the school board deals with isolated questions.

Q 19: How often have the following questions been on the agenda in the committee



2.3.1 Comment

Chairs and members of the school boards identify that many boards now have a wider area of responsibility, as shown in the range of titles of the board: 66 % of the names mentioned by the chairs and 78 % of the names mentioned by the members have the word ‘children’ in the title of the school board. 42 % of the chairs and 45 % of the members mention the title as ‘something’ with school or education. These titles encompass a broad field, signalling that the board in general covers the whole range of children’s lives and education.

There seems to be a political wish to have the board oversee the whole range of education, from 1 to 18 years and across the whole spectrum of day care and school life: children and family, childcare, leisure time and secondary schooling. It is particularly preschools and primary schools that are mentioned, which is to be expected, since day care and primary schools are part of the municipality’s responsibility.

When asked about their perception of the school board’s political influence on municipal governance, chairs and members believe they are indeed influential and particularly influential in strategic decisions and economic prioritising within their

area of responsibility. Regarding the assessment of the school board members and the chair's influence on the board's decisions, the chairs feel they have a larger influence than the members, which is arguably to be expected, since the chairs often command a majority on the board behind them. They also consider themselves able to set the agenda for how schools prioritise. However, this was not prioritised as highly as the former items.

The chairpersons and members of the school board think the board is very important for the development of schools, which is part of the board's area of responsibility. They also believe that the municipal council takes the board's views on educational matters into consideration. The board members and chairs thus consider themselves to be important for the municipal development of the schools. On the other hand, the chairpersons and members think that the municipal school administration can only exercise moderate influence over the boards' decisions and that the school administration is only moderately able to lead the dialogue with the schools about the quality reports, to suggest solutions on problems in the school sector and to analyse the national tests. The board members and chairs do not hold the school administration in the same high esteem.

The chairpersons and members think that the school leaders can only partially influence the school board's decisions. This is consistent with the fact that, in many municipalities, there is a wide decentralisation of decision competences to the individual school. There is rarely close contact or tight organisational couplings between the school board and the schools, so there is no significant direct influence either way (Weick 1976).

Only a relatively small proportion of the responses claim that the workflow processing in schools is a matter of selecting between different party political alternatives. Instead, it is apparently a matter of administrative logics. This underlines the fact that municipal politics appears to be characterised less by party politics and more by finding solutions to practical problems; compared to parliament, there are fewer ideological debates in municipal politics.

Regarding tensions in educational politics between the state and municipal level, around 40 % of both chairs and members of the board answer that they do in fact perceive such tensions. On the other hand, twice as many chairs as members think that there are no tensions. And 30 % of the members did not answer the question.

These results suggest that there is a widespread feeling among municipal politicians that the state interferes too much in the decentralised public school. However, this appears to be more the feeling among members than among chairs. The members left many more questions unanswered than the chairs. Perhaps this could be explained by the fact that the chairs have more daily responsibility in this area and, therefore, have a strong awareness on their large influence locally through their collaboration with the superintendents. Because of this, they are able to set the agenda regarding daily work within the area. On the other hand, the answers reflect the fact that, in recent years, the state level has centralised a number of issues at the expense of the influence at municipal level, particularly regarding centralised tests, comparisons between schools through publishing school exams results and numerous

alterations of the law of the comprehensive school (17 alterations in 10 years). These issues may result in the feeling that there are tensions between the state and the municipal level regarding educational issues.

The chairpersons and members spend a significant amount of time preparing themselves for board meetings. Almost two thirds of the chairpersons take between 2 and 5 h and more than two thirds of the members take between 2 and 5 h to prepare for each meeting. The preparations for the board meetings seem to be a very individual matter. Less than 8 % use more than 4 h together with their party group for preparation of the board meetings.

There appear to be very few examples of municipalities in which there is a contact politician from the board to the schools. The formal contacts are on the administrative level. In spite of this, the chairpersons and members have a good knowledge of the schools. Ninety per cent of the chairpersons and 74 % of the members visit the schools at least once during the semester. However, we are unable to establish whether this is for private or professional reasons.

2.4 How: The School Board's Governing Function

Members and chairpersons of the board emphasise the need to have knowledge about local school politics, the budget procedure of the municipality and the national school policy in order to be able to influence the board's decisions. On a scale of 0–6, these three issues score highly (between 4.7 and 5.6). All three issues are general issues within the board's work area. In addition to this, knowledge of national politics has become even more important for chairs and members of the board because control of the municipality's ownership of schools has been centralised. Lower priority was given to items such as delegation principles of the municipality, labour law/work time conditions, principal's and teacher's function as described in laws and regulations and curricula and students' work environment.

Political decisions in the school board are characterised by unanimity to the extent that 61 % (nearly two thirds) of the chairs and 41 % of the members say that the decisions are unanimous. The difference between the chairs and the members can be explained by the fact that chairs often represent a majority in the board and, therefore, are more focused on the unanimous aspect than the members and that it is minority members that focus on the majority decisions. In Danish municipality rule, there is a tradition for broad decisions. If too many decisions were majority decisions, it could be interpreted as an inability of the board chairs to create broad majorities behind their politics and, therefore, as a breach with the tradition of broad majorities and as a sign of bad political workmanship.

Regarding who decides the school board's agenda for its meetings, the answers are relatively clear: the decisions are being increasingly taken over by the administrative and judicial civil servants in the municipal administrations. Again, there is a difference between the chairpersons' and the members' opinions, since 55 % of

chairpersons and 35 % of members think the superintendent determines the agenda; however, a similar percentage in both groups (31 and 34 %) claimed that the chairperson decides. Municipal politics is becoming increasingly professionalised or depoliticised in the sense that the popular, elected feature in the administration and strategic thinking is being played down.

From whom do you get the most important information for your work on the political board was a question that could indicate how important other actors or networks are to chairs. In order of priority, these actors are teachers, other political parties, national evaluations, the internet, and students and media reports on schools. The least important informants are the school administration and the superintendent. It is difficult to interpret this picture, but one could assume that chairs and members are ‘blinded by proximity’, since the professionals and the administration are their main formal sources of information. However, the response rate for this question was very low, so it is not possible to infer a great deal from these figures.

2.5 Why: Important Policy Issues

Which – three – issues/areas are the most important for the board for this office period? This was an open-ended question – three answers for each – that we have categorised into five categories:

1. *Quality and curriculum*: student learning, including learning environment and teaching
2. *Structure and economy*: reforming the structure of schools and day care institutions and economy
3. *Day care and youth education*: bridging the transfer between institutions
4. *Inclusion* of all students into schools and institutions
5. *Special needs education, coherent politics* (attention to children age 3–18) and ICT

Important issues	Members (%)	Chairs (%)
1. Quality and curriculum	33	15
2. Structure and economy	27	34
3. Day care and youth	14	21
4. Inclusion	12	12
5. Special needs, Policies, ICT	14	20

Members emphasise quality and curriculum twice as much as chairs. Structure and economy is high for both groups, while chairs stress institutions outside schools more than members.

The focus on structure certainly reflects the fact that, at the time of the survey, political boards were in the second election period and had recently experienced extensive municipal restructuring. As well as this, in recent years, the government

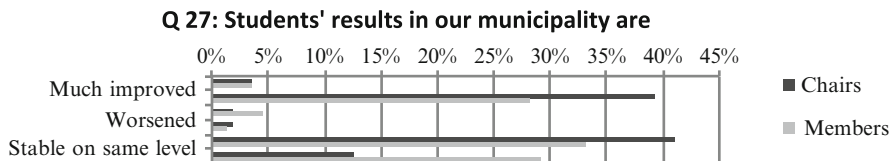
has been cutting funding to municipalities, so finances remain a challenging issue for the political board. Therefore, a lot of detailed structuring and planning was needed at this level.

Importance of board's work: Weighted averages from a Likert scale 1–6 question give an image that is very much in line with the answers to the former, open-ended question. *The important group* of issues are overarching issues: finances, school development, long-term issues, quality and strategy; issues one would expect a municipal board to concern itself with. *The next group* of issues are quality issues, in a little more detail, while the third group are issues that are perhaps not considered as interesting for a political board. *The last issue* – individual students – is very low and thus not a matter for the board.

It is worth noticing that chairs and board members are in consensus on these important matters.

2.6 What 1: Perception of Educational Capabilities

If one looks at the development of the schools' results, the general trend is that the chairpersons (80 %) and members (60 %) judge the school's results as stable or improved. However, it is thought provoking that almost 30 % of members either did not answer the question or claimed they did not know about the school's results.



Both chairs and members of the school board believe that the school administration has sufficient competence to lead the development of the schools and that the superintendent leads the principals' work with the school development competently. Although board chairs and members claim there is a difference between the various principles' professional capacities, they nevertheless believe the principles have the competence to lead the development of their schools. Regarding the students, the chairs and members estimate that the principals prioritise students' learning and create supportive conditions for students with special needs. On all of these criteria, both chairs and members score between 4.3 and 4.8 on a scale of 0–6.

It appears that chairs and members expressed some isolated dissatisfaction regarding the issue of high-performing students; both groups claimed that principles do not create optimal conditions for students who excel (4.4 for chairs and 4.2 for members on the 0–6 scale). This could be a reflection of the egalitarian school tradition in Denmark, where there has historically been much more focus on students with special needs than on high-performing students.

In general, the quality reports are (to a lesser extent) a pretext for the school board to act in relation to the schools, even if the members score 4.1 on a scale from 0–6, and think to a greater extent than the chairs (score 3.9) that the quality reports in fact lead to initiatives. This may be a sign that initiatives in relation to the schools are left with the superintendents. On the other hand, there is broad agreement about the valuable information content and clarity of the schools' quality reports.

Overall, chairs and members are satisfied with the municipalities' supply of schools and with the teachers' competences. On a scale of 0–6, both chairs and members evaluate the situation between 4.1 and 4.9. Both groups think that the general situation of the schools, their quality, and the variation in the quality is good. The only problem they seem to identify is the variation in teachers' skills across schools, which they rated with the lowest score of 4.0 for chairs and 3.6 for members (though we have to bear in mind that these scores are not worryingly low).

2.7 What 2: Demands of Accountability Towards Superintendents and School Principals

Due to the decentralisation of responsibility to the schools, which is typical for Danish municipalities, it appears as though chairpersons and members of school boards do not consider this issue part of their responsibility. The most common model of administration is the so-called company model, which is the preferred model in 78 % of the municipalities. According to this model, the school system is run administratively by a board of top management that conducts strategy, coordination and development. The responsibility for daily conduct is organised in decentred schools (Christoffersen and Klausen 2012b). This could explain why chairpersons do not wish to interfere in a model of administration that specifically prepares the ground for a division of the political and the individual school.

Q 32: What initiatives do you think ought to be taken when a school underperforms for several years compared to the expected test/marks	Chairs	Members
	% (N=37)	% (N=110)
Examine the reason	22	36
The superintendent must interfere with the management	22	27
Dialogue	16	6
Action plans	11	5
Skill development	(11)	11
Other	(19)	14
Total	101	99

The open-ended question – in which cases the political board should monitor the work of the superintendent – gave the following picture. The categories were almost identical in size – number of statements: first priority was given to *quality* (quality,

evaluation and outcomes). Second priority was given to *implementation* of political decisions, taken by the board itself. Third priority was *budget and economy*, while school *structure* and school *development* was fourth. This fourth category reflects the fact that many ‘new’ municipalities closed down schools or restructured some of them into department schools over several buildings (far away from each other) as a consequence of the municipal reform in 2007. Fifth priority was on occupational *environment* for teachers and students.

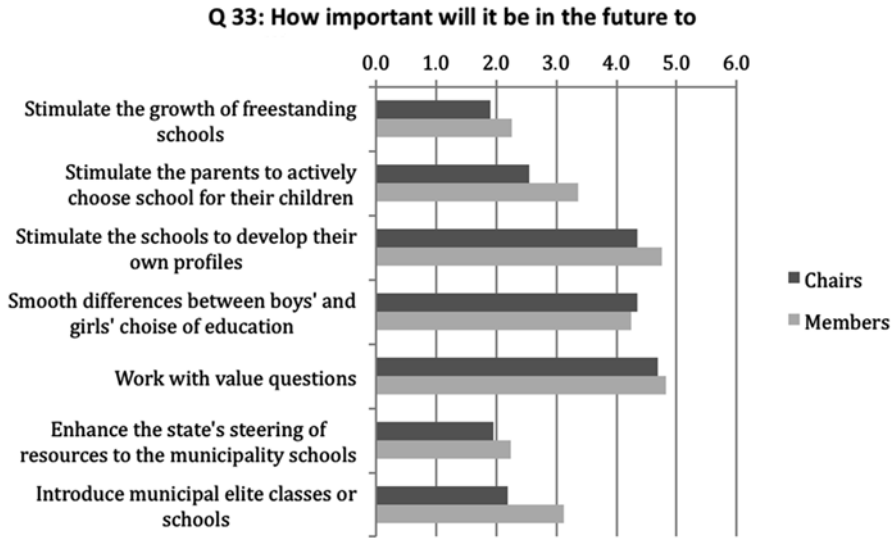
The general impression is that the chairs and members think they are governing at a middle level in the municipality with professionals between themselves and the actors in schools and other institutions. This is about economy, structures and priorities. At the same time, they occupy themselves with the welfare or well-being of the people they govern.

The chairpersons and members place great emphasis on the superintendent’s following up on the principals’ work, but they themselves emphasise more ad hoc questions than strategic questions. One interpretation could be that chairs and members of the school don’t consider it their duty to interfere with the superintendent’s work. A third interesting issue is that ‘leadership’ is rated among the lowest of all issues. An explanation for this could be that the chairpersons believe that this issue is considered a natural part of the superintendent’s prerogatives and that they therefore should not interfere in this issue. Another interpretation could be that a majority of the chairpersons and members think that, in general, there are no problems concerning this issue.

In Denmark, there is a relatively new public awareness of school quality and educational quality. However, when asked what the political board should do when presented with the facts that some schools were underperforming, the two most prominent answers were that the reason for the underperformance should be examined and that the question should be delegated to the superintendent.

2.8 What 3: Forecasting

We are currently witnessing a move from the concept of a *welfare state* towards what has been termed a *competition state* (Pedersen 2010), and this also applies to school matters. In this study, such an interpretation is supported by responses to a set of statements. In these responses, we see that questions about values, development of school profiles and smoothing differences between boys’ and girls’ choice of education are prioritised highly, while statements about rising state influence and stimulating more freestanding schools are prioritised less. The municipal politicians still expect focus to be on the classic school questions: values, traditional democratic *Bildung* and gender problems in school education. Perhaps as a reverence to New Public Management, they expect focus on the schools’ positioning in a market through developing individual school profiles.



The chairpersons and board members predict that the influence of students and parents will increase in years to come. Again, the chairpersons think this more than the members (chairs, 46–48 % increase; members, 40–42 % increase). Finally, 41 % of the chairs believe that the influence of school leaders will increase, whereas the figure among members is 37 %. It is expected that the ‘users’ of the schools (parents and children) and the leaders will gain a larger influence on school matters in the future. This can be interpreted as a clear indication of the neo-liberal move towards more user or consumer influence and more influence to management, while the influence of the democratic elected school board and the professional superintendent is expected to diminish.

Regarding the chairs’ and members’ views on the impact of education in Denmark, we have chosen to bypass this question because very few respondents wished to answer it, and, consequently, the replies we received were not statistically valid.

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Chapter 3

School Boards in Finland

Mika Risku, Pekka Kanervio, and Seppo Pulkkinen

Abstract In today's global societal development, Finland in many ways seems to be an outlier relying on policies, the goals, contents and enactment of which differ from those of many other countries. Furthermore, the policies Finland relies on appear to provide outlying results concerning both the education system and the society (Risku M, Ital J Sociol Educ, forthcoming; Risku M, Kanervio P, The Finnish superintendent. In: Nir A (ed) The educational superintendent: between trust and regulation: an international perspective. Lambert Academic Publishing, New York, 2014). The many-sided outlying character of Finland makes it an interesting case of research.

In alignment with the scope of the present book, this chapter concentrates on examining Finnish school boards. It is based on the first national study on school boards in Finland. The study was conducted by the Institute of Educational Leadership at the University of Jyväskylä and funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. In the chapter, we will present the context of the Finnish school board as well as the context of the study. As municipalities in Finland have a constitutional autonomy and municipalities are the main providers of education, research on the local political body governing educational services is of great importance. On the basis of the research, a description on the demography

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and work of school boards is given. In addition, school board members' perceptions on the status of local provisions of education and on the future of education are reflected on.

3.1 The Context of the Finnish School Board

From the point of view of the present study, one can claim that the main reforms of the Finnish education system in the past decades are linked to the reforms of the Finnish society. As Risku (2011, 2014) describes, Finland was shaped into a Nordic welfare state through a centralised, norm-based and system-oriented administration in the 1970s. After the welfare state was created in the 1980s, both the Finnish society and its policies began to change in fundamental ways. Concerning the society, migration to growth centres and the accelerating ageing of population reached a point which made it impossible for the state to provide for welfare state services with the prevailing structures. The economic recession in the 1990s further hampered the provision of welfare services.

One cannot deal with the contemporary development of the Finnish society without having a few words on municipalities, too. Municipal structures in Finland derive from the middle ages and obtained their present form in the 1800s (Pihlajanniemi 2006). Finland is still in the midst of reforming its municipal structures in ways that, for example, other Nordic countries did already decades ago. The 2007 Act on Restructuring Municipalities and Services¹ obligated municipalities to assess their services and together with other municipalities to try to find the most suitable ways to both preserve and advance their services. At least partly due to the act, 99 municipalities merged with each other at the beginning of 2009 (Kanervio and Risku 2009). The present government compiled a white paper to diminish the number of municipalities from 336 to 66–70 (Valtiovarainministeriö 2012). Typically to Finland, there has been a dialogue between the various stakeholders to come up with a synthesis that could realistically be enacted and that would have a successful outcome. The latest government bill (HE 31/2013) on municipal structures no longer prescribes the number of municipalities, but determines the criteria according to which municipalities are to develop their structures to be able to provide the required welfare state services.

Regarding societal policies, the centralised, norm-based and system-oriented administration started in the 1980s, besides to be unable to provide the welfare services, also to fail to correspond to people's expectations of governance in general. There came a need to transfer decision-making from the state level to local ones (Niemelä 2008; Risku 2011, 2014; Varjo 2007).

It is essential to note that Finland has not abandoned the ideology of the Nordic welfare state. The preservation and advancement of the Nordic welfare state is the primary goal of the present government as well (Valtioneuvosto 2011). However, as

¹Laki kunta- ja palvelurakenteen uudistamisesta 2007/169.

both the Finnish society and its policies have changed in the more and more globalising world, it is believed that novel ways have had to be found and designed to be able to preserve and advance the welfare state. In that development, many of the international societal trends of the past few decades seem to have had a distinct but often moderate influence (see, e.g. Laitila 1999; Varjo 2007). One can claim that it is the moderation that has given Finland the outlying status it seems to have today in many ways in international comparisons. Finland has tried to develop itself by first attempting to cling to those values and policies that seem to be valuable and sustainable and then to change those policies that need to be altered in ways that do not destroy what is regarded as valuable and sustainable to maintain.

Neo-liberalistic topics and scopes have in part directed public discussion since the 1980s (Rinne et al. 2002; Varjo 2007). Neo-liberalism has often been seen as a rival to the welfare state. Public discussion often includes strong doubts towards market economy solutions, as well as towards decentralisation, but there are also examples of neo-liberalistic reforms like pupils' and students' right to select their school in all school forms (Laitila 1999).

The influence of the 1990s European trend of shifting from state-led centralisation to democratic individualism can be clearly identified both in the social and education policy of Finland. Administration is no longer regarded to have only one right form, but the form is considered to vary according to the context (Ryynänen 2004). Decentralisation has become a significant driver, and municipalities have today a constitutional autonomy on how to organise themselves and their services. The State can, however, still be argued to have a central role in societal guidance, development and decision-making (Kanervio and Risku 2009; Laitila 1999). How the State succeeds in its role is given criticism. Among other issues, there are perceptions that education policies and their goal settings are not based on the real situations of schools, but on theoretically ideal starting points (Hannus et al. 2010).

In addition, there seems to be a general consensus that, for example, the formal status of the principal has changed dramatically in ways that resemble the ideology of the New Public Management. More and more autonomy, management and leadership have been transferred to the municipal and school level (Alava et al. 2012). Today's superintendents and principals are no longer merited teachers who are promoted for their good service as teachers, but managers and leaders who are responsible for the budget, personnel and efficiency of their schools (Aho et al. 2006). In the rapidly and dramatically changing operational environment, superintendents, principals and teachers often feel pressured by contradictions between goals, expectations, needs and resources (Ahonen 2008; Kanervio and Risku 2009; Souri 2009; Vuohijoki 2006).

In Finland, the education system is divided into three main tiers. The main tiers are basic education, upper secondary general or vocational education, and higher education as described as follows.² The following description well illustrates the moderation Finland has had in the development of its education system.

² Aho et al. 2006; Ministry of Education and Culture 2013; National Board of Education 2013.

Municipalities are responsible for providing basic education in the nine-year comprehensive school which is based on a single structure. Local authorities assign pupils a place in a local school, but pupils are free to enrol in other schools, too. In 2009, there were almost 3,100 comprehensive schools, and the network covered the whole country. The number of schools has been declining steadily during the last decades. About 45 % of the schools had fewer than 100 pupils. The largest schools had over 900.

Prior to basic education children can participate in preprimary education. The participation is voluntary, but municipalities are obligated to provide the service. In 2009, 99.4 % of 6–7-year-old children attended preprimary education, about 70 % of whom also took part in day care.

Municipalities, joint municipal authorities, registered associations or foundations can apply for licences to provide general upper secondary education from the Ministry of Education and Culture. In 2009, there were 398 general upper secondary schools and 43 other institutions providing general upper secondary education. Their number has been decreasing consistently during the last years in the same way as that of comprehensive schools.

The Government decides on the general national objectives of basic and general upper secondary education and on the allocation of the time to be used for instruction in different subjects. The Finnish National Board of Education decides on the national core curriculum. The education provider is responsible for compiling the final more detailed local curriculum and a yearly work plan on the basis of the national guidelines. Municipal school boards are thus not merely deciding on ‘blue prints’ of state policies, but have genuine autonomy and power in the local curriculum development. There is no inspection system or pre-inspection of textbooks.

The regional state administration comprises six Regional State Administrative Agencies. The agencies are coordinated by the Ministry of Finance, but they function under the guidance and supervision of their respective ministries. The duty of the agencies is to foster regional parity by executing all legislative implementation, steering and supervision functions in the regions. The Swedish-speaking province of Åland is self-governing.³ Education in Finland is generally free of charge for the students. Education is funded as part of the statutory government transfer system for local authorities, joint municipal authorities and private education providers. The amount (€/student) is calculated according to the unit price determined in advance for the subsequent year by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Concerning basic education, the statutory government transfer covers 34 % of the operating costs. For general upper secondary education, the percentage is 42. The subsidies are paid directly to the education provider and are not earmarked for a particular purpose. The rest of the operating costs remains with the education provider to cover. There are no decrees determining the student/teacher ratio, except for special need classes in basic education. Again, local authorities and thus municipal school boards have a lot of autonomy in their decision-making.

³Ministry of Finance 2009.

The Ministry of Education and Culture in collaboration with the Finnish Education Evaluation Council, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council and the National Board of Education determines the general framework for national evaluation on education. The framework is based on the government platforms and 5-year education and research plans and includes the international, national, regional and local level.

The 1998 Basic Education Act (1998/628) and 1998 Upper Secondary General Education Act⁴ obligate education providers to evaluate the education they provide and participate in external evaluations of their operations. The acts also require the salient findings of evaluation to be published. The National Board of Education is responsible for the national evaluation of learning outcomes. It has an extensive and systematic evaluation programme comprising mainly, but not solely, of sample-based evaluations in key subjects. In general upper secondary education, the independent Matriculation Examination Board twice a year organises a rigorous national test which in practice every student takes at the end of their studies (Aho et al. 2006). Education providers bear the final responsibility for the quality of education and are responsible for the self-evaluation of their provision of education (Kupiainen et al. 2009; Lapiolahti 2007), which once more underlines the significance of local authorities and municipal school boards.

Concerning the provision of basic and general upper secondary education, municipalities are the main education providers. In 2009 almost all of the nearly 3,100 comprehensive schools were municipal schools. Only 90 were private. Municipalities maintain also most general upper secondary schools. There are only a few that are maintained by private organisations (8 % in 2009). In general, educational legislation obligates the education provider and not directly the schools (Souri 2009). The State does thus not attempt to bypass municipalities focusing initiatives directly towards schools. For example, according to most studies principals do regard municipal level decisions most important for their work (Pennanen 2003).

There seems to be no common attempt to decouple schools from the municipal decision-making either. According to Kanervio and Risku (2009), almost all municipalities (96.7 %) in Finland are still producing their educational services in the traditional way, so that the municipality acts as one profit-and-loss centre both determining the needs and producing the educational services. In 2008, 1.4 % of the municipalities had separate profit-and-loss centres determining the needs and producing the services according to the so-called orderer-producer model. Miscellaneous other production models were used by 1.9 % of the municipalities.

Municipalities must organise their administration according to the Municipal Act,⁵ but the statutes allow a lot of freedom. There has to be a municipal council which confirms the rules of procedure according to which the administration of the municipality is organised. The municipality must also have a municipal executive board, election board and an inspection board set by the municipal council.

⁴Lukiolaki 1998/629.

⁵Kuntalaki 1995/365.

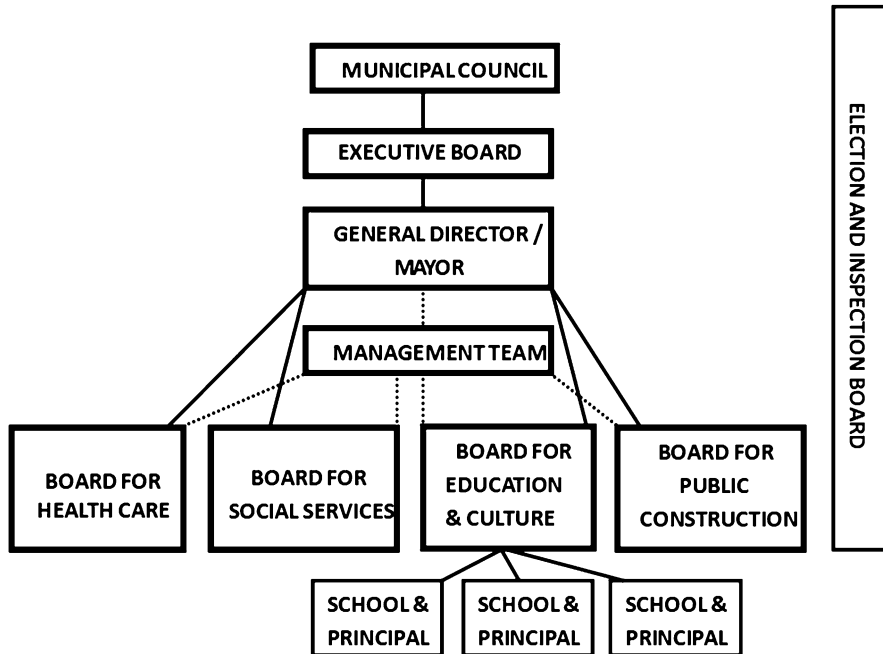


Fig. 3.1 Basic municipal organisation chart (Risku 2011)

Municipalities may decide independently on the establishment of other boards and commissions.

Because municipalities can organise themselves independently, their organisations vary a lot. A very small municipality may have just the minimum which is decreed by law. In larger municipalities, the organisation may be very complicated. A basic municipal organisation chart is presented in Fig. 3.1 (Risku 2011). In the figure, one can locate both the superintendent and the municipal school office where the position of the municipal school board can be found. Since the 1945 Act, the role of the superintendent and school office has been to serve the school board in its decision-making and manage the local provision of education (Salmela 1946).

The size of municipalities varies a lot. In 2013, about 68 % of the 320 municipalities had fewer than 10 000 people. There were only nine cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. About half of the population lived in municipalities, the sizes of which were between 10,000 and 100,000.⁶ As the sizes of municipalities vary, so do also the sizes of the local provisions of general education. Concerning basic education, the average number of pupils was 1,605 in 2012. The numbers varied between 8 and 46,185. About 70 % of municipalities had less than 1,000 basic education pupils in their local provisions.⁷

⁶Local Finland 2013.

⁷Statistics Finland 2013.

There seems to be a separate board for education practically in every municipality in Finland. According to Kanervio and Risku (2009), in 2008, only 0.5 % of the municipalities did not have a separate education board. In those municipalities, the executive board was responsible also for education. In addition, 2.4 % of the municipalities collaborated in providing education and shared a mutual education board.

3.2 The Context of the Present Chapter

The purpose of the present chapter is to give a picture of the Finnish school boards and their role in the Finnish society and education system. The chapter is based on a survey to all members of school boards prior to the municipal election in autumn 2012. The survey is part of two research programmes. Nationally, the survey resides with the research programme on educational leadership conducted by the Institute of Educational Leadership at the University of Jyväskylä and funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture.

The school board study is extremely essential in the Finnish context. Firstly, it is the first national one of its kind in Finland. Secondly, Finnish municipalities today have constitutional autonomy and are the main providers of educational services. As school boards are the supreme local policymakers concerning education, information about their characteristics, roles and work is fundamental knowledge about the Finnish education system. Thirdly, the municipal field in Finland is going through massive and radical changes at the moment (Kanervio and Risku 2009), and it is important to be aware how the changes affect the local provision of education and its governance. In single municipalities, education is usually the second largest service sector after social services (Tilastokeskus 2012). Health-care services today are more and more often provided by municipal consortia.⁸ As early childhood education is being transferred from social to educational services, the role of educational services is expanding and education is more commonly becoming the largest service sector in municipalities (Haapaniemi and Ilves 2006; Haliseva-Lahtinen 2011; Tirronen 2009).

Internationally, the survey shares the same framework, methodology and questionnaire base as studies conducted in Denmark, Norway, Scotland, Sweden and the USA in 2011 and 2012. As Finland is an outlier in many of its societal policies as described in the previous section, Finland offers an interesting object also for international research programmes. Particularly Finland is interesting because international studies on learning outcomes and on the qualities of societies indicate that the outlying Finnish policies also seem to have been able to provide very good results in an efficient manner (see, e.g. Risku and Kanervio 2014; Risku 2014).

The school board survey on which the present chapter is based on was sent to 306 municipalities and targeted at 2,745 school board members. The survey could reach individual school boards well as answers were obtained from 74.9 % of the

⁸ Compare Kuntajakolaki 1698/2009.

municipalities. Concerning individual school board members, however, the return rate turned out to be only 21.1 %. There were significant differences between the municipalities, but in general only a few of the school board members in the individual school boards answered the questionnaire. All board members participated in the survey in merely one municipality. In addition, in only 24 municipalities more than half of the board members replied the questionnaire.

One can state that the results of the present study can be considered to represent well the general status of Finnish school boards for two reasons. Firstly, the distribution of various types of municipalities and school boards in the data of the present study seems to respond well to the statistical distribution of various types of municipalities and school boards in Finland. Secondly, the respondents' political parties and genders correspond well to the results of the municipal elections in 2008 on the basis of which the school boards studied for the present research were formed.

3.3 Members and Chairs of the Political Board

In the present study, the size of school board varied from 5 to 11. Of the respondents of this study, 13.8 % were chairs, 9.7 % vice chairs, 72.9 % board members and 3.6 % substitutes. The number of chairs quite well corresponds to the expectation value (11.1 %) which is obtained by dividing the number of answerers with the number of municipalities represented in the survey.

A majority of the respondents were women (57.9 %). The result differs slightly from that of Kuntaliitto (2009). In that survey, 52 % of the answerers were women (Kuntaliitto 2009). The general line seems lucid; there seems to be more women than men in Finnish school boards.

It seems that many join the school board at the age when their own children are at school. Besides, membership in the school board seems to be more common after retirement than at an early age. Most respondents were 30–59 and the most typical age category was 30–49. Only 2.3 % were under 30 years old making the percentage (18.0) of members older than 60 much higher. The results are in line with the information from Tilastokeskus (2009) concerning the municipal elections in 2008.

School board members seem to be fairly well educated. Of the respondents, only 7.4 % had basic education as their highest education. 30.1 % had either the general or vocational upper secondary education, 36.4 % the lower university degree, 21.6 % the higher university degree and 2.1 % a scientific post graduate degree.

Concerning school members' occupational background, one can note a slight bias in the public sector. Of the respondents, 43.2 % worked in the public and 38.2 % in the private sector. The figures do not correspond well with the statistics⁹ on people's employment according to which 75 % work in the private and 25 % in the public sector. Also the percentage of board members not working (5.5 %) does

⁹EVA fakta 2011.

not match with that of the general unemployment situation (11.6 %). Furthermore, 11.6 % were retired which well equals with the age distribution of the respondents, but is smaller than the overall share of retired people in the Finnish population.

In the public sector, most school board members seem to have a performing occupational task. The portion of respondents in management tasks was significantly smaller. In the private sector, the picture was more balanced. The overall percentage (17.2 %) of private entrepreneurs in the school boards was somewhat higher than the overall share (13.0 %) in the Finnish population, which may be due to Finland having so many small rural municipalities with private entrepreneurs in agriculture.

The most common occupational domain of the school board members was other services, followed by health-care and education services. The total proportion (79 %) of board members in service tasks was slightly larger than the general share (73 %) of people working in service tasks (Tilastokeskus 2011). Of the respondents, 13.2 % worked in industry and 7.6 % in trade.

The proportions of representatives of various political parties in school boards corresponded fairly well with the results of the municipal elections in 2008. There were some deviations as well, however. There were more representatives from the Centre party and fewer from the Conservative party than the 2008 election results would indicate. This might be due to the large number of small rural municipalities in Finland. Among the respondents, the Centre party was the most common one followed by the Social democratic party and the Conservative party.

Most of the respondents had been actively involved in local politics for one or two terms, that is, for either 4 or 8 years. The most typical lengths of membership in the school board were accordingly 4 and 8 years. The results support the interpretation that school board members tend to be people who have their own children at school. More support was obtained when analysing the reasons for joining the school board. The most common reason was own interest followed by having own children at school. As other reasons respondents mentioned the will or opportunity to influence, own profession and having been asked. Own profession was a typical reason for retired teachers, principals and other people having worked in education in one role or another. A small proportion also informed that they had been ordered to the task.

3.4 The Board as an Institution on the Municipal Level

As earlier described, legislation does not obligate municipalities to have a municipal school board, but there seems to be one in almost every municipality. In the present survey board members informed altogether 42 different names for the school board. In the same way as in the superintendent survey, the most common types of names referred to boards with a very broad remit. Basic education was included in the remits of almost all boards and typically also preprimary education, general upper secondary education, early childhood education and day care, library services and

adult education. Common service areas also seemed to be cultural services, youth services, sports services and free time services.

It seems that municipal councils appoint to school boards both members of the municipal council and people who merely are members of the school board with almost equal shares. A small proportion of the answerers also informed themselves to be in the municipal executive board. In addition, some were members of other boards, most commonly in the domains of culture, construction and environment, social and health care and internal inspection. Many also participated in the work of various directorates as the representative of the municipality. When one sums up the percentiles, one notes that at least some school board members are also members of several other boards.

The significance of the superintendent for the work of the school board becomes evident when asking respondents to name five most important sources of information. The superintendent was the most common selection. Principals and school office were both common selections, too. Some significance was also given to teachers and own school visits. On the other hand, parents, students and media were not regarded as important sources of information. Information received from the trade union seemed to be quite significant but only to a few respondents. Some respondents also wanted to name themselves as important sources of information.

It does not seem to be common in Finland that school board members represent individual schools as most of the respondents informed not to represent any school. However, 18.5 % felt to represent one school, 5.5 % two and 3.8 % three. Visits to schools, on the other hand, seem to be more usual. During a school year, most of the answerers visited schools at least once.

According to Kanervio and Risku (2009), school boards usually select the principals but very seldom the superintendents. The superintendents are most often selected by the municipal council or the municipal executive board. As about half of the school board members also seem to be in either the municipal council or in the municipal executive board, their opinion of the selection criteria also concerning superintendents is important. The selection criteria for both the superintendent and the principal seem to be very similar. Respondents valued particularly the applicants' qualification, education, experience, personality and the correspondence of the applicants and municipal strategies. Gender, political stand and age seemed to have only little significance in the selections.

3.5 The School Board's Governing Function

On an average Finnish school board members appear to spend 2 h and 12 min in preparing for a school board meeting. Of that time 35 min is spent in discussing with one's own faction. In the compilation of the agenda, the role of the superintendent seems to be most significant. Most typically, the superintendent compiles the agenda in collaboration with his/her staff. In 26.8 % answers, the agenda was prepared by the superintendent together with the school board chair. The chair drew up the

agenda alone in 21.8 % of the answers. None of the respondents indicated that there would be separate working committees for the preparation of the agenda.

The strategic decisions by the municipal council and executive board and the State seem to affect the decision-making of the school boards most and be in practice of equal importance. School board members seem to consider the influence of the superintendent to be significant for school boards' decision-making, and that of the principals quite significant. On the other hand, the views of the trade union do not seem to influence school boards much, and neither decision seems to be strongly based on party politics.

More than half of the respondents thought there to be tensions between the State and the municipalities. A little less than a third did not believe there to be any tensions, and about one fifth could not make their stand on the issue. Of those who were of the opinion that there were tensions, 55.0 % answered in an open question describing in more detail what the tensions were. Almost half of the answers dealt with finance. As Hannus et al. (2010) wrote, there is criticism towards the State for both increasing and building its demands on municipalities on ideal thinking which does not seem to correspond to the reality and resources of the municipalities. The rest of the answers scattered into several small portions, of which one could pick up tensions concerning education policy. Particularly the tensions seemed to concern the then topical issues of decreasing the intake into upper secondary vocational education and cutting down upper secondary general school network.

3.6 Important Policy Issues

Concerning the societal significance of education, respondents were asked to select five out of nine options and rank their selections. In school board members' opinion, education seems to have a strong role in creating social justice and a democratic welfare state. The top five selections consisted of offering every child and young the opportunity to develop himself/herself regardless of his/her starting points and advancing citizens' welfare, culture, democracy and individuals' career opportunities.

According to the respondents, the strategic development of local provisions of education is based on economic and operational needs and steered by the strategic decisions of the municipal councils. Strategic development attempts to take into consideration also optimising state subsidies, regional needs and strategic decisions by the State.

Concerning what municipal strategies are like and how they are formulated, school board members seem to think that municipal strategies particularly aim at adapting to the changes in the operational environment, trying to anticipate future changes and making collective democratic processes. When formulating their strategies, municipalities seem to emphasise the views of the municipal council and municipal officials but also those of the State.

When the respondents were asked to express their evaluation of the significance of 15 topics for the decision-making of the school board, none of the presented topics was considered insignificant, as the most important topic was seen financial issues. Besides financial issues, respondents particularly emphasised the importance of developing schools, optimising school network, both long-term and short-term decision-making, quality issues, strategic discussions and results in school quality evaluations. When dealing with the topics, school board members especially seem to acknowledge paying attention to marginalising youth, increasing financial needs of schools, rapid increases and decreases in student population and school safety. Considerable attention also appears to be given to how staff is supported, management staff is recruited and both municipal and state statutes are abided by.

When asked about how often various issues are dealt with in school board meetings, one can find the same consistency as in the previous paragraphs, but also some interesting new information about the everyday of the meetings. Financial issues seem to dominate the agendas in the same way as the list of important policy issues. Noteworthy is that short-term everyday topics appear to overtake those of strategic thinking, although respondents indicated developing schools, long-term planning, quality issues and strategic discussions among the most important topics for school board meetings. Can this be a result of Kanervio and Risku's (2009) observation that municipalities seem to possess consistent long-term strategic thinking but not the resources to lead strategic development? Do everyday 'burning' issues dominate discussions and decision-making because there are not enough resources to lead strategic development to proactively deal with them?

3.7 Perception of Educational Capabilities

In general, the picture the respondents gave about the status of their local provisions of education was quite positive. They considered their supply of educational services to be competitive and their school networks to function well. They seemed to be able to recruit well-educated teachers and maintain a school culture that advances learning and teaching. In addition, in the respondents' opinion, the differences between teachers' professional skills were within acceptable limits as well as the differences between the learning outcomes of different schools.

When asked to value the significance and quality of the work of the school board, the respondents also gave quite a positive picture. They regarded their work as meaningful for the development of the local schools and felt they were respected by the local schools. They also believed municipal executive boards to take into consideration the views of the school boards. In addition, they considered themselves to have the knowledge and skills to deal with school board issues, and the school boards to be able to influence decision-making in the executive board, to make strategic selections and to bring forward solutions to the problems in the local provision of education. Besides, they did not consider the wide spectrum of

issues to hinder decision-making. Furthermore, the respondents were quite satisfied with how school offices are capable of evaluating schools and analysing national school evaluations.

Concerning knowledge considered essential for the decision-making of the school boards, one meets no surprise as knowledge in municipal financial management was seen as the most significant one by school board members. Once more, all presented options were regarded as important, the lowest value having been given to knowledge in legislation concerning principals' work. The top comprises, in addition to financial knowledge, knowledge in students' learning environment, local education politics, curricula and educational legislation.

Respondents evaluated management staff in local provisions of education to have good knowledge and skills in leading the provisions and schools, too. Superintendents seem to be able to lead the work of their principals and the staff in the municipal school offices the development and quality work of schools. Principals, too, were considered to have a good capacity to develop their schools and especially to establish prerequisites for the learning of students requiring special support. There seems to be quite a little variation between the professional capacities of principals in municipalities, and according to the respondents principals can quite well support also those students who are doing well at school.

3.8 Demands of Accountability

As earlier described, Finland does not have any school inspection, and national tests do not rank schools. Education providers have, however, the obligation to attend to national evaluation and to conduct local self-evaluation. It can be claimed that school board members are quite satisfied with the evaluation system. They seem to think that evaluation reports compiled by the schools themselves give boards a good picture of the real quality of individual schools. They also consider national evaluations to support principals' work in developing their schools and give a reliable picture of the quality of the local provision of education. National tests as such were not considered as significant, and sanctions by the State towards municipalities not being able to meet their obligations according to deadlines did not get much support either. There was no major satisfaction on how well school boards seem to be able to make decisions on the basis of school-based and national evaluations. Information steering by the State was not considered sufficient either.

According to the respondents, the State attempts to support strategic development in municipalities particularly by legislation, funding, projects, education and guidance. Evaluation conducted by the State was not considered to have a significant role in supporting strategic development in municipalities.

Financial issues once more topped the answers when school board members were asked the open question on what elements they should follow in the superintendent's work. In the same way as concerning the frequency of topics in school

board meetings, everyday issues seemed to stand out, like staff management and the preparation of decision-making. Only a few of the statements referred to following strategic planning and development. Is this an example of the Finnish trust again or of the focus being in the everyday management instead of strategic development?

Concerning what elements superintendents should follow in their principals' work, one finds a consistency with those in regard to following superintendents' work. The top two were exactly the same: financial issues and staff management. Also new issues appeared: principals' development work (concerning, e.g. curriculum, teachers' and students' welfare, and school safety).

3.9 Forecasting

As the survey was conducted just prior to the municipal election, school board members were asked to name the three most important issues to be dealt with during the following 4-year period. The answers comprised a large variety of issues. Municipalities seem to have a large number of challenges, and both be very different and have very different kind of situations. Once more, finance topped the list although also its percentile was modest (13.3 %). One can claim that in general the suggestions dealt with either concrete everyday issues as school buildings, school network and group sizes or with issues where there have been or will be topical legislative reforms as early childhood education and special education.

Concerning future challenges, respondents were asked to rate 11 options. There, too, was a large variation between the perceived significance of the options. The top five most important challenges comprised preventing marginalisation, having a genuine discussion on values, diminishing differences between schools' learning outcomes, setting maximum group sizes and decreasing the effect of gender on learning outcomes. The results well correspond to school board members views on the societal significance of education in creating social justice. On the other hand, the top five list can be claimed to include surprises as well. Finland has in all the five PISA surveys conducted so far had the smallest variation between schools' learning outcomes. Still, school board members consider that issue as one of the most essential future challenges. What is there behind the perception? To be even more equal or maintaining the present status as the economy is tightening? Noteworthy is also that school members seem to strongly oppose establishing municipal elite schools and classes and increasing the number of private schools.

Most respondents did not seem to expect any major changes between the relationship of school boards, superintendents and principals during the following 5 years. Quite many school board members do also anticipate that both superintendents' and principals' responsibilities will expand in the future. School board members' anticipation concerning students' and their parents' opportunities to affect local education and the development of the quality of education follow the same trend. Either they will remain the same or increase.

3.10 Summary and Conclusions

During the 1990s, the labour division between the State and the municipalities was in many ways reversed in Finland. Municipalities were given constitutional autonomy but also the obligation to be the main provider of public services. A large minority of Finnish schools are municipal so the examination of the local provision of education is of great importance. This chapter dealt with the local political body governing educational services, the school board.

In practice, all municipalities have their own school boards. The size of the boards varies between 5 and 11. Most of the school boards have quite a broad remit which includes also other areas than education. School board members seem to be people who often have their own children in school or have another kind of natural connection to education. The gender distribution of school boards is fairly balanced, and there seem to be people from various kinds of educational backgrounds, professions and political parties.

School board members seem to consider the work of the boards strategic, meaningful, appreciated and having a positive impact. The strategies that steer the work of the board are decided in the municipal councils taking into account state level strategic decisions. Finance has a significant role in the work of the school board. It is something that has to be given constant attention to when trying to anticipate future changes and trying to adapt to the changes. The school boards seem to be both efficient and well functioning. As also otherwise in the Finnish society, decisions are tried to make through democratic discussions where everybody is given a voice and rather than voting the solution is constructed together.

The role of the superintendent seems to be central for the school board. It is typically the superintendent who compiles the agendas and on whose initiative issues are dealt with. As the school board does not select, nor resign or evaluate a superintendent, the superintendent also has a strong position in relation to the school board. As municipalities have a constitutional autonomy and are the main providers of educational services, one may wonder why legislation does not recognise the office of the supreme education official in local administration at all. Due to that, there are no qualifications for the office either. That superintendents enjoy the trust they seem to do, however, indicates that they are well up to their task.

The return rate of the present study can be considered good concerning the school boards but only moderate concerning school board members. However, the distribution of the respondents mostly represents the overall distribution well. Also, the results of the study correspond well to those of other similar studies. Thus, one could assume that one could consider the results also to have at least some broader generalisability.

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Chapter 4

School Boards in Norway

Jan Merok Paulsen and Mona Strand

Abstract The current country report describes and pictures Norwegian local school boards in the national school governance process. A relatively potent layer of local politicians with education as policy specialism emerges from the Norwegian country case, where school board members are active local politicians with a clear motivation structure linked to school improvement and educational policy. At the same time the country report highlights strong influence on local policy processes from transnational and actors and state bodies. First, OECD lays down, yet indirectly, premises for the local school governing discourse in order to fit PISA as the educational “benchmark”. Second and nested (within this policy discourse), the state has strengthened its steering core towards municipalities, schools and teachers through a large body of standardized performance indicators and national tests, from which results are made publicly available for media and stakeholders. Third, the state has in the same period transferred significant responsibilities and degrees of freedom (in regulative terms) to municipalities as school owners. Local decision-making in pedagogy can fairly well be interpreted as a process of “blueprinting” of state policies. Local school politicians are tightly coupled to the administrative core and the top apex of the municipality organization. Taken together the chapter leaves the image that local school policy specialism has been significantly transferred from the political camp to the administrative centers of the municipality organization, at the same time as the state has coupled school professionals stronger to national and transnational policies.

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4.1 Introduction

Despite having a relatively large surface area of 324,000 km², with a distance of 1,800 km from north to south, Norway is a small country with a population of approximately 4.9 million. Norwegian local government is based on a two-tier structure consisting of 428 municipalities and 19 counties, and both tiers have directly elected councils and their own administration, though they have separate functions. The 19 counties are responsible for upper secondary education and vocational training at the regional level, while the 428 primary municipalities, which are the subject of this study, are responsible for providing their inhabitants with a primary and lower secondary education, basic health-care services, elderly care, and technical infrastructure. The municipality structure is scattered, and approximately half of all Norwegian municipalities have less than 5,000 inhabitants, whereas 10 have more than 50,000 inhabitants. Oslo, the capital of Norway, is the largest municipality, with 630,000 inhabitants.

Since the first PISA study placed Norway at the mean level of the participating OECD countries, the mass media and politicians have put their primary focus on how to raise the student achievements that have been perceived as mediocre (Kjærnsli 2007). However, researchers have been more concerned by the significant amounts of within-class and within-school variation in student learning – a pattern that has been visible before the PISA studies (Haug and Bachmann 2007). These reported inequalities correlate significantly to student background, ethnical culture, and gender, which indicate that the basic school system reproduces social class differences. Moreover, and alarmingly, there has been a stable but low completion rate in upper secondary education, in which one out of four drops out of school. Specifically, within vocational training the dropout rate on a national level has varied between 35 and 36 % of a cohort (Paulsen 2008), and there have been few signs of improvement despite several national strategies (Markussen et al. 2011).

In Norway, as in most other countries, a strong wave of standardization has followed in the aftermath of the PISA studies over the last decade (Meyer and Benavot 2013). A national quality assurance system (NQAS) was launched in 2005 in order to improve the national standard of student achievements. Moreover, the State Directorate of Training and Education was established in 2006, and this semi-independent body has been responsible for managing a bulk of the standardized measurement instruments such as national achievement tests, student assessment surveys, and teacher assessment surveys. Thus, a strong trend of centralization has been observable through national quality assurance and the standardization of educational targets, including a mix of hard and soft governance (Moos 2009).

At the same time, powers and authorities are decentralized from the state to the Norwegian municipalities with the purpose of steering schools more effectively. In this mixed governing regime, the aim of the current study was to empirically illuminate how transnational and national policies are transformed into local school governance seen from the perspective of local school boards. The empirical investigation was organized in two phases, in which the first one collected data on the names

and e-mail addresses of school board members from Norwegian municipalities. Approximately 300 out of 428 municipalities responded to the survey, which gave a final starting sample of approximately 1,900 possible respondents. Due to their political two-layer structure with no specific school board, approximately 15 % of the sample dropped of the remaining municipalities. Of the remaining population, a total of 833 individual school board members responded to the survey, which left the study with an effective response rate of approximately 40 %. The survey was carried out in September 2011, which means that the respondents were captured at the end point of their election term from 2007 to 2011.

4.2 Reforms of the Norwegian Educational System

4.2.1 *From Segmented to Fragmented State Governing*

Research on state governing and power relations in the Norwegian society has identified a shift from a traditional governing model labeled the “segmented state model” (Olsen 1978)¹ towards a “fragmented state model” (Tranøy and Østerud 2001). The first model, identified as the dominant model in the 1970s, was characterized by a collection of clearly defined institutional sectors, in which it was clear who belongs to the policy field (state, directorate, municipalities, schools) and who does not. Furthermore, each segment, or policy domain, was characterized by a system-wide architecture and legal, administrative, and financial interdependence between levels of jurisdiction (state, municipalities, schools). As identified round the millennium shift, the model labeled “the fragmented state model” primarily conceives of public policies as “service industries.” This model is in accordance with similar labels of governing such as “the supermarket state model” (Olsen 1988). In addition, each policy field is populated with a range of actors on a larger number of levels than in the first model. What is more, the power and capacity to make collective decisions is diffused among a variety of actors in complex networks. With its emphasis on employability and many intersections between political and economic actors, a shift towards Ove K. Pedersen’s notion of “the competitive state model” (Pedersen 2011) has been observable however not entirely. Civil service research in Norway has also inferred that Norway has both been a latecomer and a “slow learner” in the implementation of New Public Management ideas into practice (Christensen and Læg Reid 2001). On the one hand, Norway is evidently affected by transnational policy trends, while at the same time as norms of decentralism and local democracy are still observable in this policy field on the other hand (Møller and Skedsmo 2013).

¹The Norwegian Power Study 1972–1978: a grand project aiming to capture power relationships and the distribution of power in Norwegian society. The first Power Study was followed up by the second one in 1998–2003.

4.2.2 Current Trends

Since Norway experienced its modest achievement ranking in the first OECD panel study (Kjærnsli et al. 2004), a series of national policy initiatives have been launched in order to raise the level of student achievements among secondary school students (Skedsmo 2009). Specifically, in order to steer school prioritization at lower levels more effectively, a national quality assurance system (NQAS) was established in 2005 and yet is managed by a state body, the National Directorate of Education and Training that was formed in 2006 (Eurydice 2006). Following the systemic reform known as the Knowledge Promotion, which was implemented in 2006–2009, and with its strong emphasis on standardized achievement targets, it represents per se a visible shift from input orientation towards outcome orientation curriculum understanding. The Royal Ministry of Education and Research (2006) is also a school governing reform, in which the 428 municipalities and 19 counties were delegated responsibilities by the state to be in charge of reform implementation in relation to the adaptation of educational provisions to a heterogeneous student population, local curriculum adaptation, the development of formative assessment models, and quality assurance towards schools.

As prescribed in the Educational Act, all municipalities have to produce an annual aggregated quality report of the standard of primary education (within the municipality). This yearly report has to be dealt with, discussed, and finally decided upon by the municipal council. The content of the report follows a state-mandated template that is basically centered round the aggregation of performance indicators of schooling (grades, national test results, student satisfaction surveys, teachers' job satisfaction) – yet there are some degrees of freedom for each of the municipalities to fill in issues. The second component is supervision practices, and in each of the 19 counties, there is an educational governor, a state civil servant, who is in charge of supervision towards municipalities. The governor then approaches a sample of municipalities within his or her county, and they carry out a meeting that is followed up by school visits. Three properties are important: First, each year only a certain group of municipalities are targeted for supervision and control. Second, not all schools within a municipality (under supervision) are followed up by direct visits. Third, since municipalities are targets for supervision, it is possible to buffer schools. Analyses of the superintendent study in 2009 support this notion: Superintendents buffer schools from certain issues (that are central in the national quality assurance system) in their daily dialogue with the school principals (Paulsen and Skedsmo 2014).

4.2.3 Decentralization of Educational Governing

Due to the great variation in size and dispersal pattern in Norwegian municipalities, local democracy and autonomy have been important in the Norwegian welfare state model. Decentralization has also been deliberately used as a design

parameter for the purpose of counterbalancing the state's power in educational politics (Bukve and Hagen 1994; Møller and Skedsmo 2013). Moreover, this feature is historically rooted in a policy culture, in which *decentralism* in terms of local autonomy for municipalities to make priorities has been a strong value. In contrast, the ideal of a unified school system requires a series of standards (of both an input of resources and required output demands), which has resulted in a strong central corpus in terms of national curriculum and national standards of resource allocation. National standardization is rooted in another important value in the Norwegian educational system over the past 50 years – namely, *equality* in opportunities for all children, which was gradually accompanied during the 1970s and 1980s with a value orientation towards *equity* in outcomes (Opheim 2004). Thus, on the one hand, the municipalities are responsible for implementing state policy and providing public services for their inhabitants, while on the other, they are the units of local government and can be considered as a meeting ground for different local interests formulated and prioritized by local politicians. Hence, centralization and decentralization have worked as “twin strategies” in building and reforming the Norwegian educational governance system (Møller and Skedsmo 2013). This means by implication that the municipalities are required to establish local routines upwards and downwards that are matched with the national system for quality assurance (NQAS) insofar as evaluating, documenting, and following up the results of the schools. Different types of data about the schools and the education sector are collected and integrated in a status report, which in the final round is submitted to the educational governor located in each of the regional counties. Compared to inspection-driven systems found in many other Western democracies, this approach does not imply direct control of teaching and learning in schools.

4.2.4 Contemporary Educational Governing: The “Blueprint Assumption”

In a policy review of Norwegian school governing from 1970 to 2007, Engeland and Langfeldt concluded that local policy formation initiatives are very seldom observable in Norwegian municipalities (Engeland and Langfeldt 2009). Noteworthy, the timespan of their review encompasses the implementation phase of The Royal Ministry of Education and Research (2006), which paradoxically presumes a substantial local engagement in policy formation through delegation and decentralization. More specifically, the government presumed that the municipalities should “fill in the gaps” in vague and underspecified goal formulations in the national curricula with their own local strategies, policy initiatives, and prioritizations. To the contrary, the researchers find that this is not the case. For example, as observed in written documents, municipal policy goals and local educational strategies are of a general and vague nature and leave the impression of being “blueprints” of national policies. This is particularly the case when it comes to the content of the curriculum,

i.e., the ideological steering of schools, as locally developed evaluation criteria (towards school principals and teachers), as well as local curriculum development, are seldom found. As further noted by Engeland, the intended level of municipal autonomy inherent in the Local Government Act of 1992 is *not* utilized within the policy domain of primary education (Engeland 2000).

4.2.5 The Rise and Fall of Deflating Political and Administrative Designs

Municipalities in Norway have traditionally been organized in accordance with an integrative model (Kjellberg 1988), in which the municipal organization is fairly well matched to the state's central administration. As such, an implication of this model is a functional and specialized sector administration in the municipalities with a central school office set up for the purpose of supporting each school principal, in addition to ensuring that national policies are fairly well reflected in the day-to-day school practices. By implication, the model means a structure of two layers within the municipal administration. The top layer is the municipality council and its board paired with the municipal CEO and the central administrative staff, whereas the second layer is the municipal school administration led by a school superintendent that is administratively responsible for education within the entire municipality. At the millennium shift, a series of redesign initiatives were launched in order to deflate administrative hierarchies towards a lean model with only one level within the civil service administration. In parallel, significant authorities and responsibilities were delegated directly to the school principal. Subsequent to this, approximately two-thirds of Norwegian municipalities reported that they were, or had been, in a process of deflating the administrative hierarchies (Pedersen 2009). However, most of these reform initiatives culminated around 2005 (Hovik and Stigen 2008), with the 2009 Norwegian superintendent survey showing that only 20 % of the 291 municipalities in the sample reported a structure without a central school office.

4.3 Members and Chairs of the Local School Board

School board members in Norway are not elected directly by the voters in local elections (every fourth year); instead, they are appointed indirectly by the municipal council. Out of a total of 833 members, 645 in the sample are also members of their respective municipality council, while 146 out of the 833 are also members of the municipal boards. This point gives the image that school boards are recruited relatively closely to the central core of political local government.

4.3.1 Gender, Employment, and Education

In total, 55 % of the school board members in the sample are male, whereas 45 % are female. Additionally, two-thirds of the members in the sample serve as ordinary board members without any specific leadership function attached to their role, while 19 % of the members in the sample are chairs of the school board. The distribution of employment categories among the school board members in the sample is worth a comment. First, 18.6 % of the board members work in the educational sector, which is only modest compared with the traditional role of the school board as a forum of specialism. Second, there is a high proportion of the board members who work in private business sectors, a total of approximately 40 %, which on average is significantly higher than in municipal boards and municipal councils.

Moreover, within this group, close to one out of three run their own business, thereby supporting the notion that school issues attract a broader group of local politicians than professionals working in the public sector and in education. The educational level of school board members is significantly higher than the national average of 34 % who have completed a university or university college degree (OECD 2009), and 66.8 % of the board members have tertiary educational degrees. About another 25 % of the members have completed an upper secondary education and a craftsman certificate as their highest educational level, whereas only 2.4 % (20 members) have a primary education as their highest level.

4.3.2 Political Representation

When it comes to board members' political party background, the distribution in the sample of 833 members corresponds fairly well to the ordinary political landscape in Norway, though with two exceptions: (1) 15 % of the board members belong to the Center Party, which is significantly higher than the results in the 2007 local election and (2) compared with the total result of the 2007 local electorate,² the Liberal-Progressive Party on the right wing is underrepresented in the sample, as shown in Table 4.1.

As such, there is a sample bias towards the center point in the Norwegian political landscape. Related to the themes subjected to this study, this moderate bias can fairly well show a more positive perception of local capabilities and resistance to municipality mergers, which are key policy issues of the Center Party – in contrast to the Liberal-Progressive Party.

² Source: Statistics Norway (SSB), downloaded from: <http://ssb.no/a/samfunnsspeilet/utg/200802/01/tab-2008-04-11-01.html> – 6.11.2013.

Table 4.1 Party distribution in the sample and national level results – 2007 election

Political party	Representation in the sample (%)	National level 2007 municipal election
Labor Party	31.0	29.6
Conservative Party	17.0	19.3
Liberal Party	6.5	5.9
Center Party	15.2	8.0
Liberal-Progressive Party	8.9	17.5
Christian-Democratic Party	8.5	6.4
Socialist Left Party	7.6	6.2
Local election lists/others	5.3	7.1

4.3.3 Motivation Structure: Why They Joined the School Board

When asked why they accepted a position in the political board, there are three strong tendencies in the responses: (1) Education is my personal interest – and it is important for society and the local community. The vast majority of the group of respondents express a clear motivation structure such as, “the importance and value of education in the local society,” accompanied by “personal interests in education” and “personal interest in school development.” A minority group expresses that “I have children in school myself, so it is important to engage in this policy field.” (2) A significant part of the remaining minority responded that “my party asked me” or “my position was a part of the distribution of posts between the political parties in the municipal council.” (3) Only few members say in their own words that they have entered the school board to “get the budget and the finances balanced.”

4.3.4 Summary and Implications

In summary, there are three noteworthy tendencies in the data. First, the data confirms that school board members are recruited from one of the two most dominant blocks in the Norwegian political system, i.e., socialist-center or conservative. Similarly, the school board members are people with a long experience in politics (years in service), and their assessments are captured at the end point of their election period from 2007 to 2011. Additionally, they are also members of the municipal council or municipal board. Second, this image is supported by data on their educational background, which is higher than the average of the Norwegian population (the portion with tertiary education). Third, in terms of motivation structure, the data expresses an aspiration to improve the primary school system in various domains within the municipality.

4.4 The Board as an Institution on the Municipal Level

4.4.1 Total Responsibility for 0–16

A significant portion of the school board members reports that their board has a wider area of responsibility, most typically responsibility for both day care and primary schooling. The full availability of day-care institutions has been a highly prioritized policy goal for the socialist-center coalition since they took office in 2005, and in practical terms, most parents are offered day care for their children if they wish. Most day-care institutions are owned and run by the municipalities, but there are also approximately 2,300 private day-care institutions that are funded by the state. Paired with the inclusion of day-care operations as part of the board's responsibility, the widespread distribution of titles on the board reflects a broad denomination that the committee in general covers the entire range of children's life and education from 0 to 16 years.

4.4.2 Issues Most Frequently Processed in the Board

The members are asked to assess the issues processed most frequently in the board, and unsurprisingly, the number one category is "financial resources and budget issues," which accounts for the 81.9 % of the members responding "often" and "very often." The second highly ranked category is "information from the school administration," while the next four ranked categories capture different domains of quality assurance: "school quality issues," "results from evaluations," "evaluation of our schools," and "student achievements" – all counting 40–50 %, "often" and "very often." In contrast, "personnel policies and recruitment" only covers 18.3 %.

4.4.3 Perception of Influence

When asked about their perception of the school board's political influence in municipal governance, the members perceive that they are influential and particularly influential in the municipal council and board's strategic decisions and economic prioritizing. They also perceive that their work has had a significant impact on primary schooling in their municipality. However, when it comes to a downward influence in terms of agenda setting at the school level, the perception of influence among school board members decreases significantly. Of note, when board members are asked about their perception of being empowered to make "decisions about local curriculum development," only approximately 20 % respond as agreeing and strongly agreeing. There are also very few examples of direct linkages between the school board and the schools within the municipality.

4.4.4 Tensions Between the State and the Municipal Level

The school board survey captures possible tensions between the state and local politicians in the area of state supervision. As noted, in the Norwegian quality assurance system, the municipalities are the target level for state supervision.³ When the school board members are asked about their experiences with the state supervision carried out by the educational director (we first asked the members whether they have had supervision during their 4-year period), the responses cluster round two contrasting perspectives. The first perceives of state supervision as being externally controlled as well as being another bureaucratic maneuver from the state's side, both of which are overtly negative. The upfront cases cluster round an image of state supervision as an activation trigger for making improvement initiatives from the school owner's side. In a similar vein, these members perceive performance monitoring in a more positive manner as a feedback mechanism that can be productively utilized.

4.4.5 Summary and Implications

As noted, the curriculum and governance reform known as The Royal Ministry of Education and Research (2006) formally empowered the municipalities towards the responsibility for local curriculum development and adapting schooling to local demands. As referred to above, the data indicates that this is not the case in practical governance, as manifested by the low score on "decisions of local curriculum development" in board members' perceptions of political influence. This finding gives rise to a view, at least as an assumption that a large portion of Norwegian municipalities are not capable of utilizing the degrees of freedom that they enjoy in formal regulations. This inference is also supported by an analysis of municipal superintendent practices in Norway (Paulsen and Skedsmo 2014) and a comprehensive policy review (Engeland and Langfeldt 2009). The latter research couples this observation with the massive employment of standardized steering instruments by the state, which in their view dictates school policy-making at the local level.

4.5 The School Board's Governing Function

4.5.1 Critical Knowledge, Competence, and Political Decisions

School board members are asked to rank (by predefined categories) what type of knowledge they see as important for doing a good job as a school politician in a municipality. The school board underscores the need to have some knowledge

³Norwegian: Tilsyn.

about “municipal economics,” “pupils’ learning conditions,” “local governance,” and “national educational politics.” All these categories are preferred by more than two-thirds of the board members, and all three issues are general issues within the committee’s work area. Lower scores were items such as “leadership and management” and “pedagogy.” As reported, political decisions in the board are characterized by majority decisions and that there is no consistent pattern in the decision-making processes.

4.5.2 Agenda Setting and Informational Procedures

Regarding the most typical pattern of who decides the agenda for the committee meetings, the reporting is relatively clear: 68.3 % answered that the superintendent decided on the agenda together with the chair of the board, whereas 16.3 % answered that the chair of the board had decided on the agenda. Only 3.7 % answered that the agenda was created by suggestions from the board members, while 8.1 % reported that the agenda was shaped by previous meetings. These answers give rise to an assumption that municipal politics are increasingly becoming professionalized or becoming depoliticized. When school board members were asked about their assessment of the most important source of information for their work in the committee (multiple response categories), 88 % answered “information from the school administration,” 68.7 % answered “official reports on issues,” 53.9 % answered “information from the principals,” and 40.5 % specified “impressions from school visits.” The category “information from my political party” was only specified by 40.9 % of the school board members, in addition to “information from the teachers” (36.4 %) and “information from the teacher trade unions” (23.8 %). These answers leave the impression that the administrative core of the municipality is the prime source of information for the board members.

4.5.3 Summary and Implications

Administrative knowledge, such as knowledge on municipal economics, scores high on critical competence as assessed by the school board members. Moreover, knowledge of national educational politics has become more important for members of the committee because of the state-initiated control of how the municipalities act as school owners in the national quality assurance system. On the other hand, the most important sources of information come from the central school office, and superintendents play a prominent role in the agenda-setting phase of the policy process. Over and above this, the data supports an image that school boards are tightly coupled to the administrative sphere of the municipality organization in their daily functioning, as well as similarly decoupled from any pedagogical processes linked to the schools.

4.6 Important Policy Issues

The board members were asked about, “how important are the following issues for the school board.” Each of the predefined categories was incrementally assessed on a 5-point scale, and when the response categories “important” and “very important” were aggregated, “budgeting and finance” was ranked highest by 91.1 % in the sample. “Follow up the schools’ accomplishment of policy goals” was ranked second highest by 84.1 %, with similar scores for “quality of the teachers’ work” and “leadership of the schools” at 83.1 % and 75.3 %, respectively. Given its national focus in the public debate in Norway, it is worth noting that “raising the level of student achievements on national tests” was only ranked by 58.1 % of the school board members. The survey instrument also asked the school board members in the sample to assess various stakeholders’ influence on the board’s decision-making. Not surprisingly, the administrative core of the central school office, including the school superintendent, consists of the stakeholders ranging highest among all.

As we can see, the overarching policy issues in the board’s work are budget and finance, and the accomplishment of (central) policy goals and organizational issues. Again, there is little evidence in the data on direct interference and discussions with schools in pedagogical matters. When it comes to stakeholder influence on the school board’s decision-making, the administrative core of the municipality consists of the high scorers, whereas teachers and parents are systematic low scorers in relation to perceived influence. The board members’ preference structure (of policy issues and stakeholder influence) indicates tight couplings between the school board and the administrative core of the school sector in the municipality organization. In a similar vein, the data indicates that the school board’s functioning and policy processes are decoupled from current school reforms in Norway as far as local curriculum development, the implementation of formative assessment practices, and participation in leadership dialogues.

4.7 Perception of Educational Capabilities

4.7.1 *Assessment of Competence in Various Organizational Domains*

The board members were asked to assess their own competence in relation to the work in the committee. When the response categories “fairly competent,” “competent,” and “very competent” were aggregated, the percentage was 97.3 %, which underscores a high level of self-believed efficacy and mastery. School board members were also asked to assess their school administration’s competence. The board members assessments were measured by statements such as

“our school administration is well competent in school law issues.” Similar items were loaded on various competence domains, such as “analysis of national tests,” “leadership and management,” “national educational policy,” “quality assurance,” and “school development.” When “agree” and “strongly agree” were aggregated, the scores varied between 51.7 % (law issues) and 67.1 % (analysis of national tests).

The board members were asked to assess their superintendent’s competence in important leadership areas, such as ensuring good working conditions for schooling, allocation of resources to the schools, mobilization for school improvement, and school development in general, with the results indicating only a modest level of assessments (variation in positive assessments between 50 and 60 %). Furthermore, when the board members assessed the level of competence among school principals (within their municipality), a further decline is observable. For example, only 32 % of the members in the sample saw their school principals as fairly good in leading school development. Moreover, when the board members were asked to express their perceptions about school principals’ loyalty (with conflicting interests about student learning), only 41.5 % of the board members trusted that their school principals would side with the interests of the students. Thus, the latter observation indicates that the level of organizational trust, as seen from the policy sphere, is only modest.

4.7.2 The Municipality’s Capacity as School Owner

In the Norwegian policy context, there is a recurrent debate on the municipality structure, with the backdrop being the dispersed structure of 428 municipalities. At the national level, one of the predominant policy discourses raises critical questions about whether or not small municipalities are capable of ensuring good learning conditions for all children, and there is also a question of whether or not small municipalities are capable of recruiting competent teachers due to a perceived lack of attractiveness. Against this backdrop, the Norwegian survey instrument assesses school board members’ perceived capacity in two areas, respectively, their home municipality and small municipalities in general. First, a homogenous and large majority of the sample of school board members expressed a view of municipalities, both smaller and larger, as capable of fulfilling their role as school owners. For example, approximately 80 % of the sample falsifies (disagree and strongly disagree) that “our municipality is too small to fulfill the obligations of primary schooling set by the state.” A similar disagreement is shown by the statement that “our municipality is too small to ensure good learning conditions for all pupils in the future.” Subsequently, a similar portion of approximately 80 % of the sample perceives that “our municipality will also be capable of offering school provisions that are attractive for the choice of the parents in the future.”

4.7.3 *Summary and Implications*

There are three implications that emerge from the data on the school board members' perceptions of capabilities in their municipalities. First, the data portrays a fairly strong self-belief in the municipality's capacity as school owner, both in terms of the level of student achievements and owner capacity, as providers of good conditions for teachers and learners. Second, the school boards express a fairly strong self-efficacy linked to their own competence as local politicians. When it comes to the perceived competence and level of trust of their school principals, there is a visible decline in the perceptions. Over and above this, the data shows a strong self-belief in school ownership capacity. Furthermore, compared to the national discourse, in which small municipalities are seen as problematic in terms of school ownership, the findings of the current study portray a contrasting "counterculture" or deviating policy discourse compared with the national debate.

4.8 Demands of Accountability

The survey instrument asks the school board members in free-form responses about the expectations of their superintendents in terms of what kind of policy targets they will hold the superintendent accountable for. Prioritized tasks that the board feels that they should hold the superintendents responsible for are, for example:

- Student achievements in national tests
- Reaching budget targets
- Monitoring school results and quality indicators
- Producing the quality report

When it comes to the issues that the board members feel that the superintendent should hold the school principals responsible for, a softer language is visible in the bulk of free-form expressions, such as:

- Transparency in all sides of schooling
- Closing the gap between the budget and real costs
- Ensuring good working conditions for teachers and students
- Ensuring good learning conditions for students

The free-form answers cluster and cohere around a set of demands that will hold the superintendent accountable for student school quality in terms of an appropriate level of student achievements. Moreover, they do *not* expect the school superintendents to hold their respective principals accountable for these targets. In contrast, they first and foremost expect the school principals to be accountable for good working conditions and motivational conditions for their teachers. Hence, there is a significantly softer rhetoric when it comes to the expectations for school principals as expressed by the school board members in the sample.

4.9 Forecasting

There are three parties in the national quality assurance system in Norway: the state department, the regional educational governors, and the municipalities. Notably, the operating level of the quality report system itself is the municipality, which means that the municipal school administration collects data from the school level and aggregates the sources into the report, which in the final round are submitted to the educational governor in each of the 19 regional counties. Nevertheless, a certain amount of templates and tools are available (linked to several national register databases) for producing the yearly quality report, as the individual municipality enjoys some degree of freedom to include target issues in accordance with local priorities. Lastly, the report then forms the basis of supervisory practices for the yearly meeting with the municipality administration; however, this is significantly influenced by the choices made by the municipalities.

The school board members were asked to express in their own words their experiences with the Norwegian quality assurance system in terms of the supervision from the state governor in relation to the yearly quality report. In brief, the respondents split into two “camps” with regard to their experiences and perceptions. The first group perceives this arrangement as increased state governance in which the state lays down the premises of local approaches to quality assurance, and they express different categories of negative perceptions. Within this group is also a subgroup that sees this arrangement as a case of the bureaucratization of local school management. The more visible group of school board members express that this is a useful arrangement that enables local school politicians to set quality issues on the agenda based on performance indicators. Despite significant within-group variation in the responses, a number of members also perceive that they enjoy many degrees of freedom in the construction of the quality report, and they also perceive the supervision meeting and school inspections setup by the governor as fruitful.

4.10 Summary and Concluding Remarks

Three trends are visible in the Norwegian policy landscape. First of all, an implication of the current educational legislation, national curriculum, and the dominant discourse is a national assessment system that lays down premises for school governing adapted to fit PISA as the educational “benchmark.” Second and nested within this landscape, the state has strengthened its steering core towards municipalities, schools, and teachers through a large body of standardized performance indicators and national tests, in which results are made publicly available for media and stakeholders. Thus, a combinative model of steering and indirect steering, often labeled hard and soft governance (Moos 2009), has been implemented. The third trend is a decentralization of the responsibilities and degrees of freedom (in regulative terms) to municipalities as school owners, in which the state demands

that the municipality sector act as an implementation center of reform and quality assurance. As such, there is a series of tensions and paradoxes inherent in this current governance regime.

The Norwegian school board study reveals a relatively potent layer of local politicians with education as policy specialism. The members of the sample are active and fairly knowledgeable local politicians with a clear motivation structure linked to school improvement and educational policy. They also see themselves and the municipal administration as fairly competent in educational matters. When task preferences, policy preferences, and policy processes (information acquisition, agenda setting, and openness for stakeholders) are investigated, we infer that the school board in Norway is typically tightly coupled to the dominant policy coalition, as well as the administrative and organizational sphere of the municipality. From this perspective, the board members also perceive a high level of influence towards these spheres. Shifting towards schools, school principals, and school professionals, the image emerging from the data portrays a pattern of *decoupling* that is manifest in very few direct communicative linkages towards schools. In terms of political agenda setting, pedagogical issues, local curriculum, and assessment models are also typically low scorers and close to absent when board members specify their tasks and priorities. In addition, the school boards assess their influence towards schools as relatively low, with also only a modest level of organizational trust towards school principals. When shifting the perspective in reverse by asking board members about stakeholder influence, the same pattern is visible: The administrative corpus exerts a high influence, whereas teachers, teacher unions, and parents are absent in this part of the policy process.

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Chapter 5

School Boards in Sweden

Olof Johansson, Elisabet Nihlfors, and Linda Jervik Steen

Abstract The school law has strengthened the rights for the pupils and parents not only through the possibility to choose the school but also to test decisions taken by the law in court. The state inspection has a great number of possibilities to act against schools that don't fulfill the law.

When the principal needed support, they gave their demands to the school owner. We call this "under-pressure". Often the demands are about resources. These negotiations affect the relations between the principal and the school owner, as well as between principals, teachers, and parents who have often been involved.

The strong and direct state regulation of the schools, together with a separate system for the allocation of money between states and municipalities, seems to have strengthened the relation between the state and the school and weakened the relation between the schools and the municipality (Nihlfors E, Johansson O, Rektor – en stark länk i styrningen av skolan [The school principal-a strong linkage in school governing]. SNS Förlag, Stockholm, 2013).

At the same time, well-educated, dedicated board members with an interest in education work as spare-time politicians and want to make a difference. The communication with the principals is not frequent, and they heavily rely on the information from the superintendent. Also the board members look to the national level and trust the state inspection more than they trust their own evaluations.

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5.1 National Policy Meets Local Implementation Structures

This chapter focuses on the Swedish school boards and their role and function as active parts of the governing chain for schools. Our focus is on finding explanations to differences between school boards in their understanding of their tasks to improve and sustain school improvement. How do school boards understand their function in the local educational system, and do they see two sides of the system: one political and one administrative?

The governing system of the Swedish school system has changed several times since the first school board for all municipality schools was introduced in 1958. At that time, both school boards and superintendents were regulated by the Education Act (Nihlfors 2003). From 1991 and onward, the municipality council decide themselves about their organization concerning political boards.

The last two decades of governmental control can be characterized by two trends working side by side and yet contradicting each other. Decentralization, deregulation, and an increased local independency were rhetorically strengthened in the reform era of the early 1990s. This was paired by recentralization and increased national control from the end of the 1990s onward. The Swedish context can also be characterized by competition. The policy stream has been intense in order to strengthen the pupil's results or to make Sweden competitive on the market in the future.

Many reforms over the last decades have been directed directly at the school level. This placed strong pressure on the principals and on the school owner/municipality to give the best prerequisites to the professionals to fulfill the national goals set by the Education Act and the curricula. In the Education the state regulates the work in the school sector of Sweden. The law clarifies the division between politicians and professionals when it comes to responsibility and accountability (Nihlfors and Johansson 2013). The result from the 2012 PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) study has started an intensive debate about how schools are governed on the local level.

5.1.1 National Actors in the Governing System

The Swedish school system, which operates on a national level with the government and parliament (*Riksdag*), makes basic decisions in relation to content through binding laws, regulations for the schools, and the school districts. The most important ones are school laws, national curricula, and syllabuses for different subjects; decisions concerning teacher training; teacher qualifications; and a compulsory principal training program for all newly appointed principals (Boström and Lundmark 2012).

The National Agency for Education (NAE) is the central administrative authority for the public school system, publicly organized preschooling, school-age childcare, and adult education. NAE shall provide support for the implementation of new national

reforms but also set up frameworks and guidelines regarding how education is to be provided and assessed with the aid of syllabuses and subject plans, knowledge requirements and tests, as well as general guidelines. NAE is also responsible for the national system for assessing knowledge. Together with universities, they develop national tests and assessment guides for teachers to ensure that pupils receive equivalent assessments. NAE takes part in international studies to benchmark the Swedish education system and compare it with other countries.

There is another national agency in the governing chain: the Swedish State School Inspection (SSI). This agency has supervisory responsibility for preschooling, school-age childcare, schooling, and adult education. This means that the agency checks that the municipalities and independent school owners comply with the legislation and other provisions applicable to their activities. SSI is also responsible for approving applications and grants for independent schools.

There are some other national agencies, but the two previously mentioned are the most central for policy implementation. To understand the transformation of legal norms into professional action at a local level, an analysis is needed of how national guidelines and national inspections of local authorities are effecting the implementation of legal standards.

We see this trend of using bypass as a way for the state to interfere in local administrative and political structures. Going more or less directly to the schools can be seen as a bypass operation where the municipality level is more or less left out. This bypass contains support directly to the schools, which can then create an “under pressure” from the schools to the school board. One example is national financial support to specific teacher categories within the municipality. As the municipality is in charge of salaries, the state with this bypass action interferes in the salary structure of teachers within the municipality.

5.1.2 Municipalities, County Councils, and Regions

Sweden is divided into 290 municipalities and 20 county councils, each with a degree of autonomy. Local self-government and the right to levy taxes are stipulated in the Instrument of Government, one of the four pillars of the Swedish Constitution (Myrlund 2011).

The municipality is governed by elected people. There are approximately 46,000 political assignments in the municipalities and 3,500 political assignments in the 20 county councils and regions. This means that 1 % of the adult population in Sweden holds a political assignment in a municipality or county council.

Swedish citizens aged 18 or over has the right to vote in elections to the parliament, municipal, and county councils. Citizens of foreign origin living in Sweden can vote for the local elections in the municipality and county. The electoral system is proportional, which means that the proportion of seats that parties may have is largely the same as the percentage of votes that the party received. To participate in the distribution of seats in the parliament, a party must receive at least 4 % of the valid

votes in the whole country. In the county council election, 3 % of the valid votes in the county are required, and for the municipal councils, there is no percentage barrier.

The municipality council can be viewed as the parliament of the municipality. They make decisions about taxes, allocate resources, decide which political boards are needed, and appoint who shall audit the work in the municipality. The municipality board can be viewed as the government of the municipality and conducts the implementation of the council's decisions and is responsible for having a balanced budget. The politicians in the municipal board are the most influential in each party and an implication of that is that the board's recommendations for the council are very central. In many municipalities, the chairperson of the school board is a member of both the municipality council and board.

The majority of municipalities also have other boards pertinent to different administrative areas, and one of these is often the school board. The appointed members of the school board are all politicians and are organized with a chairperson from the political majority in the council and one or two vice chairs from other political parties. Because each municipality has many boards with ten to 15 members and substitute members, all cannot be members of the municipal council. There are around 470 school boards in the 290 municipalities. Most school boards have a central school office serving them and the head is often called superintendent. We find different names both of the school boards and the superintendent. This reflects what responsibilities they have. It can be preschool, compulsory school, and also libraries and sport facilities. The combinations of tasks are greater in smaller municipalities.

The school board and the superintendent are not mentioned in the school law, but they are both appointed by the municipal council and seen as the school owner representatives. There is, in some municipalities, one more decision level between the superintendent and the principals and subdistrict heads, and their task is to organize and support a part of the school district.

5.1.3 Local Boards of Parents

To enhance parent involvement in municipal schools and to vitalize local democracy, it was proposed that municipalities should be permitted to delegate decision-making authority previously held by district school boards and school principals to local school boards that had a parent majority. This idea was introduced by a national committee first and eventually decided upon by the parliament that the boards should be allowed a trial period. Although local school boards are now entering their 16th year on trial and have become an institutionalized part of the system, parents are no longer allowed to be in the majority within the local school board. The National Assembly passed a law giving the rights to municipal councils to introduce local school boards at the school site with parents involved, but it is the district school board that, in collaboration with individual schools, decides on the functions to be delegated. Initially, municipalities were allowed to delegate authority on areas such as culture and sports, in-service professional development of school staff, and cooperation between the school and homes—but not regarding

the use of the school's budget or pedagogical planning. However, with the enactment of the new Education Act, local school boards are regulated as a special case of local self-management, without specific guidelines about what the boards are allowed to do (Holmgren et al. 2012). The new Education Act references the Local Government Act, which only specifies the kinds of decisions that the district boards are *not* allowed to delegate. This includes decisions that concern them, “goals, focus, scope, and quality of the activities,” as well as authority in relation to individuals (e.g., the hiring of staff or children in need of special support).

5.2 The Local School Board

From the beginning of the 1990s, an intense stream of policy reforms have affected the schools in different ways. The purpose of new laws and regulations has, from the national political level, been aimed at improving pupil's results. Whether national decisions are perceived as positive reforms or as new control mechanisms depends to some extent on how much support the intentions behind the decisions have—in other words, how important these intentions are, especially among those responsible for the implementation. Lundquist's (1992) classic governance model will serve as a basis for further discussion here. He defines two distinct roles in politics: the policy-maker role and the implementer role. Or, as Lindensjö and Lundgren (2000) put it, this is the difference between the formulation and realization arenas. The direct control is coupled with more or less clear rules of what is to be implemented, while the indirect concerns the conditions for doing so, for example, allocating resources for implementation. In this context, it is important to point out that the implementation level is often influenced by several different processes of change, including the mediation arena.

The vast number of new regulations makes it difficult to discern which effects come from what decision. This difficulty may also be exacerbated by the fact that institutions find themselves at different stages of implementation. Lack of understanding on the local level can also affect implementation. During the realization of a decision, there is a possibility, sometimes even a duty, for different levels to interpret the intent of the political decision to reformulate it in order to make it possible to implement the decision in the prevailing context.

Since the middle of the 1990s, Sweden has had a dual school system with both independent or free schools and public schools. Pupils and parents have the possibility to choose between different municipality schools and independent schools. Both school forms are financed with tax money from the state and municipality and are not allowed to take fees from the pupils. Independent schools must have an official school owner, and they often organize themselves with board functions equivalent to district school boards. There are a variety of different association forms and the independent school boards can differ a lot in size and importance. The effects vary between different parts of the country; where there are many independent schools, the changes in the number and size of public schools have been visible (Holmgren et al. 2013).

This chapter concentrates on the elected boards in the municipalities and is based on a national study of all Swedish school board members from 2012, with a respondent rate of 46 %. Grounded on a response rate analysis, we find the material valid. This study is part of a bigger project¹ including surveys to chairpersons, board members, superintendents, and principals in all Swedish municipalities and is comprised of interviews with these people in 12 municipalities/school districts.

When we ask the school board members about the importance of different aspects of the policy streams for improved education, we discover an interesting picture. When we asked which statement they considered to be important reasons for schooling, almost three-quarters of them (74 %) say that it is important that all children have the chance to develop as much as they can. In second place, with 56 %, the statement was that it is important to teach children about the democratic principles of society. And 40 % of the board members believe that it is important to teach about the importance of Sweden being active within the international arena. The rest of the statements that were mentioned at around 25 % each or less are it is important for the well-being of the society and it is important to help young people to have good working prospects and the possibility of social mobility. Only 15 % of the school board members believe that education is important in reaching a higher understanding of different cultures.

5.3 The Demography of the School Boards

In this section, we will describe the school board member's characteristics as well as internal similarities and differences within the given sample of school districts. Within the material responses from 1,599 board members, 49 % were from men and 51 % were from women. The average age was 51 years old; 25 % of them were younger than 40 years of age and 25 % were older than 60 years. There are no persistent gender differences related to age.

More than 60 % have a post-upper secondary school education, including higher education, with 3 % more women than men possessing a higher education. The group that only has a compulsory education is 5 %. Another big group (31 %) has upper secondary school as their highest formal education.

5.3.1 *Which Position Do the Members Have on the Labor Market?*

One-fifth of the members of the board are not employed, 14 % are pensioners, 4 % are still studying, and a small percentage of them (4 %) have no work position for the moment. A large group is employed within the public sector (37 %), including

¹When National Policy meets Local Implementation Structures, SRC 2009–2013.

13 % working in education and 7 % working in the health sector. In the private sector, 13 % are business owners, 11 % are employed in the private service sector, and 8 % are employed in the industry sector. Another 2 % are active in the nonprofit sector working for political parties, unions, or the church.

5.3.2 How Engaged Are These Members in Politics?

Of the respondents, 16 % are vice chairpersons, 13 % are chairs of the school boards, and 1 % are substitute members of the board. For 26 % of them, the school board is their only political assignment. But many of the others have more than one assignment: 66 % have a seat in the municipal council and 26 % are assigned to a seat in the municipal board, which is the government of the municipality. One-tenth of them have a seat in the municipality companies and 23 % are also members of one or two other sector boards. School politicians in Sweden can be characterized as a well-qualified group.

5.3.3 Reason for Accepting to Be a Member of the School Board?

It is very clear that the absolute majority say that they wanted to assign as they are interested and engaged, see its importance, etc., in education. Many see themselves as knowledgeable and therefore able to make a difference. A few highlight political reasons, saying that the education board is a good way into local political work.

The party distribution in our project has an acceptable adjustment to party distributions within school boards in the different school districts within the country. There is no possibility to compare the election distribution in each school district with our data, but it is important to know that on the local level, more often than not, Sweden does not have a clear party cleavage between the bourgeoisie and socialist parties. Most of the times, the local politics is very pragmatic. In about 34 % of the school boards, there is a socialist majority, in 35 % there is a bourgeoisie majority, and within the remaining boards, 31 % are parties working together. In Sweden, we have eight parties on a national level, and these can be divided into three groups: the socialists (three parties), the bourgeoisie (four parties), and the nationalistic (one party). On local politics, it is also possible that a local party is represented in the municipality council.

The people in the school boards must be seen as important local politicians and that they consider the school board to be an important governing body of the school sector. They have been active within politics for on average of 8 years—25 % has been in politics for 4 years and 25 % have more than 15 years of experience. On average, they have been members of the school board for 3 years, i.e., 53 % of them were appointed to their school board after the last election in 2010 and another 25 %

have 6 years or more on the school board. There are no persistent gender differences related to time in politics or time on the school board. We have checked the variables in this section for size of the municipality and cannot find any clear variation in relation to municipality size.

5.4 The School Board as an Institution

One important question is what role the school board has in the local implementation process for national policy and in the local quality assurance process. The role is very much decided and elaborated in relation to the quality and interest from the board members. Even political and ideological disagreements and conflicts can have an impact on how the boards work. The perception of empowerment among the board members has been measured by two questions. One concerns how they see the school board's possibility of making important decisions, and the other relates to the influence of the school board on education in general within the school district.

A majority of the members on the school board think that the board can make strategic priorities for the school sector. On a six-grade scale (where 1 = totally disagree and 6 = totally agree), 54 % answered 5 or 6. Fifty-four percent of the board members think that they can influence the way that decisions are formulated. A little over half of the members (52 %) also give the board the power to make economic priorities that are important to schools, and to a little lower extent (39 %), they accept as true the fact that the school board has an influence on the way the school decides on their priorities (Table 5.1).

We find a small, but consistent, difference between men and women. Men are not using *agree totally* as frequently as women. If we also accept a 4 on the six-grade scale as a positive answer, we find that almost three-quarters of the members of the board feel empowered in their work as board members. It is also very clear from the tables that the chairs of the school boards have a much more positive view when it comes to decisions related to strategic priorities and their own influence on the board's decisions. But when it comes to the degree of impact on schools' agendas and priorities, they rank that they have higher impact than board members. The analysis reported reveals that they are not totally convinced or trust that their

Table 5.1 School board members' and chairs' view on their power—highly agree, values 5 and 6

	The board can make strategic priorities	As a member, one can influence the decisions made by the board	I feel that the board has an impact on the schools' agenda/priorities	I feel that the board can make economic priorities that are important to schools
Board members	54 %	55 %	39 %	52 %
Chair	76 %	96 %	56 %	64 %
Total respondents	807	587	825	773

Table 5.2 Difference between chairs and board members on different important items—highly agree, values 5 and 6

	Board (%)	Chair (%)	Total number of respondents
The board's work is important for the school's development in our municipality	75	88	1,113
The municipality board takes the views of the school board into account in matters relating to education	52	73	770
As a politician, I am treated with respect by the school staff	74	78	1,093
Principals in the municipality have great influence on the board's decisions	30	34	439
The municipality's school administration has a major influence on the board's decisions	52	53	774
The treatment of different school issues is all about choices between different political party options	21	11	305
The school board is good at suggesting solutions to problems in the school sector	32	42	475
The school administration is good at analyzing the national test	34	44	488
I have sufficient competence in relation to the matters dealt with by the school board	60	74	889

decisions have an impact out in the schools, i.e., they are not sure if they can influence the principal's work at the different schools.

Our questions regarding the influence of the board on different educational matters display a greater variation in the board members' opinions. More than 70 % of the members agree on the statement that the board's work is of great importance to the schools in the district. And they also, to the same degree, feel well treated and respected by the teachers and principals in the schools. Around 50 % of the board members believe that the municipality board accepts their proposals and takes them under consideration before taking any decisions. Fifty percent also think that the central school office has significantly influenced school matters and that the central office does a good analysis of the national tests that their pupils take.

We also asked about how much influence principals have on the board's decisions. It is of interest that 30 % of the members agree that the principals have a large influence on the board's decisions. The same number of members think that the school board is good in finding solutions to different problems within the school sector. Finally, 60 % believe that they have the competence needed in relation to the challenges the school board has to handle and make decisions about. The chairs of the boards in general answered that they agree (5 or 6) to a higher extent than the board members do (see Table 5.2 above). The one question which stands out is the one where we asked if the treatment of different school issues is about choices between different political party options, where one-fifth of the board agrees and only one-tenth of the chairs agree.

The pattern from Table 5.1 is repeated, meaning that the chairs more often agree when answering our questions. The distance between the members' and chairs'

opinions is not great but shows that chairs judge their importance as being higher than that of the members.

The answers above can also be mirrored with some other questions dealing with the relation between the board members and the principals. Nearly 50 % of the board members don't visit the schools or are a "contact" politician for one or two schools. The other half does visit schools once or twice, sometimes three times every semester. Another difference inside the boards is how much time the different board members, who are "spare-time" politicians, are using to prepare for the board meetings. The chairperson often has more time to use as being the chair—more than double the time compared with an ordinary member. The vice chair falls in between these two.

When we ask the school board members about which critical knowledge they need for mastery of the governing functions, they rank knowledge about local school politics as the number one item, 85 % ranked it a 5 or 6 and at the same level is a good understanding of the municipality budget process ranked, 80 %, and on third place we find another important local understanding according to the school politicians, the working conditions of pupils. First on fourth place, we find the understanding and knowledge about the national school policy process and politics to be 69 %. This is interesting because local connection and relevance becomes very evident in the answers. The other alternative answers are ranked as follows:

The school law	63 %
The principal function according to the law	59 %
The content of the curricula	56 %
The teacher's function according to the law	52 %
The local arrangements for delegation	50 %
Other knowledge	46 %
Administrative law	36 %
Laws related to the workforce	31 %

When we leave the top four, we see that the board members rank other law-related items high, so in that sense they recognize the importance and influence of the state on the local school board. Women, in general, answered *agree totally* more frequently than men but still followed the same ranking. The same trend can be seen if we analyze the chairs' answers: In general, they more frequently respond *agree totally* (5 or 6).

5.4.1 Where Do They Get Their Information About School Board Questions

We asked the board members for the five most important sources of information. The number one source is the superintendent, followed closely by the central school administration, i.e., the superintendent's office. Their own political party is

also an important source for information and visits to schools. And as number five, we found the school-based actor's principals, teachers, and pupils. On the same level, the school politicians also mention national and local evaluations and measurements.

The agenda setting for the school board meetings is in 50 % of all cases set by the chairperson and the superintendent. About 25 % of the school board members believe that it is the superintendent in cooperation with the chairperson and 25 % believe it is decided by the executive committee of the school board. How does the decision-making atmosphere in the board relate to conflicts between the parties? Of the board members, 53 % think that the decisions are almost always taken in a unanimous manner and 39 % believe that the other usual way is that the decisions are based on what the political majority in the board supports. But of the board members, only 3 % think the decisions are compromises and the remaining 5 % think that there are no clear decision-making patterns. The chairs think that the decisions almost always (73 %) are taken in a unanimous way.

5.5 Important Policy Issues

When the school board members, in an open-ended question, write down their three most important policy questions for their 4-year period on the school board, the following policy areas are mentioned.

The area that comes up most frequently is “goal fulfillment and pupils’ results.” The second most frequent area is the pupil’s right to good education and learning environment without stress. In third place, we find a lot of answers in relation to democratic values and gender equality. In fourth place, they state concerns related to the teachers and principals competencies and ability to create a good learning environment for the pupils. This is linked to their concern for the improvement of pupils’ knowledge. In summary, we find a great focus on pupils and their well-being, as well as school results.

We also asked the board members the same question but with the given response alternatives in the end of the questionnaire and asked them to rank the five major objectives of the education.

The analysis of these answers points to the same pattern of important items. On top, we find quality questions and long-term planning, and almost at the same level of ranking, we have pupil-related answers, and in the lower part of the list, we find organizations that are mentioned by 60 % and three other administrative matters that don’t seem to be of high priority for the board. We find the frequency of the last item “questions related to individual pupils” mentioned a bit surprising. A political school board should work with long-term policy questions and focus on decisions that can improve the school action by not making decisions about individual pupils. There are no significant differences for gender or position on the board, i.e., chair or board member.

5.6 Perception of Educational Capabilities

We have asked the school board members about their view related to different actors' ability to perform in relation to different important tasks, and we only report strongly agree, i.e., 5 and 6 on a six-grade scale. Our first item concerned the capacity of the central school office to lead school improvements. Almost 50 % of the board members think that the office has that capacity. A few more present (54 %) agree that the school administration has the capacity to perform the necessary quality control activities within the school district. They are about equally confident in their view on the superintendent and his/her leadership of the principals in school improvement matters (57 %). More than half (55 %) of the school board members say that there is a great variation between the different principals in regard to their professional competence. When we asked if the principals have the capacity to lead school improvement on their own school, 35 % strongly agreed. But at the same time, the board members believe that the principals see the pupils' learning as something very important (54 %). There are no significant differences for gender or position on the board, i.e., chair or board member.

We also asked board members how they think the principals have implemented one of the new paragraphs in the school law from 2011. Only 39 % think that the principals create good conditions for children in need of special support for their learning. The corresponding figure is even lower for creating good conditions for high achieving pupils (22 %). Our conclusion is that school board members do not have high expectations regarding the different actors in leadership positions within the school district.

School board members' view of the school district is another set of items that we asked for their opinions on. That the school district has attractive schools with programs that are desired by the pupils is something that 53 % of them believe, but the school structure has difficulties in recruiting well-qualified teachers—only 43 % think that the schools can recruit well-qualified teachers. If we go on and look for how they judge the school structure, 40 % say that it is good. But again, when we ask about the pupils, we get another type of answer. We asked, “are the variation of outcome in children's learning between different schools acceptable?” and only 21 % responded that this was ok. When the same question was asked in relation to the teachers, we got the same low-level answer of 21 %. There is still some trust in the school system as 39 % think that their school district has a good school culture that promotes teaching and learning. There are no significant differences related to gender or position on the board, i.e., chair or board member.

Checking that statement through a question of how the school results has developed in the school district, we find that almost 48 % say that the results have improved, 27 % say that they have gone down, and another 22 % say that the results have remained the same.

From Table 5.3 below, we can see that there is not a perfect match. The question is why. In general, the board members do not seem to have a good understanding of

Table 5.3 How would you characterize the development of school results in your municipality? Change in merit values between 2009 and 2011 (row percentage in each category)

Statement: "The school in our district has:"

Merit value change 2009–2011	Improved greatly in terms of pupil results	Improved slightly in terms of pupil results	Stable pupils results	Deteriorated somewhat in terms of pupil results	Deteriorated greatly in terms of pupil results	Do not know	Total
Stable low	3 %	37 %	21 %	29 %	8 %	2 %	344
Stable mean	8 %	39 %	22 %	24 %	6 %	2 %	637
Stable high	14 %	45 %	23 %	13 %	2 %	3 %	362
Total	111	533	296	300	70	33	1,343

the situation in the school district. The reason for that can be that the superintendent doesn't offer clear information to the board, but it can also be the case that they express a general opinion related to their political party's opinion.

Table 5.3 clearly shows that there is a low understanding of how the merit values in the school district have developed over the last 3 years among the school board politicians. In school districts where the merit values have gone downhill still 40 % of the politicians think that they have improved. The same trend of not knowing the development of the merit value can be seen among school districts where merit values have improved and 38 % of politicians think that the pupil outcomes are stable or have deteriorated. Among the stable school districts, 47 % of the politicians believe that the results have improved.

Finally, under this section, we focused on quality evaluations. "Does the school board get a good picture of the schools quality from their own quality reports to the board?" About 45 % agree that the quality report gives the board a good understanding of the school quality. Does this report lead to decisions of the board in asking for improvements? In most cases, only 39 % of the board members say they do. A majority of the board members (55 %) think that the state school inspection offers a reliable picture of the school district schools in their inspection reports. When the same question concerns only the individual schools, 50 % of the board members think that it is the case. The school board makes 66 % of the inspected case decisions because of the school inspection reports and asks the schools to improve. That the principal's quality work can be helped by the school inspection reports is the opinion held by 61 % of the board members. That the school inspection can use sanctions on school owners if the critic is not taken cared of within the time limits given is the opinion of 77 % of the board members. Only 32 % think it is right that the inspection only writes in their inspection reports about the problematic conditions that they find and are not supporting what is good within the schools. There were no significant differences for gender or position on the board, i.e., chair or board member.

5.7 Demands of Accountability

In two open-ended questions, we asked which of the three most important issues the board should review in monitoring superintendents' work and the three most important issues that the superintendents should use to monitor the principals. Two key areas appear in their answers to both these questions: budget and pupil results. The difference appears on the third position. The board wants the superintendent to both explain the reasons behind decisions taken on the board and take responsibility for these being implemented. After budget and pupil results, the board wants the superintendent to make sure that the principles work toward improved education results and a good learning environment for both pupils and teachers (usually the board members do not specify how this is to be achieved or what aspect of the issue they are referring to).

5.8 Country-Specific Observations

In the Swedish system, it is often argued that there is a tension between the state and the local school districts. When asked about if they felt any tension between the local school districts and the state, 53 % agreed and 25 % disagreed of the board members and the remaining group does not know how to answer.

As we can see in Table 5.4, the chair more frequently than the board experiences a conflict between the municipality and the state. We can also see that males, more frequently than females, experience a conflict between the local and state level. Women more frequently were not sure if they perceived a conflict. In response to an open-ended question, the school board members expressed their views about the conflict. Most of the answers were related to the fact that the government developed new laws and regulations, but there was no money for the implementation of the new policies.

One other way to analyze this tension is to look for the school board members' opinions related to their future roles. When asked about what will happen with the boards' influence over the schools in the school district, half of them (50 %) think that there will be no difference and 37 % believe that they will have greater influence over the schools. When the same question was asked in relation to the

Table 5.4 Do you think that in the current situation, there are tensions between the state and the municipality when it comes to education policy (column percentage in each category)?

	Board	Chair	Male	Female
Yes	54 %	64 %	60 %	47 %
No	25 %	25 %	25 %	25 %
Don't know	22 %	11 %	16 %	28 %
Total <i>N</i>	1,323	175	662	662

superintendent, 33 % think their power over the superintendent will increase and 57 % think that it will stay the same. The new school law mentions the principal in five times as many paragraphs as in the old one, and these school board members have been informed of because 61 % of them believe that the principals will get increased responsibility. Forty-two percent also say that the principal will have more power in relation to the superintendent, but at the same time, 30 % of the board members think that the superintendent position will increase in importance. When we asked that question in relation to the principal, 15 % think their overall power will be less, 22 % believe that the control over principals will increase, and 55 % think that there will be no change. With the superintendent's relation to the board, 72 % think that it will remain the same but 15 % think that the superintendent will have more discretion.

The school board members anticipate a great change in the demands that will come from pupils and parents on having the right to influence their education. They think this will increase with 63 % for the children and 57 % for their parents. This is an interesting development and is in line with the school board members' interest for the school quality in other questions. Women tend to answer "do not know" more frequently than men who seem to think that it will stay the same as now.

Finally, the boards were asked what issues they thought should be taken when a school, for several years, underachieved in relation to expected grade results. The most common answer (nearly 50 %) suggested to start with an analysis of what the problem actually is and thereafter take action, or as one board member put it, analysis direct, action set and goal follow up. Two common groups of answers, even if the groups are small (under 20 %), are to change the leadership and invest in different types of development, mostly in-service training for teachers.

5.9 Concluding Remarks

Many decisions that previously were handled at the national level are today made by the municipalities, but the state still has strong control over the school sector (Hudson 2007; Lundahl 2005; Segerholm 2009). There are several mechanisms through which the state learns about the characteristics and behavior of different actors: screening, contract design, reporting requirements, and oversight (Holmgren et al. 2013).

Some of the regulations are direct to the school level and bypass the school owners.

The school law has strengthened the rights for the pupils and parents not only through the possibility to choose the school but also to test decisions taken by the law in court. The state inspection has a great number of possibilities to act against schools that don't fulfill the law.

When the principal needed support, they gave their demands to the school owner. We call this "under pressure" (see Fig. 5.1). Often the demands are about resources.

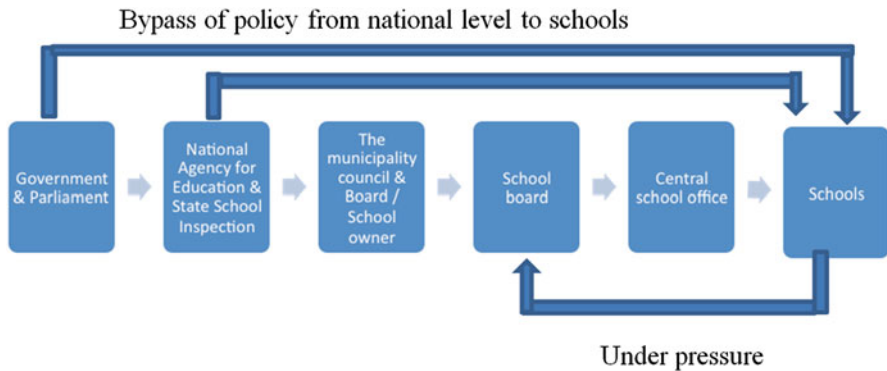


Fig. 5.1 The governing chain with a “bypass” from government/agencies to school and “under pressure” from schools to local political level/school board

These negotiations affect the relations between the principal and the school owner, as well as between principals, teachers, and parents who have often been involved.

The strong and direct state regulation of the schools, together with a separate system for the allocation of money between states and municipalities, seems to have strengthened the relation between the state and the school and weakened the relation between the schools and the municipality (Nihlfors and Johansson 2013).

At the same time, well-educated, dedicated board members with an interest in education work as spare-time politicians and want to make a difference. The communication with the principals is not frequent, and they heavily rely on the information from the superintendent. Also the board members look to the national level and trust the state inspection more than they trust their own evaluations.

How, and if, quality in education does affect a movement from equality to a stronger controlled quality, and if this affects the democratic role in governance of schools, the boards’ work, and the balance between politicians and professionals is an empirical question.

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Part II
Thematic Chapters

Chapter 6

Educational Governance: Politics, Administration and Professionalism

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and Seppo Pulkkinen**

Abstract The current restructuring of Nordic educational governance systems is creating new relationships between the state, local authorities and schools and, therefore, between politicians, managers and educational professionals. With inspiration from transnational agencies – primarily the OECD – new chains of governance are being created. Some elements of governance are being de-centralised, whilst other elements are being re-centralised. The couplings of economies, human resource management and operations are being loosened while at the same time the links between an educational content, aims and accountabilities are being tightened. This tendency has also led/made many municipalities to restructure the municipal political and administrative system into a more steep hierarchy.

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This restructuring also influences the work of school boards and their relations to administrators and educational practitioners. School boards are increasingly responsible for a greater part of the life of children and adolescents and, consequently, they are responsible for an increasing number of institutions. New power-balances are being created with the use of diverse forms of influences. Structural power, discursive influences and social technologies are being used in new combinations. Different groups of stakeholders are being targeted in a way that prioritises management and consumers, while politicians and educational professionals lose influence in new neo-liberally inspired forms of New Public Management.

In this chapter, we draw upon theories and policy papers on governance (Foucault 2001/1978; OECD 1995; Osborne and Gaebler 1992), power (Foucault 1983; Moos 2009b) and public institutions (March and Olsen 1976; Meyer and Scott 1983) to identify and describe general trends and tendencies in the development of school boards in Nordic countries and the USA. We selected this approach because we are interested in making sense of new patterns in educational governance (Weick 2001). We view patterns as plausible explanations of the school boards' current relations and situation, and we wish to identify plausible understandings of relations, links and couplings between agents and agencies.

6.1 Restructuring Public Sectors

As described above, we claim that politics has been developing the fundamental paradigms of governance from the 1980s onwards (specific accounts of recent and current public sector trends are provided in the country reports). Following World War II, many countries worked on developing social, democratic welfare states. However, from the 1980s onwards, these states focused more on remaining competitive in the global marketplace (Pedersen 2010). A very influential player in this development was the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which issued one of the soft governance instruments – a report on the urgent need for reforms of public sectors in the OECD member states (OECD 1995). The OECD found inspiration in the work of management theorists like Osborne and Gaebler (1992). The OECD report can be traced in many national policy papers in the Nordic countries, and the so-called soft governance – the advice and comparisons provided by the OECD – proved to be immensely influential (Bovbjerg et al. 2011).

This shift can be identified in the social and labour market as well as educational policies; in fact, it can be seen in all public sector politics, because this shift represents the intention to change the role of the state and its institutions in order to perform better – more efficiently and effectively – in the marketplace. This entails new structures, positions, relations, values and norms at all levels of the governance chain: from state (parliament and government) to regional and local level (regional/

municipal council and administration with superintendents) and ultimately to institutional level (local school board and school leader/head teacher).

In the following chapter, we shall focus on the municipal level. We shall examine its inner workings as well as its relationship to the state and public institutions. However, before providing this analysis, we shall first introduce the fundamental logics of traditional governance in the monocentric state, which was based on the separation of power between the executive, judiciary and legislative institutions and which also imposed sharp distinctions between policymakers and civil servants. On this monocentric model, politicians were seen as legitimate because they were elected in parliamentary ways, and civil servants were seen as legitimate because of their level of expertise and experience. The primary task of politicians was to develop politics, purposes, values and aims, while civil servants were occupied with operation, strategies and execution. The division of tasks and responsibilities between these two groups was clear and distinct, as is the case in Max Weber's ideal bureaucracy (Bogason 1997; Jæger 2003).

6.2 Polycentric or Segmented States

The opening up of states to collaboration and competition with other states, international enterprises, agencies and (most importantly) other marketplaces has brought about changes in the way states are viewed and the way in which its sectors and institutions are managed. New structures and relations are producing a new kind of state: a polycentric state, with very complex relations to and networks of political agents and agencies from other sectors of social life, such as production and culture (Pedersen 2005). This restructuring of the public sector is often performed in non-political ways; for example, it is based on the market, or it is based on public-choice theories, principal-agent theories, scientific management theories and transaction cost economy theories. The general concept that is often referred to – with inspiration from the OECD – is called new public management, which is characterised by marketplace thinking, product or outcomes thinking, consumer thinking and low-trust leadership thinking (Moos 2013a).

Restructuring processes are employed in order to facilitate the management of public expenditures as well as welfare state institutions and initiatives. They also further competition between institutions and sectors. It is for this reason that governments and parliaments pass legislation on budgeting, administration, and staff politics and wages, which often moves decisions from one level to another: from the government to the municipal council or to institutional boards.

A parallel development has been identified in Norway by researchers who describe a move from (what they term) a 'segmented state model' towards a 'fragmented state model'. A 'segmented state model' is based on a number of assumptions. First, there is a clear and visible division of work between societal sectors and institutional spheres in society, for example, between the corporate sector and the

political system, and similarly between the organisations in the civic community and local government. Second, in the segmented state model, the boundaries between the political sectors are clear and visible and, consequently, it is easy to determine who does and does not belong to a policy sphere. Third, the boundaries between policy sectors are more or less impermeable, which limits access to the various policy discourses. As argued by Tranøy and Østerud (2001), this pattern changed into a fragmented model at the turn of the millennium. There are two main consequences of this change: Firstly, there are now more players in the policy fields and, secondly, players are able to enter and exit various policy spheres. One of the many cases analysed by the researchers in 1998–2003 was the restructuring of the finance business sector, in which a large number of players participated in critical decision-making processes that affected the restructuring of the finance sector in the early 1990s. Moreover, players were able to enter and exit the field, and the nature of the decision-making displayed many of the features portrayed in the ‘garbage-can’ model (March and Olsen 1976). On this basis, it can be argued that there has been a move towards a more polycentric state model in Norway over the last few decades. So, in many ways, we can identify similarities between Denmark, which is a member of the European Union, and Norway, which is not a member of the European Union but is a member of the European Economic Area (EEA) with the EU and other countries.

While the development in Denmark and Norway is similar overall, we can see that Swedish policies are more inclined to continue to develop a monocentric state model. Sweden is as dependent on global competition as other Nordic countries, and it recognises the need to distribute power among more agents than the ministries; however, Sweden’s preferred solution is to invest more resources in state agencies like inspectorates. These agencies engage in detailed governance of municipal agencies and authorities, yet, on educational issues, they leave some room for manoeuvre to somewhat autonomous municipalities (their level of autonomy has been restricted to some extent over recent years).

Finland is also a member of the European Union and a player on the competitive global market; however, it has developed its national governance system differently from Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The municipal level – with numerous small municipalities – is strong and independent both in relation to the state and in relation to schools. This was stated in the Finnish Constitution in the 1980s.

6.3 Network Governance

The development from monocentric states towards polycentric states was structured through the development of different kinds of network governance (Sørensen 2003). Network governance is a mixture of meta-governance and self-governance. *Meta-governance* involves implementing financial and legislative frameworks and initiating discursive governance. It is a governance form that does not resemble governance: It imposes frameworks and attempts to influence discourse, yet it defers

actual governance activities to different levels. A set of very important governance tools are social technologies, such as standards and testing, quality reports and student plans, regular staff appraisals and budget models (Moos 2009a). Through various frameworks and soft governance (Moos 2009b), the government encourages local authorities and institutions to produce and find their identity as an institution (March and Olsen 1976), with specific aims, meaning and accountabilities. On the other hand, *self-governance* (Foucault 1983) means that institutions can – and wish to – govern themselves in self-governing institutions and networks. Some decisions are made at state level, while others are distributed to lower levels, creating new relations between policymakers and civil servants and different combinations of these members on all levels: Municipal managers, like superintendents, are given more room to describe and produce local solutions in ways that policymakers used to, and school leaders are also given more room within the given frames and aims to create local solutions to local challenges.

In many ways, ministries and their agencies are still in command of purposes, aims, frames and organising, since they make use of autocratic ways of governance (legislation, regulations, economical frames, etc.). They set the goals and monitor the outcomes. However, in some areas of responsibility, they delegate decisions on how to achieve these goals and outcomes – in other words, the operational aspects of proceedings – to lower-level agencies and institutions.

In all Nordic countries, there are clear tendencies towards meta-governance when it comes to educational aims, accountability programmes and overarching financial frameworks for municipalities, while operations, human resource management and educational practices are, to some degree, left to the practitioners' self-governance. However, the steering is left to practitioners only to a certain extent, because ministries continuously attempt to influence the reflections and practices through quality assurance initiatives with clear national standards or indicators and the monitoring and assessment of outcomes.

6.4 Municipal Governance

In all Nordic countries, there are municipal councils, which are elected by citizens of the municipality from within political parties or as personal candidates. In Denmark and Norway, a majority of council representatives elect the mayor. This position is very powerful. In Finland and Sweden, the municipal council also elects a municipal executive board. We could refer to the municipal council as the 'municipal parliament' and the municipal executive board as the 'ministry'; as such, the municipal executive board is very powerful. The position of chair of the executive board is influential, but not as influential as the mayoral positions in Denmark and Norway. In most cases, it requires a coalition of several political parties to reach the requested majority. The municipal council members decide which political boards they wish to have in the municipality and elect members of these political boards on the basis of their size; however, chairs are elected as a result of coalition agreements.

6.5 Public Institutions or Companies

As part of governance reforms, municipal administration, governance and management have also been reformed. For several decades, municipalities in Nordic countries have been free to structure their political work and administration as they wish; however, in some cases, they are given a great deal of advice from the government and local government when doing so. One such piece of advice was to change the municipal structure from three layers of political boards/committees and administration to two layers. If implemented, this would produce wider fields of responsibility, such as the right to make all relevant decisions regarding children aged 1–18, and also result in a steeper hierarchy. It is possible to view this new model of public institutions as a company model (Christoffersen and Klausen 2012): the concern/group, the enterprise and the workplace. The *concern* (the municipal, political and administrative section) takes care of aims and frameworks, budget models, organisational development and professional management of quality and outcomes in the interface between policymakers and enterprises. In education, this will most often be the municipal school board and its director/superintendent. The *enterprise* manages the economy, operations and staff who have a contract with the concern. This corresponds to the schools and their local board (in countries where this applies) and the school leader. The *workplace* decides on and organises internal organisation and relations between leadership and staff through a set of new social technologies, such as incentives and employee interviews. This refers to the internal leadership of the school, its departments and its teacher teams (where this applies). The situation at the municipal level will be described below. At the school level, we know that governance is diverse within the Nordic countries, as more decisions have been delegated to schools in Denmark, Sweden and Finland than is the case in Norway.

It is built in into the new structure that school board members are to decide on a level that overarches several types of institution, be it schools or day-care institutions, leisure time institutions or other cultural institutions. This means that the members require an insight into the work of several types of institution: their aims, outcomes, ways of operating and the competencies and commitment of their professional staff. This also applies to the concern manager, the superintendent, which means that the relation to individual institutions and their leaders and staff has become steeper and more distant. Seen from the institution's perspective, the distance is greater and it is therefore more difficult to communicate with and be heard by political decision-makers and the superintendent.

A similar development can be identified in Norway, where a series of redesign initiatives were launched in order to deflate the administrative hierarchy towards a two-layered model, visibly inspired by similar trends in the corporate sectors (Røvik 2007). Despite the vast difference in the municipalities' sizes, local histories, political coalitions and demographics, a two-layered model emerged relatively uniformly. Thus, in 2004, 41 % of Norwegian municipalities reported that they had implemented a three-layer structure in their administrative organisation (Hovik and Stigen 2004). Consequently, a significant number of Norwegian municipalities dismantled

the central school office and the superintendent position. By 2006, approximately two-thirds of Norwegian municipalities reported that they were, or had been, in the process of deflating the administrative hierarchies (Pedersen 2009). However, there is also evidence that most of these reform initiatives culminated around 2005 (Hovik and Stigen 2008).

In Sweden and Finland, we can identify a parallel development, yet the overall picture is as complex and hazy as the Danish and Norwegian picture: Traditional models of area-specific boards and administrations (like schools and day-care institutions) are mixed with cross-area boards that include several areas. At this point, it is worth highlighting that the common argument for restructuring was the need to find more efficient structures that deliver a high-quality service and further the citizen's democratic participation in local politics.

6.6 Redesigning Municipal Administration

The overall picture reveals that the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish municipal structures are, as mentioned above, in the midst of a transitional process from a three-layered model – with the municipal council and area-specific boards – to a two-layered model, with the municipal council, the political board and specific administrations that refer to the wide political board. Approximately half of the boards are now wide and cover multiple areas, such as day-care institutions, primary schools, secondary schools, libraries and culture. The other boards, which are still in a transitional phase, are responsible for only one specific part of education, such as primary education. However, in most places, this transition is not clear and could change direction.

The new structures provide board members with new challenges, since they need to know and be informed about a wider range of issues, problems and relations. At the same time, they have to manage the effects of reforms in national governance, which entails the decentralisation of economical and human resource management and the re-centralisation of curriculum and accountability aspects of education. These changes seem to have brought about a shift in the work of school boards, whereby the focus is no longer on educational issues, but on economical and managerial issues instead.

6.7 School Board Members and Chairs

In all Nordic countries, the school board is viewed as the link in the chain of political governance (from state level to institutional level) with both a political and an administrative function. Therefore, school board members are seen as local politicians who represent local political parties. In some of the countries, all school board members are also members of the municipal council, but, in others, only a

section of the members are also members of the council. In Denmark, all school board members are members of the municipal council. This is prescribed by the Danish Act on Municipal Governance (Finances 2013, §19). In Finland, only 41 % of the school board members are also members of the municipal council, compared to 77 % and 66 % for Norway and Sweden, respectively. The remainder of the members are appointed by the council, but selected from outside the council. In Sweden, 26 % of school board members are also members of the executive board, which gives them (and their educational issues) a more powerful position and role in political decisions.

All Nordic school board members are, as previously mentioned, politically appointed. The majority of them are elected members of the municipal council or appointed by the council and, therefore, most of them are members of a political party; however, as in Denmark, they can also be individually and personally elected. Seats on the board are decided on the basis of the party's size on the municipal council, which means that, proportionally, all parties have the same representation on the school board as on the municipal council. It is the political parties that decide which party should chair the political board. This decision is made during the coalition-forming negotiations that follow the election of the council. It is a priority for the political parties to chair the school board, because doing so means they are able to set the agenda, chair meetings and, thus, chair decision-making. It also means they are in charge of acquiring information for the board. In Denmark, the Socialist People's Party has focused heavily on acquiring this position and, in the local elections in 2009, they obtained three times as many chairs as board members. It is in the party's interest to obtain the chair, since this position provides them with a good opportunity to influence political decision-making. If we compare this picture with Norway, we can see that one Norwegian party – the Centre Party – is three times overrepresented on school boards.

When asked why they accepted the appointment to a school board, members usually give two main answers: (1) that it is his/her personal interest (and also often occupation) and (2) that the seat provides his/her party with an important opportunity to influence development in the municipality. Most chairs agree that, with regard to strategy and economy, they gain political influence by being on a school board. The board members are less optimistic.

6.8 Important Political Issues

In order to analyse the survey data on important political issues, we would now like to introduce the OECD school leadership study (Pont et al. 2008), since this report, like other OECD tools for soft governance, is currently influencing national politicians and policymakers in their perception of public governance. Earlier in our analysis, we introduced the Governance in Transition study (1995). This study summarises our project's country reports in describing the new expectations on school leaders in three categories. The first is called *leading autonomous schools*

like small businesses. Here, there is a need for competences in human resources management and the management of economical and human resources. The second category is called *leading for accountability and outcomes*. The focus here is the need for competences in strategic planning, assessment and monitoring. And the third category is called *learning centred leadership*, in which there is a focus on new approaches to teaching and learning (OECD 2008).

This general picture fits well with the political expectations in the Nordic school boards: Governance is almost exclusively about management and assessment of resources and outcomes – which is in line with managerial and marketplace accountabilities – while the educational focus receives little interest (Moos 2013b). This is because municipalities have little influence over educational content: Matters of curriculum and the assessment of results have been re-centralised to the national level, bypassing the local level. This is the general image in Denmark, Norway and Sweden; however, in Finland, the situation is different. The Finnish local curriculum is important, and quality assurance takes place at the local level. No reports are sent to the national level. Even the execution of the quality assurance system takes place at the local level. They choose the tools. In fact, in the 2016 curriculum reform, the national emphasis will be on how teaching and learning should be conducted. The education provider will become increasingly responsible for the content of the curriculum.

This is in line with the ideas of a concern, which we mentioned earlier. When asked what they considered to be the most important policy issues with which the board should engage, chairs answered ‘structure and economy’ followed by ‘day-care and youth issues’, which are both relatively new issues for the board. Ordinary members placed greater emphasis on the curriculum and quality monitoring. Chairs are fully aware of their responsibility as policymakers at this concern level. They also indicate that the board leaves educational decisions, such as quality issues and curriculum, to the next level in the governance chain. The links between these levels can be contracts, like quality reports, and social technologies, like employee interviews.

When asked about the type of knowledge they require for their work on the school board, local school politics and budget procedures emerged as top priorities. Next on the priority list was knowledge regarding the outcomes of education, and at the bottom of the priority list was knowledge of curriculum.

Let us now turn to our interpretation of these observations. In a review of Norwegian school government between 1970 and 2007, Engeland and Langfeldt conclude that independent school policy formation and policy initiatives are very seldom observable in Norwegian municipalities (Engeland and Langfeldt 2009). The Norwegian government apparently assumed that the municipalities should ‘fill in the gaps’ in vague and underspecified goal formulations in the national curricula with their own local strategies, policy initiatives and priorities. However, municipal policy goals and local educational strategies, as observed in written documents, are also general and vague, and they come across as “blueprints” of national policies. This is particularly the case when it comes to the content of the curriculum, i.e. the ideological steering of schools; locally developed evaluation criteria (regarding school principals and teachers) as well as local curriculum development are seldom

found. The situation is similar in Sweden and Denmark; for example, when a new act on the school was launched in 1974, most Danish municipalities established local working groups to ‘localise’ the curriculum. Between 2001 and 2011, there was no local work on the new acts, so municipal authorities – including school boards – have had to accept the national legislation and curriculum as a blueprint for their local curriculum. However, as described above, the Finnish situation is different: In Finland, there is still a clear focus on the local education provider, influence on curriculum and accountability.

6.9 Relations to Administration

The most important civil servant for the school board is the superintendent (Moos 2011). Superintendents see themselves as both civil servants and policymakers, because they are engaged in many meetings where they take part in producing premises for decision-making and, in this way, they set the agenda for the policymakers’ actual decision-making (Moos 2009b). At the same time, they actively disseminate decisions to school leaders. Through dialogue and social technologies, such as quality reports, they ensure that decisions are connected to actions in the schools.

Generally, in Denmark, this corresponds well with answers to the following question: *In which cases should the school board monitor the work of the superintendent?* The results are listed below:

1. Quality, evaluation and outcomes
2. Implementation of political decisions
3. Budget and economy
4. School structure and school development
5. The occupational environment for students and teachers

The Swedish school board provided similar answers, though priorities 1 and 2 were different:

1. Budget/economy
2. Student outcomes, monitoring and effectiveness

In Finland, the first priority is also finances, but the second is personnel issues, such as recruiting teachers and leaders.

Again, a picture emerges of a political board that generally adheres to political decisions and to transferring these decisions into actions. The fact that many members are also members of the city council – and that, in Finland and Sweden, the chair can also be a member of the executive council – may help us understand the members’ professional and political conception of their role and position.

While board members consider their activities important and influential, it is perhaps a little surprising that half of the chairs claim that the superintendent writes the agenda for board meetings (only 10–15 % of chairs claim that they themselves

write the agenda). This can be taken as an indication of the increasing political influence that the professional manager has on the expenses of the politically elected chair, or it could be an indication of the question being interpreted with the following premise: Writing the agenda does not necessarily mean deciding on it (Kanervio et al. 2014).

6.10 Relations to Schools, City Council and State

Relations between the school board and the city council are often very clear: Members of the board are either members of the municipal council or have an affiliation to a political party. Therefore, they are able to contribute numerous thoughts, ideas and decisions in both directions. Relations between the school board and the school are indirect – and operate via the superintendent, middle leaders or other administrative staff – as none of the members has a formal relation to the school. They occasionally visit schools, but not always in a formal capacity. They may visit schools for personal or occupational reasons, or they may visit in a parental capacity. This means that relations between schools and school leaders are not on a purely political level; instead, they are on a political-administrative level.

This trend was underlined when board members were asked about their role towards school leaders. Generally, they do not prioritise these relations highly. On the contrary, they view them as fairly unimportant. This could be because school boards assume that the superintendent is responsible for such matters, which emphasises our earlier point that relations between the professional school level and the political level are mediated through the administration and its CEO, the superintendent. However, it could also be because schools are not the only institutions in the school board's field of responsibility; the board is responsible for many other types of institution.

School board members and chairs are interested in the quality and outcomes of school activities, but again at a distance. When asked which initiatives need to be taken in the case of underperforming school boards, we again find that the actual initiatives are to be taken by the administration, not by the policymakers themselves. However, the Swedish school board members question whether the information and analyses they receive from their administration is sufficient for their decision-making. As the majority of school board members are fully employed in other jobs (and are engaging in political work over and above this), they request better-prepared analyses from the administration.

The majority of school board members and chairs claim there are tensions between themselves and the state, the higher level in the governance chain. This is because they believe the state interferes too much and in too many details. They emphasise the need to acknowledge, what is traditionally called, the right to local government. Schools are usually thought of as owned and run by the municipalities, and they operate within a few national aims, frameworks and rules. Over the past

two decades, municipalities have experienced what they call ‘a flood’ of detailed regulations, standards and demands for reports and accountability that distract them from the important issues. They have also experienced having too little room for local decision-making.

Board members may also feel uneasy about the development of relations between the state and the municipal level and, thus, about their board’s function with the ‘bypassing’ tendencies in educational governance and with the ‘blueprinting’ tendency in relation to local influences on curriculum (again, with Finland as an exception). Both tendencies contribute to placing school board members in a resource-managing and outcomes-assessing role, which neglects the original reason that most members wished to join the school board, namely, because they were committed to and concerned about education and schools.

6.11 Predictions

School boards think the current trend towards more autonomous/free-standing/independent schools, with regard to finances and operation, is likely to continue, since they believe that politics will stimulate parents to actively choose schools for their children. This trend is not seen in Finland, where autonomous schools are not viewed as a political issue (the Finnish school board also holds this opinion). The Danish, Norwegian and Swedish trend is more in line with general development trends in meta-governance and the ‘company model’ that builds on and promotes free-standing institutions and independent schools. School boards also foresee that the influence of pupils and parents will increase in the future, as will the influence of school leaders as managers of small businesses. They seem to anticipate the strengthening of the state and the schools and the weakening of the municipal level. This, in turn, will lead to the weakening of the democratically elected municipal council, school board and the professional superintendent in favour of a strong administrative state that exercises meta-governance and also in favour of popular stakeholders, consumers, who directly influence schools.

6.12 Conclusion

Analyses in this chapter build on the ‘Concern’ governance model with three layers: concern, enterprise and workplace. The metaphor, developed by Dorthe Pedersen, is imported from analyses and theories of corporate life in a neoliberal, global marketplace. The intention of using this model on the school board analyses is to test out whether theories about global marketisation can be employed on public governance at the municipal level, which would mean accepting the hypotheses that public governance is being moved from a political field into an economical field.

Analyses of the data showed that the model is valid and usable for this analyses: The concern overriding enterprises, which again are overriding workplaces in a straight hierarchy with mixed forms of couplings, is what we found in Nordic municipalities. However, the top-down hierarchy, which is immanent in the concern model – the municipal top describes the frames and aims, the next levels carry them out – is only part of the picture. We see a split model, where much of the human and financial resource management and ‘running a small business’ is decentralised from the state to the concern, the enterprise and even the workplace, the school. At the same time, setting aims and developing social technologies (indicators, standards, test and curriculum development) is re-centralised. Decision in this field is thus been taken back from municipal to national level, leaving administration of teaching programmes and monitoring of outcomes (quality assurance) to the municipal level. Those trends can be seen in the answers members and chairs of political boards gave on questions about core issues in the boards’ work and priorities.

One more tendency, not captured by the concern metaphor – and only vaguely in the survey, is the move towards privatising schools by making them self-steering. This tendency is strongest in Denmark and Sweden and can be detected, when board members give their anticipation of the time to come: The free choice and the influence of students and especially of parents are underscored, which point to loosening couplings between state and institution as foreseen by the OECD and seen in England and the USA.

To sum the trends up, we see significant moves towards strong and detailed national steering of curriculum, preferably through indicators, standards and accountabilities, in line with European Union governance tendencies. This can only happen on the expense of the middle layer, the municipalities, which are loosing influences on curriculum. The local curriculum, traditionally a characteristic of Nordic education, is disappearing in order to make room for national and transnational indicators and standards. Finland is an exception on this – as it is on PISA.

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Chapter 7

Control and Trust in Local School Governance

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Abstract External school inspection and state supervision represent key instruments in many European countries for improving the quality of education. Although some countries, such as England, France, and the Netherlands, have a long tradition of school inspectorates, other countries such as Sweden only recently reintroduced a school inspection system (Johansson O, Holmgren M, Nihlfors E, Moos L, Skedsmo G, Paulsen JM, Risku M, Local Decisions under Central Watch – a new Nordic quality assurance system. In: Moos L (ed) Transnational influences on values and practices in

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Nordic educational leadership – is there a Nordic model? Springer, Dordrecht, 2013). In Denmark, the relationship between the state and the municipalities is conducted through a public governance contract. For example, subject matter aims that used to be very broad and loose at this level were supplemented with *clear aims* that were developed into *shared aims* from 2006 onwards. Moreover, a state supervision system was introduced to standardize the quality assurance procedure. In a similar vein, Norway conducted a national quality assurance system in 2006, paired with national achievement testing systems, to chart and publish the results and a state supervision system. In contrast to Sweden, the local governance level – municipalities – in Denmark and Norway is the target of state supervision; thus, inspection and control are more loosely coupled with schools and principals at the “street level.” In Finland, the National Board of Education conducts national evaluations, and this state agency is also responsible for the national evaluation of learning outcomes. Notably, in this respect, Finland deviates from the international stream of state quality assurance and inspection, not at least linked to the political system’s resistance to ranking schools and municipalities and the external publication of performance indicators.

7.1 Introduction

The different shapes and forms of national inspection, evaluation, and supervision systems are seen as manifestations of how central and local governing actors address the dialectical phenomena of external control and organizational trust. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to analyze inspection, state supervision, and accountability demands in light of control and trust. Supported by reform policy research, control and trust are viewed by Brian B. Rowan as manifesting in the governing chain in two incompatible school reform frameworks, which are labeled external control strategy and professional commitment strategy (Rosenholtz 1987; Rowan 1990). Specifically, this chapter compares and discusses control and trust issues as experienced by school board members and maps their experience of trust versus control in the supervision and inspection systems imposed on them by state bodies. Moreover, board members’ propensity to apply accountability devices to their superintendents and their demands of their superintendent to apply the same devices to school principals within their municipality are analyzed.

7.2 Trust and Control as Twin Strategies in Educational Reform

7.2.1 *The Concepts of Trust and Control in Organizations*

In interpersonal and intraorganizational settings, trust is defined as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau et al. 1998, p. 395).

Moreover, Gambetta (1988) argued that trust is irrelevant without some form of risk and freedom to behave in a manner that is unpredictable or contrary to our wishes. Therefore, trust and mistrust are theoretically strongly related to the phenomena of risk and uncertainty (Gambetta 1988). If risk is viewed as a dangerous property, responding with distrust is easier. On the one hand, trust represents the acceptance of risk in the absence of control or risk reduction measures, which can lead to a trusting actor having a lower risk aversion strategy than a mistrustful actor or institution (March and Shapira 1999). On the other hand, a trusting actor may have stronger expectations of a positive outcome of cooperation and, thereby, have more solid basic trust, which in turn reduces the focus on risk and the perception of the scope of the risk (Høyer and Wood 2011).

In contrast, control is defined as “the ability to exert some influence over one’s environment so that the environment becomes more rewarding or less threatening” (Ganster 1989, p. 3). The primary control activity is to search for and warn of mistakes and irregularities, which frequently includes hierarchical control of subordinates. This control refers to post hoc investigations, which fail to directly affect current processes to prevent mistakes or losses from occurring in the future. This type of control occurs internally – leaders carry out the control themselves. Alternatively, the control may be external, where control authorities outside the formal decision-making system check whether procedures are being followed correctly to ensure that the surroundings do not suffer. Control also involves supervisory activities continuously undertaken to follow up on occurring events; such control activities aim to ensure that various management actors achieve the organization’s goal. Beck-Jørgensen (1987) identified five different forms of control: bureaucracy, democracy, markets, knowledge, and collective norms and values. He believed that these forms of control capture the spectrum of control mechanisms through which external hierarchical control contrasts self-regulation (Conger and Kanungo 1988) as a form of empowered internal control (Beck-Jørgensen 1987).

Arguably, vertical organizational trust represents an alternative to outer control mechanisms (Mayer et al. 1995). Simultaneously, actors in a trusting cooperation are believed to be influenced by some kind of self-obligation. Such self-obligation includes not engaging in activities that may betray the mutual trust relationships that characterize cooperation, and such obligation approaches what Beck-Jørgensen (1987) called self-regulation or internal control. Taken together, a trusting interaction among people, groups, or organizational units that are interconnected in the same governance system also includes an element of risk, which measures or prescribed routines in an uncertain situation from a lack of control (Høyer and Wood 2011).

7.2.2 Trust in Educational Reform: Professional Commitment as Strategy Model

A trust- and commitment-based educational reform strategy emphasizes, firstly, teachers’ discretion and empowerment in the adaptation of instructional changes to the genuine context of their classes and students. Secondly, the commitment model

aims to strengthen the collective responsibility among teachers for instructional improvements by developing professional learning communities within schools (Bryk et al. 1999; Louis and Marks 1996; Mc Laughlin and Talbert 2001; Stoll et al. 2003). The third element in a commitment strategy model is expanding teachers' engagement in professional network structures (Bakkenes et al. 1999) to strengthen their capacity to absorb external knowledge and to utilize it for instructional improvement purposes (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Lane and Lubatkin 1998). Finally, bureaucratic control is replaced by normative control as posited: "If this pattern of management were implemented in schools, we would expect "cultural" control to replace formal controls and teachers to base their commitment to personal identification with the school rather than loyalty to superiors" (Rowan 1990, p. 359). This model, viewed as partly incompatible with external control, is grounded in the view of teaching as complex and nonroutine. The model assumes that network structures and the expansion of teacher authority enhance teacher commitment and improve instruction. In short, this approach relies on teacher expertise, innovative capabilities, and collective problem solving rather than elaborating control systems (Rowan and Miller 2007).

Moreover, the professional commitment orientation of educational reform presumes that organizational actors form their decisions and actions based on what is "appropriate" behavior within a group, community, an organizational collective, or an institutional sector (Scott 2000). In this perspective, trust is rooted in loyalty and binds to norms, values, and belief systems that have gained hegemony within the same institution (Rowan and Miskel 1999), and this form of trust is *not* conditioned on finding good control and incentive systems that make it profitable to follow the behavioral norms given through formal normative structures (Scott 1995). Rather, trust is anchored in the basic notion that individual actions are characterized by the "logic of appropriateness" – the type of actions that is regarded as appropriate as applied to specific problems within the role set of a profession's normative sphere (March and Olsen 1989).

7.2.3 *External Control in Educational Reform: "Mistrust-Based Trust"*

In his policy review, Brian Rowan labeled the contrasting reform perspective an *external control strategy*, which required a tight management control system exercised top-down that states and school districts needed to induce throughout the United States in the 1980s. Since Rowan's publication in 1990, this strategy model has diffused to become close to a global standard (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009). As observed by Pasi Sahlberg, "schools are more frequently controlled by data collected from various aspects of the teaching and learning process. Continuous reporting, evaluations, and inspections are diminishing the actual autonomy of teachers and the degrees of freedom of schools" (Sahlberg 2011, p. 180). In the external control model, policy makers and administrators from the top of the hierarchy impose two

main tools – curriculum alignment and behavioral control – on schools, principals, and teachers. In Rowan’s terminology, curriculum alignment encompasses several comprehensive control instruments, such as “systems of input, behavior, and output control designed to regulate classroom teaching and standardize student opportunities for learning” (Rowan 1990, p. 354). Moreover, criterion-referenced tests were applied to control output in terms of student achievements. These input- and output-control mechanisms were reinforced using the second main component, that of behavioral control of teachers and school leaders: streamline in-service workshops for teachers, uniform approaches to teaching, and uniform supervisory practices paired with standardization of policy goals. Behavioral control was also launched in the form of a standardized training program for teachers, administrators, and school leaders and clear preferences for the type of projects and developmental activities that would gain the support of the governance system.

Thus, the purpose of an external control approach is to “produce faithful implementation of a program’s preferred teaching regime, through tight restrictions on teacher autonomy and a corresponding focus on a narrow band of teaching practices” (Rowan and Miller 2007, p. 254). The underlying assumption of the external control strategy, which presumes that a multilevel school governance system works as a tightly coupled system that can only be managed tightly, seems obvious (Weick 1982). External control implemented in multilevel organizational systems reflects governance systems as tools designed to achieve certain goals in predetermined ways by actors with clear goal-means perceptions (March and Olsen 1984; Scott 1992; Thompson 1967). According to this perspective, the basis for trust between the leader and the co-workers and between upper and lower levels in a multilevel governance system is the coexistence of common interests and compatible goals. Then, mutual trust-promoting measures will consist of measures that show that both principals and agents have common interests and that control and incentive mechanisms are necessary to make it unpalatable to *not* following the behavioral norms issued through the formal organization structure. Trust emerging from efficient control systems and incentive systems is considered a kind of “mistrust-based trust.”

7.3 School Boards’ Work Related to External Control and Trust

7.3.1 Inspection and State Supervision

Inspection and state supervision in strict forms (which are tightly coupled to all lower levels in the governing chain) and processed using standardized assessment and reporting routines are fairly well seen as manifestations of a system primarily based on external control. In the upfront case, a system that as a whole gives actors at lower levels certain degrees of autonomy and self-determination in the choice of actions taken to address educational problems is viewed primarily as a professional

trust-based system. However, as noted, educational systems are seldom *either* control-based *or* trust-based because the two upfront categories are abstract models. Rather, both control-based and trust-based practices are expected to be found within the same system or even at the same system level.

Important *similarities* exist among all four Nordic educational systems related to the conceptual dichotomy of external control versus trust. First, unlike the English system, very few sanctions are imposed on schools that do not perform as expected. Underperforming schools are not closed; rather, as a rule of thumb, the systems activate a certain level of support actions. Second, in all four Nordic countries, important decisions are made in the municipalities as part of local democracies because “decentralism” has emerged in education as a strong value of Nordic policy culture (Moos and Kofod 2012). Third, the Nordic systems are characterized by many democratic hearings and corporative arrangements, evidently influenced by a culture of “openness” manifested by the inclusion of a large number of stakeholders in educational discourses (Ekholm 2012).

However, significant dissimilarities also exist along an axial system of external control and professional trust. At the most evident control-based position is the Swedish system, the Swedish State School Inspection (SSI). This agency has supervisory responsibility for preschooling, school-age childcare, schooling, and adult education, indicating that the SSI oversees whether municipalities and independent school owners comply with the legislation and other provisions applicable to their activities. SSI is also responsible for approving applications and grants for independent schools. SSI also enjoys increasing autonomy in bypassing municipalities in governing schools with respect to setting up control activities and changing initiatives directly at schools. When Swedish school board members were asked about their perceptions of SSI, a slight majority – approximately 50 % – reported that the SSI reports provide a reliable description of the quality of education within the municipality and of the quality of education provided at each individual school. A more substantial portion (approximately two out of three) of the board members reported that the SSI report leads to implementation decisions. Moreover, a vast majority of the board members expressed that sanctions against the respective school principal are justified if discrepancies in school quality measures are not corrected within a specified time frame. In a similar vein, the board members rejected the notion that SSI should focus only on and highlight the achievement areas that need improvement. As such, the board members have strong beliefs regarding the SSI. They visit schools (bypass) and subsequently report to the mandatory/municipality or independent schools. Their reports give principals a “tool” to use “against” the municipality (under pressure), primarily in the form of questions regarding the need for extra money. However, both the board and the principals are positive toward the SSI because they both view the entity as “independent”; alternatively, perhaps “reliable” provides a better description (Nihlfors and Johansson 2013, p. 36). Because the SSI works based on jurisdiction – monitoring whether and how a municipality follows the Education Act – their reports are used at the board level for decision-making. In that way, the boards are “willing” to use the reports and yet

really do not have a choice. The boards do not appreciate that the SSI writes “only” about dysfunctional areas or areas in need of development; the SSI does not discuss positive topics even though they could do so in their reports.

On the other pole of the axis is Finland, which conducts no school inspections and no national tests and does not rank its schools. However, education providers are obligated to attend national evaluations and to conduct local self-evaluations. The Finnish school board members are quite satisfied with the evaluation system and seem to believe that the evaluation reports compiled by the schools give boards a good picture of the real quality of individual schools. They also consider national evaluations to support principals’ work in developing their schools and to provide a reliable picture of the quality of the local provision of education. As such, national tests were not considered significant, and state sanctions toward municipalities (not able to meet their obligations according to deadlines) received little support. No major satisfaction occurred over how well school boards seem to be able to make decisions on the basis of school-based and national evaluations. Information steering by the state was also not considered sufficient.

The Danish and Norwegian systems place themselves in the middle, between Sweden and Finland, with respect to system-wide external control. Denmark has a tradition of a highly decentralized schooling system. For many years, the public school, the “folkeskole,” is and has been owned by the municipalities. Therefore, for the state to interfere in running the schools has not been a tradition. A division of labor existed among the state, the municipalities, and the schools. The state – the parliament – made the laws that govern the schools, and the Ministry of Education saw to it that the laws were implemented and had overall responsibility for the schools. Not much central control came from the state regarding school matters, and the relationship between the state and the ministry was preferentially built on trust and not much control. A similar “path dependency” is found in Norway, where municipalities are expected to counterbalance the external power over schooling (Bukve and Hagen 1994).

During the later years in Denmark and as a consequence of the introduction of new public management as a steering technology in the public sector from the mid-1980s (Klausen 2001), and later with the introduction of the competitive state at the turn of the century, schools became a strategic means to secure the competitiveness of Danish society in global competition (Pedersen 2011). Parallel with this development has been a shift in the relationship between trust and control in the Danish schooling system in the direction of placing more weight on control and less weight on trust. In both Denmark and Norway, national quality assurance systems are implemented throughout the educational sector, in which a yearly quality report based on upward data aggregation is a key component. Therefore, various performance indicators (national tests, student satisfaction measures, cost-efficiency ratios) are collected and retrieved, matched at a higher level, and reported upward to the state. This relatively tightly coupled information management system creates a public governance contract between lower and higher levels. In contrast, elements of looser couplings exist between the state and the schools and their professionals.

In both Norway and Denmark, state supervision is targeted toward the municipality level as the calculation and control unit, making it possible to buffer schools from direct monitoring and inspection.

Therefore, board members were asked in their own words about their experience with state supervision. Moreover, a significant portion of the free-form answers in the Norwegian sample noted that board members view state supervision as increased external bureaucratic control that adds to a series of information aggregate systems, of which schoolteachers and principals spend more of their time on reporting. The same portion of the sample sees supervision experienced in practice as not preferred and redundant, and critical comments were expressed, such as, “this is another case of bureaucratic control from the state that puts another heavy burden on the work of professionals in schools.” However, a significant portion of the responses in the Norwegian case also noted that board members view state supervision as useful input and activation triggers for addressing school policy issues on the agenda of the municipal council and board. This group of board members views state supervision as a methodology for detecting discrepancies and errors for subsequent improvement processes with the purpose of raising the general standard of schooling within the municipality.

As such, a “mixed message” exists in the Norwegian data on the issue of control and trust related to supervision; yet, that municipalities and not schools are the primary targets for state supervision in the Norwegian system must be noted. Consequentially, inspection and control are only loosely coupled with the everyday life of principals and teachers, and the system as such creates the possibility that critical issues are filtered out when supervision meets the school level. Moreover, inherent in the system is a loose coupling mechanism manifest in the fact that each municipality is *not* selected for state supervision every year. Moreover, when a municipality is selected for supervision (by the state governor), only a small sample of schools is subjected for inspections. In contrast, procedural control is evident in the Norwegian system but only at the municipal level, indicating that municipalities are generally well positioned to shelter schools from intervention.

7.3.2 Demands for Accountability and Responsibility Toward Superintendents

The school board members were asked about the types of tasks and issues for which they hold the superintendent accountable and responsible as related to educational targets. In the Norwegian case, the tendency was for the majority of the board members’ responses to cohere around two discourses. The first discourse is related to accountability in quality assurance and the second one is associated with administrative responsibility for budgeting and achieving financial targets. The Norwegian free-form responses indicate that board members tend to hold the superintendent accountable for the schools (within their municipality) to deliver a satisfying level of student achievements. Similarly, the responses indicate the demand for

accountability for pupils' and students' (of their municipality) rankings on national tests. Moreover, Norwegian school board members tend to hold the superintendent responsible for quality assurance routines, such as monitoring and evaluating school results and quality indicators and reporting that deviates from professional practices. The Swedish board members hold student achievements or rankings on national tests as second highest for which superintendents are held accountable, whereas the Danish board members tend to hold the superintendent responsible for monitoring and evaluating school results and quality indicators.

Compared with the Norwegian board members, the Danish and the Swedish board members are less specific (in terms of many categories) with respect to accountability demands of superintendents. In principle, this phenomenon does not mean that Swedish and Danish board members have a lower propensity to hold the superintendent accountable for quality targets. One explanation may be that, in Sweden (school inspection) and Denmark (more administrative layers), board members are more loosely coupled to the accountability discourse.

In contrast, the Finnish board members represent a contrasting case in terms of the total absence of accountability and responsibility demands (related to quality issues) of their superintendents. The Finnish responses clustered around an administrative demand structure (toward their superintendents), by ranking budgeting, financial targets, staff management, and preparation for decision-making. Additionally, in the other Nordic cases, budgeting and financial targets are ranked highly with respect to the tasks and issues for which board members tend to hold the superintendents responsible and accountable. However, in contrast to the Finnish case, administrative responsibilities *supplement* demand for quality assurance devices and accountability related to student achievements. Additionally, because the school board is responsible for budgeting and financial targets, this task area is – not surprisingly – highly ranked across all national samples. Across the national cases, the Finnish data portray a more administrative and human resource-oriented profile than the three other cases with respect to the same demands.

7.3.3 Demands Toward Principals: Both Controlling and Trusting?

Shifting the focus to the school board members' demands that they argued that superintendents should impose on their respective school principals, the language was generally softer and more rhetorical – with the exception of the Swedish case. The Swedish board members ranked second highest (budgeting was ranked the highest) the demand that superintendents hold their respective school principals accountable for student achievements and rankings on national tests, which expresses a strong focus on external control. In contrast, the Danish case shows that, when deviating practices or results are detected, board members expect the superintendent to, first, determine the reason; second, discuss the issue with the school principal;

and, finally, close the gap by developing the required skills. This cluster of responses is fairly well interpreted as a more school developmental-oriented discourse.

The Norwegian board members expressed a demand structure toward school principals that encompasses the occupational environment for teachers and students, the implementation of curricula in the classroom, and staff management. Thus, external control issues related to quality assurance are absent. When the Finnish board members were asked about the types of issues and tasks for which they expect their superintendents to hold the principals accountable and responsible, the preferences are almost similar to those for superintendents: budgeting and financial targets, staff management, and principals' school development work.

7.4 Discussion and Concluding Remarks

7.4.1 *Board Members' Propensity to Use External Control Devices*

The data on board members' propensity to apply external controls in the governance chain to municipal administration versus school principals display a slightly different pattern. As noted in the Norwegian and Danish responses, a visible focus on external control is manifested through demands for *responsibility* for quality control *procedures* when board members expressed their expectations of their municipal school superintendents: monitoring and evaluating school results and quality indicators. In a similar vein, the Norwegian and Danish cases also show external control demands imposed on school superintendents in the form of *accountability* for student results (academic achievements and rankings on national tests). In contrast, Finland showed an absence of targets in the ranking of demands for school superintendents; instead, the country focuses on budgeting and financial targets, staff management, decision-making, and strategic planning. Interpreting the Finnish school board case as reflecting a more professional trust-oriented culture is fair and concurrent with the findings in a line of published research (Sahlberg 2011; Silander and Välijärvi 2013).

Additionally, the Swedish case shows little focus on quality control *procedures* when the board members expressed the demands for which they tend to hold the school superintendent accountable. Similar to the Finnish case, the budget and finances are the highest priority in that respect. Yet, the Swedish board members also expressed a propensity to hold the school superintendent *accountable* for student achievements and rankings on national tests. Taken together, the free-form answers indicate differences across the Nordic samples in the propensity to use external control devices in their relationship with the school superintendent. In the Danish and Norwegian cases, quality control procedures are high on the agenda, paired with strong demand for accountability of student achievement results. As expected, this situation is not the case in Finland. More noteworthy, the Swedish case shows a low propensity for board members to hold their superintendents responsible for

quality control procedures. This phenomenon may be explained by the fact that, in Sweden, a school inspection system independently operates quality assurance procedures directly toward schools and school principals. In that respect, state inspections and numerous directives aimed directly at schools are assumed to represent a bypass mechanism and a case of loose coupling between the school board and school principals with respect to quality control.

Moreover, the Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish cases analyzed at the municipal level of the national educational policy chain uniformly show a significant influence from the external international control strategy movement, in which the OECD and PISA form the “epicenter” in many respects (Meyer and Benavot 2013). For some years, concern grew over the visible side effects of PISA as an international standardized reform movement for global transparency, accountability, and de-professionalization (Sahlberg 2011; Shirley 2011). The empirical cases underpinning this chapter suggest that this “global reform movement” has reached the “meso” (i.e., municipal) level of the Nordic educational systems. As is frequently observed, the exception and contrasting case is with its system-wide institutionalization of professional commitment and trust. As several Finnish researchers noted, Finland, with its cultural roots in social-democratic and agrarian egalitarianism, is the *one* country that most distinctly deviates from this OECD-initiated “standard reform package” (Sahlberg 2010; Varjo et al. 2013). Specifically, Finland has not followed the Anglo-Saxon accountability movement in basic education, which believes in making school principals and teachers accountable for students’ learning outcomes; moreover, municipalities resisted the implementation of studies that could be used as ranking lists (Silander and Välijärvi 2013).

However, significant differences exist along the Nordic local school governance axis, and they tend to be nonlinear. Whereas the Finnish case systematically portrays a system-wide counterculture with respect to external control, standardization, and accountability for student results at lower levels, variations exist across the Scandinavian (Denmark, Sweden, and Norway) cases. The variations follow a “trade-off,” such as a blend of both “soft” and “hard,” in their propensity to employ control devices. For example, whereas Denmark emerges as a straightforward case of quality assurance in the system architecture, the Danish school boards seem to bow to dialogue and improvement when expressing their demands of school superintendents. Norwegian school boards express a typical “hard” quality assurance rhetoric in their demands of superintendents, which becomes absent in their demands of the next in the chain, school principals. Taken together, the cases suggest that external control and trust strategies occur in a “tangled” fashion.

7.4.2 Indirect Control Demands Toward School Principals

In the responses to the type of demands for which board members believe that the superintendent should hold their respective school principals responsible and accountable, the ranking displayed indicates a mixed message. First, keeping the

budget in balance (and, thereby, reaching financial targets) is frequently reported by Swedish and Finnish board members but is *not* frequently mentioned by Danish and Norwegian board members. Two possible explanations exist for this pattern, at least speculatively. First, Danish municipalities are large organizations that induced site-based management models in schools. Thus, principals are more autonomous in their financial management of schools and are tightly coupled with the municipal hierarchy and decoupled from the political board. Second, many Norwegian municipalities are so small that they do not delegate responsibilities for financial steering to schools, which may provide an explanation. Two contrasting hypotheses explain the same pattern. As noted, Norwegian school board members expressed a “soft” rhetoric when noting the indirect (through superintendents) demands of principals: occupational environments for students and teachers, staff management, and implementing curricula. This demand structure is deviating for the one toward Norwegian superintendents. The only explanation is that Norwegian school board members accept loose couplings between municipalities and schools to buffer accountability from principals and teachers. Another explanation is that, to date, municipalities focused primarily on procedural control for detecting discrepancies in legal rights and formal requirements (Skedsmo 2009).

7.5 The Nordic Model: Coexistence of Control and Trust

In all Nordic countries, the conduct and characteristics of local actors are evaluated through a variety of procedures, including screening, contract design, reporting requirements, and monitoring, and Nordic states employ both *soft* and *hard* social technologies to act on the judgment (Johansson et al. 2013). Moreover, a general preference seems to be to steer schools indirectly, such as through benchmarking, consultancy, guidelines, and skill development, and the legal capacity of national agencies and politicians to intervene directly in the day-to-day work of teachers and school leaders remains primarily limited (Skedsmo 2009). A comparison clearly shows that Sweden has progressed the furthest in reintroducing central command through statutory regulations, oversight, and sanctions, whereas Finland has largely abstained from developing a comprehensive system of national quality control. However, Finland uses international evaluations and assessments to position the country in the global context and to identify national strengths and weaknesses. Finland also attempts to play an active role in the development of international evaluations, ensuring that the country meets the needs of its education system. Denmark and Norway placed themselves in between the two extremes, both having developed national oversight systems with monitoring and reporting requirements but to date without the addition of hard sanctions. However, in all four countries, the state remains an active player, and the future is likely to see further tensions in central-local relations. Educational policy is increasingly moving toward a governance space developed by experts and agents and depoliticized through standards and data (Moos 2009; Skedsmo 2009).

7.5.1 *Limitations*

The contributions of this chapter should be viewed in light of several limitations and, accordingly, call for improvements from further research. The data were collected at a single point in time in each country, which is a potential source of bias in the patterns of responses. Moreover, the data collection in the countries took place at different points in time, which may disturb the comparisons. These limitations were taken into account when drawing inferences. The data analysis of free-form qualitative responses is also based on “face value” techniques, through which more systematic analytical strategies, such as computer software, could provide more nuanced paths. The conclusions attempted to counterbalance these limitations.

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Chapter 8

The School Boards Between Power and Influence

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Abstract The decentralized Scandinavian school structure with the municipal school committee as a central factor between the municipal council and other school interests gives the school board a central role in the implementation of the centrally decided school legislation from the parliament. Therefore, the central questions in modern Scandinavian schooling are: what are the ways of influence and what power mechanisms are in play throughout the schooling system.

The chapter will investigate what power and influence mean in a school board context. We will conduct comparisons across countries and look into which influence and power relations there are between the school committee as the central focal point and the schools' most important interests. Therefore, we will look at the relations

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between the board and the national parliamentary level, the superintendent/the municipal administration, the chair of the board, the principals/schools and lastly the parents and the students. These relations between the board and its stakeholders will be analysed in the terms of power and influence in this chapter.

8.1 Introduction

The Danish philosopher K. E. Løgstrup once wrote, ‘We are never in a room void of power. The individual’s life manifestations are always manifestations of his powers over others. Life manifestations and power manifestations can never be separated. That makes our existence dangerous and it is a dangerousness that cannot be ignored’ (Lykkegaard 2012).

Løgstrup believes that power and life are inseparable factors; power is an integral part of being alive and among other people and that it is impossible to imagine powerless relations between human beings. Therefore, life and life’s manifestations are intertwined with power relations, and we have to consider the risks associated with such power relations when interacting with other people.

If we take Løgstrup’s claim further, it becomes necessary to ask what kind of power we are discussing and how it manifests itself. The French philosopher and sociologist Michel Foucault (1976/1994) analysed what power means and how power manifests itself. Foucault claims that power is the multiplicity of power relations that are immanent in the area in which they are exercised; it is the play that, through encounters and struggles, reshapes, strengthens and adapts the power relations. The support that these power relations give to each other allows them to form systems; and the power strategies manifest themselves through the government apparatus, laws and social hegemonies and various other strategies. In this way, power is omnipresent, and it is created in a multitude of meeting points (Foucault 1976/1994: 98–99).

Foucault’s claim here is similar Løgstrup’s idea, namely, that power is immanent in all social relations, but not only on an individual basis. In addition to this, Foucault maintains that power relations are a prerequisite for social coherence. Power relations are the social glue that interconnects people in organisations and between organisations, and it is exercised in a multitude of relations. It is everywhere.

We can assume that power saturates the relations between the municipal school boards and their interested parties. However, we should not assume that these power relations are stable. On the contrary, they are expected to shift over time, with developing situations and changing combinations of people. The power relations are both developed and constituted by other people’s use of power and are thus a result of interconnected relations. Therefore, the changing tactics of the involved actors influence the power relations and how they manifest themselves. It is not a question of *whether* there is power at stake in the relations between the municipal school boards and their stakeholders. It is a question of *how* the power relations reveal themselves.

An actor's influence – in other words, his/her ability to put across certain points of view – is thus inseparable from power. It is through power and power relations that influence is exercised, whether this be the personal influence of a board member on a school board, the school board's institutional influence – legitimised through being elected and written into the law on the steering of the municipalities (Lov om kommuners styrelse 2013) – or a principal's influence through being appointed by the municipality. In all these cases, influence is exercised through various power relations. Power is the tool to gain influence.

We have three conceptions of power: substantial power, relational power and institutional power.

In the substantial conception of power, power reveals itself through the strategic thinking actor's attempt to 'win' over other strategic-thinking actors by activating given resources, such as knowledge, status, interests and the ability to make alliances. Such resources are perceived to be connected with the actor's abilities and can be understood as substances that influence the result of the power struggle (Christensen and Jensen 2008: 107). These conceptions of power concern themselves with explaining how an actor can win power over (an) other actor(s) by bringing given resources into play (Christensen and Jensen 2008: 108). This is what occurs when an issue is negotiated on the municipal school board or when scarce economic resources mean that difficult decisions have to be made regarding the school budget.

In the relational conception of power, power emerges in the social power play between the actors' interests and perception of reality (among other things), which is not given from the outset, but can be maintained or developed in the social relations of which the actors are part. In this conception of power, the focus is on what happens to the actor's own perception of his/her situation and possibilities under the influence of the given relationships that are part of all relations (Christensen and Jensen 2008: 107). In the relational concept of power, actors interact in different patterns of social relations, and, in turn, they influence each other's perception of reality; in other words, what is possible and what is not. This creates new social relations that again lead to a transformation of perceptions of reality and so on. It is in these transformations that the real relational power lies (Christensen and Jensen 2008: 109). In the relational conception of power, focus is on the mutual impact among actors, the individual actor's understanding of his/her own role, the organisation's tasks and its way of functioning, future possibilities and what is making sense for the actors in working with the processes (Weick 2001).

In the institutional conception of power, power is perceived as part of the institutionalised norms, routines, rules and culture that create the relationships between those involved. These structures are so self-evident that they are usually taken as given or as the natural way of doing things (Christensen and Jensen 2008: 112). When these norms are taken for granted, the board can exercise its institutional power – for example, it can order the supervisor to take action against a head teacher – because it gains legitimacy by being elected, by the law and by the habits that reinforce these structures.

These three dimensions of power are not mutual exclusive. On the contrary, they are mutual inclusive because they can be perceived as supplementary to each other.

The characteristics of situations in which the focus is on analysing what kind of power is at play can be grasped by different conceptions of power. One could argue that the different conceptions of power can explain different aspects of how the municipal school boards function in different contexts in relation to their stakeholders. The different concepts of power can be regarded as a prism, through which it is possible to observe different aspects of the same reality.

8.2 The State and Perceived Relations to the Municipal School Boards

When looking at the relations between the state and municipal levels in society, there are both similarities and differences between the Nordic countries. In Denmark and Finland, a major restructuring of the municipal landscape has recently taken place. In both countries, these municipal reforms have loosened the couplings between the state and the municipalities, and, as a result of this, power has shifted from the state administrative and political level to the municipal level. This change in power relates to institutional power. Changes in the institutional arrangements in both countries have resulted in a redistribution of institutional power from the state to the municipal level, and they have therefore altered the power relations between the state and the municipalities.

In Denmark, the restructuring of the public sector with the municipal reform of 2007 – in which 271 municipalities were reduced to 98 – has led to a decentralisation of decision power from the ministry to the municipal level and, in turn, to the school level. Parallel with this, it has also led to a decentralisation of power, thus altering the power balance in the relations between the centralised and decentralised authorities. The reform was partly the solution to the widespread decentralisation of decision competences and power from the state sector to the municipal sector. Therefore, the reform was evidence of a loosening of the couplings between the ministry and state and the municipalities (Christensen and Kreiner 2000/1991).

The municipal reforms shifted decision-making power from the state level to the municipal level of the administration and to the municipal school boards. It also loosened the couplings between the state level and the municipality level and the administration. However, the reverse move was that the ministry of education tightened the couplings between the ministry and the municipalities through national goal setting, national testing and the evaluation of schools (Political Board County Report Denmark: 2). This strengthened the state's direct power over the municipalities and reduced the ability of the municipalities' school boards to exercise discretion and to take independent decisions in this field.

We could claim that there has been both a loosening and strengthening of the couplings between ministry and municipalities and, in turn, a redistribution of power through a combination of institutional, substantial and relational power.

According to Weick (1976), this simultaneous strengthening and loosening of the couplings is necessary to hold the system together.

A similar development can be identified in Finland. Finnish municipalities are autonomous in many ways, and the power relations between the municipal school boards and the state have been influenced by the restructuring of the public sector. The project to restructure the local government and services (Paras) was launched in 2005. As a result of this process, in 2009, some 99 municipalities merged, and, in 2013, the number of municipalities fell from 432 to 320. This process is being continued by the present government, and the final goal is that, at the end of the current decade, there should be approximately 100 municipalities (Government 2011). At the same time, state funding has been decreased and the municipalities' economic responsibility has increased. The state exercising power over the municipalities has been decreasing.

In Norway, there has been very little restructuring of the municipal sector over the last decades, despite several key players forming a 'national rhetoric' which claims that the scattered and diverse municipal structure (428) is a problem for the national educational system. There has been a uniform reluctance among national politicians to force municipalities to merge. In the first part of the 2000s, the then centre-conservative coalitions sought to utilise coercive power towards mergers by means of financial incentives that favoured large municipalities and 'punished' the smallest. The explanation for this set of political practices can be sought in Norway's strong standing in public finances paired with strong values of decentralisation in the Norwegian policy culture.

The Norwegian case resembles the Finnish and Danish situations, with a strong tradition of a relatively decentralised political and administrative system with a fairly solid local influence and power vested in the municipalities. This local power can be seen in the different governments' reluctance to centralise the municipal structure. The Norwegian case differs from the Finnish and Danish case because, in both Finland and Denmark, there has been a transferral of institutional power from the centre to the municipal periphery, whereas, in Norway, the situation remains more or less unchanged in this respect.

At the outset of the 1990s in Sweden, parliament decreed a partly new distribution of responsibility between the government and municipalities. Among other things, the aim of this was to make the distribution of responsibility clearer. At the close of the 1990s, the distribution of responsibility could be regarded as somewhat obscure. Ideological issues in the form of school acts and curricula were formulated to give greater room for local interpretation. Underlying this, there was a system whereby the government drew up the national objectives and expected accountability in the form of results from the local level.

The Swedish example shows a more centralised school administrative system compared to the three other Nordic countries. Despite initiatives to elucidate the distribution of responsibility between the local and the central authorities, the situation remains obscure. The institutional arrangements with the relatively centralised system mean that here is a large amount of institutional power installed at the central state level.

8.2.1 Tensions Between the Municipal Board and the State

The board members claim that there are tensions between the municipal board and the state regarding educational politics. They feel that the state interferes too much in local school matters. The general feeling among the board members is that the correct power equilibrium between the state and the municipal board has not yet been struck and that there is a power struggle between the two layers of school administration.

This feeling of a power struggle can be interpreted as an imbalance between the state and municipalities due to the ongoing reform process, where the natural equilibrium between the state and the municipalities has not yet been reached in the wake of the municipal reforms. This has created somewhat of a power vacuum that the two administrative and political levels are fighting to fill, which involves discovering the limits of their respective power and the influence they have regarding their substantial power (as described above).

In Finland, there is also the perception that the local school system has been financially starved by the state as a result of the financial crises.

In Norway, there have been no municipal reforms, and board members do not perceive tensions between the municipality and the state. Neither do they regard the relatively small number of Norwegian municipalities as a problem. The power balance between the local and the central state level seem to be stable due to the stable institutional arrangements in the school system. The Swedish school system is the most centralised school system of the Nordic countries.

In Denmark, 40 % of both the chairs and members say that, in their opinion, there are such tensions. Taking into account the fact that the Danish school system is supposed to be very decentralised and that the municipalities, as school owners, are supposed to run the schools' operations, these answers can be interpreted as a feeling among school board members and chairs that there is a power struggle between the state, the ministry and the municipalities regarding the influence over the content of the school. This may be a substantial type of power, where the power struggle centres on who has the right to set the agenda for the school's development.

In Norway, the school board members assess their municipality's capacity for self-governance in primary education. The main message from the board members is that 'small municipalities are not seen as major problems' with regard to ensuring that all pupils receive good learning conditions, recruiting competent teachers and implementing the national curricula effectively in the classrooms.

When the board members in Finland were asked which strategic definitions of policy lead strategic thinking in the municipalities, state strategies were the sixth strongest influencer (Avg. 4.24, max 6), and the above-mentioned Paras project was the eighth strongest influencer (Avg. 3.96). These results show that the state's role is relatively weak in the strategic development in the municipality (Risku and Pulkkinen 2014) and that there is a feeling among board members that the central power – the state – exercises a large amount of influence, especially regarding the school strategy.

In the survey, board members were asked whether there were any tensions between the state and the municipalities. Of the members of the boards, 30 % said there were no tensions, 52 % said there were tensions and 18 % did not know whether or not there were any tensions. Fifty percent of the stated reasons were that the tensions are financial, which might be due to the radical decrease in state subsidies. Only 11 % made reference to educational policy issues. When the survey was being conducted, the 2008 economic depression was still affecting the Finnish economy, and, as a result, the schools had lost some of their basic funding (Kanervio et al. 2014).

In Sweden, the national level has two closely related functions – one of politics and one of several national agencies for schools. The two most important of these are the national agency of schools and the national state inspection. The municipality is also divided into a political and an administrative level. However, locally, they very seldom discuss school matters. When the state school inspectors write a report, it is sent both to the school and the political level in the municipality.

8.3 The Local Administration of the Schools

Regarding the relationship between the school boards and its interests in Denmark and Norway, the school board representing the municipal council is the major link between the state and municipal political and administrative level of the school system. In spite of the decentralised character of the school system and the potential for decisions to be made at local level, there seems to be a certain reluctance in Norway to utilise these possibilities. It could be argued that, for one reason or another, the local political level does not make the most of these opportunities, which results in a power vacuum.

In contrast, in Denmark and Finland, there has been a delegation of a relatively wide range of decision-making power from the municipal level to the school level, meaning that, in a certain way, substantial power has been transferred from the municipal council and the municipal school board to the school. This can be seen as a relative enhancement of the power of the school leaders vis-à-vis the municipal board.

In this respect, Sweden also goes its own way. Sweden has experienced a power centralisation at the municipal level around the mayor and the top levels of the administration in such a way that there is now a greater distance between the schools, the school administration and the top layer of both the political and administrative layer of the municipality. This has changed the institutional arrangements of the school administration and has increased the relational power in such a way that it is now more difficult for school professionals to influence the development of the schools.

In many municipalities in Denmark, the structural reform was followed by a restructuring of the administrative system for the schools. This first took the form of a decentralisation of decision-making power from the municipal school administration and the local management of school finances, staff and operations (Political Board County Report Denmark) as a parallel to the decentralisation of power from the

Ministry of Education to the municipalities. This move took place in the wake of the structural reform supplemented by the introduction of a district structure, where one school leader governs five to six schools. It has been observed that when the system is decentralised, the responsibility and the relative power of the head teachers and teachers are enhanced at the cost of municipal councils and the central state authorities.

This restructuring has been interpreted by the municipalities as a means to enhance the efficiency and the effectiveness of the schools in order to both improve the quality of education and to reduce costs. In this move, power has been subject to a double transfer: an enhancement of the decentralised influence of the school leaders and parents at the expense of the municipal school board through a loosening of the organisational couplings between school and the municipal school administration. This can mostly be interpreted as an example of institutional power transference and a change in the relational power to the school's advantage.

In the absence of comprehensive structural reforms in the Norwegian municipality sector, local politicians are still a strong mediating level between the state and the schools (Larsen and Offerdal 2000). Moreover, in the system-wide reform known as the 'Knowledge Promotion' in 2006, powers and responsibilities were further decentralised from the state, especially in relation to the newly formed National Quality Assurance System (NQAS). However, reviews of local government in education suggest that this room for manoeuvre is not utilised when it comes to key pedagogical issues, such as local curriculum development, ideological steering and locally initiated assessment procedures (that are in accordance with the national curriculum) (Engeland and Langfeldt 2009; Paulsen and Skedsmo 2014). In other words, there are several degrees of freedom in formal terms, yet they are not utilised. The politicians seem to be decoupled from the 'core business of schooling'.

This inference is supported by the data in the Norwegian school board sample. In the school board members' task preference structure, local curriculum development receives a low score, typically absent from the agenda in board meetings. Assessment models and other pedagogical matters are also almost invisible in the task preference structure. However, this is not a function of low motivation or a lack of educational background, since the 833 board members in the Norwegian sample is characterised by a relatively high educational background and a relatively clear motivation structure towards school development and educational politics (which the members disclosed when asked why they originally joined the school board).

In Finland, there has been a restructuring of administration at the municipality level. Due to the changes in administration, more tasks pertaining to the decision-making power have been delegated to the school level. This has led to an increase in the workload associated with leading the stakeholders and other networks at the school level (Mäkelä 2007: 190–194). Pulkkinen (2011: 166–167) found that, in the leading of the networks, the political element in collaboration with the superintendent and the political board members has increased the head teacher's workload. The present school board research supports the claim that the head teachers' responsibilities are increasing. When the board members were asked how their responsibilities would

develop in the future, 38 % of the members believed that their responsibilities would increase, 57 % believed they would remain the same and 3 % did not know. Only 2 % of the board members believed that their tasks would decrease. On the other hand, when asked about the effect of the head teacher's opinions on the decision-making of the school board, the board members believed that it affected the decision-making strongly (Avg. 4.35, max 6) (Kanervio et al. 2014).

The Swedish municipal reform was performed before the 1990s, and there are still 290 municipalities in Sweden. The argument to maintain this number of municipalities is similar in Sweden and Norway; it is claimed that a large number of municipalities facilitates a distributed democracy in which community members know their local politicians. In almost all municipalities, there has been a struggle with economic resources since the early 1990s. Originally, there was a school board, a central administrative office and schools. The first change that was introduced was to view the municipality as one unit. When this occurred, central departments for staff, finance and planning were created, and these functions were no longer linked to the central school office in many municipalities. This means that, currently, the central office of the municipality is the place at which the power is concentrated.

Parallel with this change, we also find that some municipalities are challenging the principle of distributed democracy in which the community members know their politicians by abolishing the school board in its traditional form with 13–20 elected members. Instead, they are concentrating power on the municipal board, which is the 'government' of the municipal council. Under the municipal board, these municipalities create small committees of three to five people who are expected to answer questions that were formally answered by the school board. So, in conclusion, the school sector is beginning to lose both school politicians and a central office capacity close to the schools.

8.4 The Chairs of the Municipal School Board, the Administration and the Board Members

When considering the relationship between the administrations and school politics, Norway and Denmark are similar in that they both demonstrate an increasing professionalisation of the school sector at the municipal level. We could say that, in both countries, there is a sort of depoliticising of the sector; the administrative apparatus sets the agenda in varying degrees of collaboration between the board chair and the superintendent. This results in a concentration of power around the top administrative layer, the superintendents and the chairs. This tendency can be regarded as a consequence of the general neoliberal trend that has been spreading over the western hemisphere under the name of New Public Management (NPM). For years in Sweden, there has been a general tradition for administrative dominance over school matters at the municipal level. However, although this dominance has been a general feature of the educational landscape in Sweden, it is a relatively

new development in Norway and Denmark. In all three countries, the chairs of the municipal school boards seem to be more informed than the board members. Therefore, there is in general an institutional and substantial power concentrated around the top administrative and political level in the municipalities due to a depoliticisation of the school area in the municipalities. This also means that the relational power is enhanced for the administration at the expense of the board members' political power.

Our questionnaire also revealed information regarding cooperation in the Danish municipal school boards, since increasingly decisions are being taken by the administrative and judicial civil servants in the municipal administration. It is still more common for the municipal school board meeting agenda to be set by the top educational administration and endorsed by the chair. There appears to be a movement towards a professionalisation of the field and a concentration of power around the top administrative layers in the municipalities and the chairs vis-à-vis the political board regarding school politics and school administration. This development is parallel to a more general movement that has taken place over the last 10 years or so, whereby power is concentrated around the top municipal administrative civil servant, the city manager and the mayor (Sørensen and Torfing 2005). Therefore, regarding cooperation in the municipal school boards, it is possible to identify a shift in agenda-setting power to the advantage of the top administration layer and the chairs and, more generally, of the institutional power. At the same time, it could be argued that municipal politics are being depoliticised in a way that the popular elected feature in the administrative and strategic thinking is being played down to the benefit of the administration and the civil servants.

Since the 1990s, civil service researchers on Norwegian school matters have observed a gradual trend of 'depoliticisation' in the Norwegian public sector as a whole, whereby decision-making powers have been transferred from regional and local politicians to administrative layers – towards a model labelled the 'supermarket state' (Olsen 1988). Moreover, this trend has been interpreted as a function of NPM influence in Norwegian civil service reforms (Busch et al. 2001; Christensen and Lægheid 2001). Shifting to school board members' assessments, it seems clear that the board is strongly influenced by the administrative apparatus in agenda setting and information acquisition related to their meetings.

In Sweden, the politics on the municipal boards have always been more pragmatic and less ideologically driven than the politics at national level and central local level, i.e. the municipal council and board. The effect of this is that the school boards have tried to find solutions to economic restraint in relation to national policy. One such policy change that many school boards have adopted is the pass rate target set for pupils; the current target is that 80 % of all pupils should pass (this goal was originally 100 %). The school board chair is more informed than the school board member because the chair meets the superintendent every week for 2–3 h. During this meeting, they discuss all items on the agenda for the meetings, so, in this respect, we can conclude that the chair of the board has more power than the members. In Finland, this question was not treated.

8.5 The School Board's Influence on Political Governance

In all the Nordic countries, the members of the board and the chairs feel they can influence school matters. They believe they have formal, institutional and substantial power to take concrete decisions on the municipalities' school politics. There appears to be a great deal of institutional power vested in the school boards in the form of the views of the board members and chairs. At the same time, there appears to be quite a loose coupling between the schools and the boards, which means that the schools do not seem to be able to influence the school boards' decisions.

The chairs and the members of the Danish school boards find that they have political influence on the municipal's governance in school matters. They feel particularly influential in strategic decisions and economic prioritising, and they believe they are listened to by the municipal council (Political Board County Report Denmark). This political influence that they have as elected members of the municipal council is in accordance with the steering rules for the municipalities. As politicians, they are supposed to set the overall guidelines for both the municipal school administration and the schools. This vests them with the formal powers to make strategic decisions and economic prioritising in school matters according to the laws on steering of the municipalities (Lov om kommuners styrelse 2013: § 19). Therefore, we could say that they perceive or interpret their power in accordance with the official rules of the country on the steering of the municipality as an institutional power.

On the other hand, among the members and chairs of the school board, there seems to be a very moderate influence from the school head teachers on the school boards' decisions. This is a consequence of the relatively loose couplings between the schools boards and the schools: the schools govern themselves and the school boards govern themselves independently of the schools. There is rather limited influence and power exercised both ways.

It is the expectation of the chairpersons and the board members that the influence of parents and students will increase in the years to come (Q 31). It is expected that the 'users' of the schools – the parents, children and school leaders – will acquire a larger influence on school matters in the future. This is a clear indication of the neoliberal move towards more user or consumer influence (Bauman 2001) and more influence for school leaders, whilst the influence of the democratic elected members of the school board and the professional superintendent is expected to diminish. We could argue that power is shifting from the administrative and political level and is being decentralised to the school level; however, whilst power is shifting to the school consumers and leaders, it is not shifting to the teachers. This is in line with the 2013 folkeskole reform in which it is envisaged that the influence of parents and students is going to be enhanced (Forligspartierne, 7. juni 2013; Undervisningsministeriet 2013), just like the influence of the school leaders (Forligspartierne, 7. juni 2013).

When chairs and board members were asked to assess the stakeholder influence on their decisions, the Norwegian school administration, including the superintendent,

is the strongest source of external influence on their decisions. Parents, parental representatives, teachers and teacher trade unions all received low scores when assessing influence on the board's decisions. This latter pattern suggests that professionals have lost power, whereas the administrative apparatus has strengthened its influence. The board members see themselves as fairly influential on their municipal policy environment in several domains (including the ability to affect the municipal council and municipal board in school policy issues, priorities and strategic decisions). Moreover, the data supports the image of loose couplings between school boards and professionals and tight couplings between administration and the top political apex of the municipal organisation. Paired with the image of only modest political action capacity in pedagogical matters, this suggestion makes sense.

The Finnish board members believed that the school board's decisions have a significant effect on strategic policy definitions. (Avg. 5.03, max 6). Correspondingly, the municipal executive board acknowledged the views of the school board when dealing with school matters (Avg. 4.34) (Kanervio et al. 2014).

When the board members were asked about the board's political influence, all the statements received fairly high mean averages (4.4–4.7, maximum 6). The school board members felt that the school board had an influence on decision-making in the field of education. They felt that they could make strategic decisions, have an effect on the school board's decision and have an influence on the schools' strategic decisions and that they could make financial decisions which were influential for the schools.

In Sweden, a large proportion of the school board members are also members of the municipal council. This indicates that they can influence important school matters in the municipal council. On most issues, the political parties adopt a firm party line, so the real possibility to influence political decision-making in relation to the school system is at the party meetings before the council meeting. Both in the council meetings and the school board meetings, power is very seldom linked to specific people, except for the chairperson. The formal power of the board is linked to the collective decisions of the board. This is also why very few stakeholders can influence the board's decision.

One other problem in the distributed democratic model is that there is little contact between the school teachers/head teacher and the school board members. When questioned on this issue, both groups admitted that there is a lack of understanding between them, which is a result of the fact that they very seldom meet.

8.6 Discussion and Conclusion

This thematic chapter, which has focused on the power and influence of school boards, considered power as a means to influence the direction of the school system from top to bottom, from the macro or state level of political formulation, to the intermediate or meso level of municipalities and finally to the interpersonal or micro

level of the municipal school board members. Corresponding to these three levels, we looked at institutional, substantial and relational types of power. A certain type of power is not reserved exclusively for a specific level of influence, and actors that exercise power can be both persons and functions, even if functions are fulfilled by persons who act through their positions, such as the chair of the school board or a school superintendent who derive influence from the powers of their offices. This chapter analysed these powers as a means to influence politics and steer the direction of school administration, mainly at the municipal level.

8.6.1 The Macro Level

Of course, the Nordic countries share many similarities in how power and influence are exercised in the school sector, but there also are differences. At the macro level, Finland and Denmark demonstrate similar traits with breaks and rearrangements in institutional power relations because of restructuring of the municipal landscape as several smaller municipalities have merged to form fewer larger ones and as decision powers have been transferred from the state to the municipalities. Although no such development has occurred in Norway, that country has exhibited a certain political will to follow a similar path, and perhaps we will witness a similar break or rearrangement of the power relations between the central state's and the decentralised municipalities' influences over the school policy formulation and administration. Sweden seems to have more stable power structures with fewer alterations because the distribution of responsibility between the state government and the municipalities was settled in the 1990s; consequently, a seemingly stable equilibrium exists between the state and the local levels of administration and policy. However, a nuance to this picture is the emerging situation in which the Swedish central government tends to bypass municipalities with its school initiatives. In Denmark and Finland, a power vacuum exists at the macro and meso levels because the relatively new institutional rearrangement has not yet been firmly established; for example, the situation in Norway is a rather stable yet fragile case because the administrative structure is still being contemplated politically.

8.6.2 The Meso Level

At the meso and micro levels, the institutional power is superimposed by relationships that are more personal than those at the macro level. At the meso level where local school administration is handled, Finland and Denmark are again similar because both have widely delegated decision-making power from the state to municipalities and from municipalities to individual schools. This institutional arrangement has vested the schools with much substantial and relational power to make

their own decisions and to influence local politics and administration. In contrast to Finland and Denmark, Sweden has decentralised power from the macro (state) level to the meso (municipal) level, but the decentralisation stops there. The mayor and top levels of the municipal administration hold substantial power in Sweden, which increases the distance between the individual school and the top political and administrative decision-makers and makes it more difficult for school professionals to use relational power to influence school development.

In addition, changing organisational couplings at all levels influence power relations. The looser the couplings, the more independent and powerful is the exercise of substantial, institutional and relational power. In Denmark and Finland, institutional couplings between individual schools and the central municipality are rather weak, which in some ways decouples schools from the municipal administration. As long as things run smoothly, the administration does not interfere with the individual school, and consequently, the schools have relatively greater institutional, substantial and relative power vis-à-vis both local administration and politicians. In Norway, organisational couplings between the state and the municipal levels in school matters are rather loose, which would seem to indicate greater institutional power among municipalities vis-à-vis the state. However, this does not seem to be the case in reality because the municipalities seem to ignore this potential and act as if the coupling were tight. At the local level the authorities do not use their relational and substantial powers to set their own agenda for the schools. In Sweden, municipalities have kept the couplings between the schools and administration tight. The institutional arrangement between schools and the municipal administration has a centralised structure, and the relative substantial and relational power lies with the administration and the municipality's top political layers.

8.6.3 *The Micro Level*

Regarding school board chairpersons and members, no information was available from Norway and Finland, but in Denmark and Sweden, the board chairs seemed to be better and more closely informed than board members, which give the chairpersons an advantage in relational and substantial powers. Better and earlier informed board chairs are able to work more closely with the superintendent to set the agenda for school development in the municipality. In both Sweden and Denmark, the tendency is for the administration to be depoliticised, or perhaps more correctly, for substantial power to be concentrated at the upper political and administrative layers, such as the school board chair, the superintendent, the mayor and the city manager – at the expense of rank-and-file board members. In this way, the school board members' influence is diminished through a transfer of relational and substantial power from the members to the superintendent and the board chair, and the board politics short-circuit the members' influence. Viewed with a political lens, all three countries have a concentration of relational power around the top political

echelons, and the administration must fulfil the wishes of a narrow circle of political decision-makers, which excludes the professionals, the school leaders and not the least, the rank-and-file board members. This trend can be called a professionalisation and a concentration of power through building up institutional arrangements that endorse this organisation of local school administration.

In the four Nordic countries, board members and chairs felt that they had a large influence on the direction of schools in the municipalities. In addition, that influence seemed to be mostly one-sided: board members felt they could influence schools, but not that schools could influence boards' decisions. This finding indicates that board members and chairs felt they had the sufficient relational and substantial power to exercise their influence. Institutional arrangements seem to give the chairs and members the confidence that they have sufficient influence to do their political job and that they have democratic legitimacy to make decisions by having been elected.

Of course, school board members and chairs may not actually be influential simply because they believe they are. Indications are that when it comes to day-to-day administration, the municipal administration has the upper hand. We also have seen that the chairs have access to more and earlier information than rank-and-file members, and in some political and administrative matters, school board members may be left out of direct decision-making. Much power has been centralised around, first the mayor and the city manager and second, the dyad of the school superintendent and the board chair. So even if board members feel they are influential and therefore vested with solid relational and substantial powers, there are indications that this is not the whole story. A discrepancy may exist between the formal institutional arrangements and members' perceptions of power and influence over the day-to-day operations.

8.6.4 A Cohesive Governance System

In all four countries, the dominating discourse on schooling matters was that school board members and chairs have the political legitimacy to influence school matters by virtue of having been democratically elected and that this influence can be legitimately exercised through various power tools. Institutional arrangements change over time, which in turn changes the discourse related to school administration. With changing discourse, the institutional power relations change (Haslebo 2006), or perhaps changing discourse is simply the outer sign that institutional arrangements and institutional power have changed.

The Nordic school system is decentralised to various degrees, and as a result, there are differences in how power relations are exercised and which positions in the system hold power. In addition, power relations change over time, as does the location of the power. For example, a restructuring of the municipal landscape in Denmark and Finland has decentralised power from the state to the municipal level. But power relations function as a sort of glue that holds the system together, especially as the school system in the different countries has been decentralised to various degrees

and organisational couplings between the central and the local levels have loosened. However, looser organisational couplings have been partially offset by other tighter couplings, such as centrally managed tests. The simultaneous loosening and tightening of couplings are a sensible move for a coherent system (Weick 1976), and power is part of the glue that holds the system together (Foucault 1976/1994).

Løgstrup (Lykkegaard 2012) showed that power plays a role in all human relationships, and Kanter (1979) and Foucault (1976/1994) discussed the necessity of power and power relations as productive, necessary and stabilising mechanisms. Our findings from the four Nordic countries' school systems clearly confirm these uses of power.

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Chapter 9

Role and Influence of School Boards on Improving Educational Quality

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Abstract Ensuring educational quality is high on the policy agenda in many countries, especially efforts regarding students' learning outcomes.

In the Nordic countries, local school authorities are in charge of developing systems to assure and enhance school quality. This chapter discusses how members of the school boards perceive their roles, functions, and positions. Based on a survey, we report on the extent to which they are satisfied with student achievements,

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their expectations towards the work of the superintendent and principals, and their own work related to improving school quality. We examine how the school board members see their own opportunities to influence decisions about school practices and whether the knowledge and capacity in different professional groups are to sufficiently fulfill tasks and responsibilities.

In this chapter, we will argue that new governing modes and accountability processes have led to the establishment of new roles and relationships between national authorities and local levels of school governing. One example is quality assurance and the use of quality reports. During the last decade, the focus on establishing systems for quality assurance has intensified. A quality assurance system, in the sense of quality reports, is included in Education Acts in each country. The ways in which reporting and feedback systems are organized differ, but in all Nordic countries quality assurance is an important task for school boards.

9.1 Introduction

The comprehensive education system is regarded as a distinguished feature of the Nordic education model, which reflects a deep belief in community and collaboration (Moos 2013). This model is linked to pivotal values such as social justice, equity, participative democracy, and inclusion (Telhaug et al. 2006). Moreover, comprehensive education has strong local community roots. Local municipalities and counties have played, and still play, a strong role in school governing, but in some cases (such as Denmark and Sweden) this role is challenged by national recentralization. Leadership responsibility at municipal and county levels is shared between professional administrators and elected politicians. Through this linkage, education is connected to broader community affairs in a strongly institutionalized system of local democracy in the Nordic countries (Engeland 2000). The local school governing context is in all countries characterized by a long tradition of trust among stakeholders, manifested by openness and inclusion of interest groups in various decision-making processes (Ekholm 2012; Moos and Kofod 2012). Municipal school boards have had a key role in local school governing in all Nordic countries, and board members are typically appointed by their respective political parties for a period of 4 years. On the one hand, they are (in political terms) responsible for implementing the national educational policy and they have a statutory duty to assure the quality of education in their municipalities. On the other hand, they have some room to maneuver, in the frame of the national educational system, to decide how to create the best prerequisites for education in each municipality. The politically elected school boards are responsible for policy and service areas such as preschool, compulsory education, adult education, and sometimes also other public service areas (e.g., culture, sports, etc.) depending on the structures of departments and committees. During the last decade, the focus on establishing systems for quality assurance has been accentuated in three of the countries: Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Through the construction of multilevel quality assurance embracing state directorates and

independent state bodies, regional agencies, and municipalities, it is fair to interpret, at least as a working hypothesis, that the “trade-off” between administrative steering and local policy making is gradually shifting in favor of the administrative apparatus in municipalities. The latter point brings the relationship between the school board and the school superintendent to the forefront of local school governing, in particular with respect to quality assurance.

By “school superintendent” we mean the incumbent of a managerial role in the municipality’s (i.e., school district’s) hierarchy who is, firstly, responsible for primary and/or secondary education within the entire municipality and thereby in direct contact with school principals; secondly, subordinated to a municipal school committee or school board; thirdly, leading a central school office in the municipal hierarchy; and finally, being coupled to the top apex of the municipal hierarchy through membership in the senior leadership team (Johansson et al. 2011).

In this chapter, we focus on the role of the political school board, its opportunity to take responsibility for the quality in schools, and the extent to which the school board can influence the work in schools.

9.2 Decentralization and Recentralization: Local Tasks and Responsibilities

Decentralization strategies during the 1980s and 1990s were intended to strengthen local responsibility for changes and to develop school practices (Engeland 2000; Gundem 1993a, b; Karlsen 1993). In all four Nordic countries, the municipalities were given increased responsibility for school sectors during the 1990s, especially when it came to budget, financial issues, and personnel management, for example, undertaking local tariff agreements with teachers’ trade unions. The introduction of national evaluation systems and, in some countries, national inspections, during the 2000s can be seen as an attempt to recentralize through monitoring and output control. This development has been reinforced by the reformulation of goals in terms of competency aims (Sivesind 2009).

In Finland, the municipalities and schools have great autonomy when it comes to drawing up their own curricula (Aho et al. 2006; Kupiainen et al. 2009). Superintendents, principals, and teachers in Finland, as in the other Nordic countries, are recruited by municipalities and serve them to carry out goals and legislation (Alava et al. 2013; Pennanen 2006; Souri 2009).

There are, although to a different extent, tendencies by the state to bypass municipalities in respect to curricula, standards, and testing. In Norway, the state has only a slight tendency to bypass municipalities. In practical terms, this is observable in terms of routine descriptions and official interpretations transmitted directly from the state Directorate of Education and Training towards schools. Yet the main trend is non-bypassing. This pattern may not necessarily be rooted in a lack of ambition on the part of the large state directorate to govern schools directly. Rather, it is fair to say that the scattered school structure in Norway creates a stronger interdependence

between each individual primary school and its municipal administration (in terms of demand for administrative and expertise support). In consequence, the state depends more heavily on the municipalities' capacity in the governing chain. In Sweden, principals have, parallel to this, gotten a stronger position through the Education Act, which challenges the relation to the municipality especially when it comes to financial issues (Nihlfors and Johansson 2013). In Denmark, the national level is issuing more detailed standards and more tests and is encouraging schools to become more self-steering. The 2013 Act on teachers' working conditions points in the same direction.

While there are several indicators of increased central governing in most of the Nordic countries, the concrete tools introduced in the different countries to measure and monitor educational quality and accompanying accountability processes show some variety across country contexts. While Sweden has reintroduced national school inspections, standardized testing, regulations, and the use of economic sanctions, the other three countries seem to have adopted a softer approach by establishing national evaluation systems that are not tied to any concrete sanctions (Johansson et al. 2013). Relationships between the municipalities and national educational authorities, as well as between municipalities and schools, also differ.

These development trends can be described and understood in different ways. Centralization of political decisions, tasks, and responsibilities can be seen as a necessity to avoid fragmentation. At the same time, the increased focus on educational outcomes and demands of transparency and efficiency on different levels in the school system are connected to reform ideas for the public sector in general, often referred to as evidence-based governing or an audit society. In educational policy rhetoric, it is often argued that increased information and transparency concerning school results will lead to an increased public trust in the school system as necessary actions are taken to improve conditions. However, several scholars have pointed out that the need for oversight, transparency, and accountability indicates the opposite: namely, a lack of trust in public services (c.f. Power 2000; Strathern 2000; Weiler 1990). Even if the countries do handle this differently, the changed modes of school governing seem to reinforce the hierarchical relations between the local and central levels at the same time as accountability is placed at the school level (Johansson et al. 2013). This has consequences for the role of the school boards, which may seem less visible and influential in school governing issues.

In Sweden, a state inspectorate was reintroduced around 10 years after the national decision was made about stronger local autonomy. Some of the most common arguments for this decision were the bad test results and the lack of quality work at the municipal level (Rönneberg 2012). The Swedish inspectorate works directly with single schools and reports back to the municipalities, in a sense a "bypass" of the municipality, as laid out in the Swedish country report.

In Norway, state supervision follows a system revision approach to ensure that legal regulations are followed (Sivesind 2009). Yet in Norway, municipalities are a target for state supervision, and there is, unlike in Sweden, no state body responsible for inspection per se. In the Norwegian system, there are three distinctive points that deserve a comment. First, responsibility for state supervision is delegated to 18

regional offices, a system that represents a looser coupling than in the case of a central inspectorate. Second, within each of the counties, only a sample of municipalities is selected for supervision each year. Third, within the municipalities, only a sample of schools is selected for “school visits.” There is, as such, a more loosely and flexibly coupled system than in a mainstream state inspectorate, and the different elements within the Norwegian system are internally more loosely coupled than is the case in other Nordic countries (Paulsen and Skedsmo 2014).

In Denmark, there are no inspections and the like, but there is legislation on quality reports from schools to municipalities and further to the ministry. In Finland, the inspection structure was demolished in 1994. The process to demolish the inspection structure was started at the end of the 1980s and was based on changes in comprehensive education. The current educational system is based on trust. Even though the FNBE¹ makes several assessments every year, each school is selected for assessment at least once every 3 years, the assessment is not standardized, and some of the assessments measure only the learning process (e.g., how the students experience the learning process). Due to this, the Finnish questionnaire did not include questions concerning the state’s supervision in the general sense.

These examples show that all levels are included in quality assurance but in different ways. Student outcomes and legal compliance are the most important quality indicators for which the local levels are measured and held to account. Less visible is the evaluation of the costs for education, perhaps because responsibility for financial issues in all countries is a question mainly for municipalities. The state allocates resources to the municipalities, but the resources are not earmarked for different duties in the municipalities. The total costs for education in a municipality are financed around 50–50 between the state and the municipality. Danish municipalities administer this option differently, so that funds allocated for schools can differ up to 30 % per student per year.

9.3 National Quality Assurance in Loosely Coupled Systems

The state has a strong role in education in all of the Nordic countries. In some countries, the controlling function for evaluation has been strengthened, which affects the relations between professional and political power on all levels. Differences appear in the way that information and data are distributed, aggregated, and communicated (c.f. Ozga et al. 2011). In theoretical terms, this pattern briefly described above can be understood as coexistence of loose and tight coupling within the same governing system. Moreover, elements are coupled in a mixed fashion, and there are dissimilarities across the Nordic systems in terms of how the elements in the system are ordered – and how the system works in reality.

¹The Finnish National Board of Education.

9.3.1 *Loose and Tight Couplings: What Can It Mean?*

As noted by several scholars, educational systems often exhibit a “managerial paradox” manifested by a disconnection between tight management systems conducted in a top-down fashion, e.g., a national quality assurance system and the technical core of classroom teaching – a phenomenon often conceived as loose couplings in education (Orton and Weick 1990; Rowan and Miskel 1999; Weick 1976, 1982). In general terms, loose couplings connote some lack of correspondence between goals, plans, and the control system on one hand and work processes and outcomes on the other (March and Olsen 1976). It describes different forms of limitations in decision-making rationality, as “the concept of loose coupling indicates why people cannot predict much of what happens in organizations” (Weick 2001, p. 384). Weick (2001) suggests loose coupling as evident “when the components of a system affect each others (1) suddenly rather than continuously, (2) occasionally rather than constantly, (3) negligibly rather than significantly, (4) indirectly rather than directly, and (5) eventually rather than immediately” (Weick 2001, p. 383). In contrast, a tightly coupled management system, as found in many business sectors and even in civil service, basically share four characteristics: (1) there are rules, (2) there is a widely shared agreement on what these rules are and what they mean in practice, (3) there is a system of inspection to see if compliance occurs, and (4) there are feedback systems (and sanctions) designed to improve compliance (Weick 1982).

9.3.2 *The Dialectical Nature of Loose Couplings*

A crucial but mostly overlooked point inherent in Weick’s (1976) proposition is that loose couplings must be understood as a dialectical phenomenon. As noted by Orton and Weick: “Organizations appear to be both rational determinate and closed systems that search for certainty and open systems searching for indeterminateness” (Orton and Weick 1990, p. 204). The recognition of the dialectical nature opens up the possibility that these two incompatible logics may coexist in different parts of the quality assurance system. Another implication is the possibility that loose and tight couplings may exist side by side and even at the same level of the control system. Similarly, the same unit of a school organization can be *both* loosely and tightly coupled. As noted by Weick: “Some aspects of schools – the bus schedule for example – are tightly coupled. Students and drivers know where people are supposed to be and whether and when buses are running late or early” (Weick 1982, p. 673). The dialectical nature of school governing, in terms of coexistence of loose and tight couplings, also underscores the idea that several possible combinations of tight and loose couplings are possible, and Brian Rowan labels this property “a tangled web of couplings” in educational organizations (Rowan 2002).

9.3.3 Implications for Quality Assurance Systems

The underlying rationale of quality assurance is a tightly managed or coupled system that spans multiple levels of educational policy making and governing: government, a state department, an educational directorate, regional governors, municipalities, and schools. The quality assurance system is to be capable of producing feedback for national policy making, at the same time that the system is aimed at contributing to school improvement – we must talk, first, about a tightly managed system in Weick’s (1982) terminology, characterized by shared agreements of goals and rules and how to understand these among national agencies, municipalities, school principals, and teachers. Second, a tightly managed system presumes a feedback and sanction system in order to affect school strategies, work procedures, and pedagogical decision making in the classrooms. The counterhypothesis, derived from Weick’s (1976) loose coupling argument, posits that a national quality assurance system will typically consist of a blend of loose and tight couplings. For example, it is possible that upward information feedback (based on national data aggregation) from municipalities to the state can be tightly coupled to national policy making (agenda setting, negotiations between parties, choices, and national planning). In a similar vein, the same data-information procedures can fairly well be close to decoupled from school leadership and school improvement (Skedsmo 2009) at the “street-level” of the educational system. Moreover, school boards’ decision-making processes can be relatively tightly connected to the work with the quality report, whereas superintendents can loosen the same couplings by means of sheltering principals from some of the demands (Paulsen and Skedsmo 2014). Taken together, several possible combinations of tight and loose couplings must be accounted for, which is also shown in this chapter when Nordic quality assurance systems are described.

9.4 Members of the School Board and Quality Assurance

9.4.1 The Board Members’ Opportunity to Influence

The board members in all Nordic countries are well educated and have a high motivation to work on the school board; many of them have a strong desire to make a change for the better. The types of items that occur most frequently on the agenda are of course budgeting and financial issues, but after that they differ between the countries: pupils’ results (Sw), building and structure (Fi), strategies (De), and policy goals (No). We also find many answers in this open-ended question that relate to democratic values, gender equality, and concerns about the teachers’ and principals’ competence and ability to create a good learning environment for the students. This is linked to the board members concern for the students’ knowledge improvement.

In Norway, the policy preference structure of the board reflects a managerial focus on targets that are important for the municipal organization, independent of sectors (education, healthcare, social services, and so forth). Quality of the teachers' work is assessed as important and very important, below the two issues commented on above. Raising student levels in testing achievement is rated by just over half of the sample as important and/or very important. Over and above that, there is only a modest focus on pedagogical and student learning matters in the school board's preference structure.

The tools that board members have to fulfill their "mission" are the local administration. It has to be noted that most of the members of the board are spare time politicians. In Finland, all politicians are, but in the other countries, the chairperson and sometimes vice chairperson can be paid for this assignment.

The relationship between the administration and the superintendent is essential; they meet often and they decide the agenda and what material should be presented for the board. The agendas for school board meetings are often set by the chairperson together with the superintendent. In Finland, the agenda is set most often together with the administration. Here we can see differences in the answers from the chairperson and the rest of the board regarding the chairperson's influence. Half of the board members think that the decisions are almost always taken in a unanimous manner, and the other usual way is that decisions are based on what the political majority in the board supports.

The board members see their own opportunity to influence some areas as positive. It is obvious that the chairperson feels most involved. The most important information is provided by the superintendent. The board members both in Finland and Sweden, even if their evaluation and control systems differ, say that they think the schools' quality reports are informative but that they rarely lead to decisions by the board. In Sweden, on the other hand, the state inspection reports include decisions. In the Finnish and Danish context, one can plead that the principal is in charge and that the board should not intervene or that they trust their principals. But the quality work is intended, in the legislation, to include dialogues between the municipal and school levels. It seems that this is only the case in some municipalities. In Sweden, the principals' work is strongly regulated by the Education Act, and at the same time their influence and communication with the school board is low. In Sweden, the state inspectorate has been accepted as an independent body by the board members and as a state representative for the principals (Nihlfors and Johansson 2013).

9.4.2 Expectations and Capacity

We have also asked the school board members about their view on different actors' ability to perform in relation to different important tasks; we only report strongly agree (i.e., 5 and 6 on a 6-grade scale).

Our first item was about the capacity of the school administration to lead school improvement.² Around half of the board members think that the administration has the

²Norway didn't have this question.

capacity required for leading school improvement as well as conducting necessary quality control activities in the municipality. On the same level is their view on the superintendent and his/her leadership of the principals in school improvement matters.

Around half of the school board members in Sweden and Denmark say that there is a great variation between different principals, in regard to their professional competence, but only one third of the Finnish board members agree on this. A few (around 30 % or less) think that principals have the capacity to lead school improvement in their own schools. At the same time the board members think, to some extent, that the principals see the pupils' learning as something important when they have to choose between conflicting interests.

In Denmark, there is also a general satisfaction with municipalities' supply of schools, but almost half of the chairpersons did not answer the question of responsibility to the schools. Maybe the chairpersons do not consider this issue to be part of their responsibility in a decentered school system. That can be an explanation for why the chairpersons do not wish to interfere in a model of administration that especially prepares the ground for a division of the political system and the individual school.

9.4.3 *Satisfaction over School Results*

School board members in all four countries reported about recent improvement of student achievements. Roughly half of the school board members in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, but only one third of the Finnish board members, think that student achievement levels have declined.

When we compare the board's answers in Sweden with the municipality schools goal achievement (i.e., number of pupils with marks in all subjects), we find that of boards with a positive perception of their schools, more than 50 % have the highest goal achievement; but for the rest there is not a perfect match. We find board members who think that pupils' results have increased when they actually have decreased (Nihlfors and Johansson 2013). The reason for this, among others, could be that the superintendent does not give clear information to the board; but it could also be that the board members express a general opinion related to their political party's opinion. Notable is that the discussion above is a not a question in Finland.

When we ask if the school board gets a good picture of a school's quality out of the school's own quality reports, not even half of the members agree on that. In most cases these reports do not lead to decisions asking for improvement in the board.³ As a contrast, around half of the board members in Sweden think that the state school inspection gives a reliable picture of the situation and leads to decisions by the board. In Norway, the school board members were asked in a slightly different way about their experiences with state supervision. The open answers cluster around two main groups of perceptions. The first group sees this as external control from the state, whereas the other group accepts the initiative as an activation trigger for discussing quality improvement.

³This question was not included in the Norwegian survey because this questionnaire was sent out earlier than in the other countries, and the other three countries added some new questions.

We see in our material that the school board members are devoted to fulfilling their responsibilities but seem to have difficulties in finding the balance between professional and political issues. It is clear that the relationship between the superintendent and the chairperson is of great importance for local school governing (c.f. James et al. 2013; Kowalski 2009; Leibetseder 2011). The development of different assessment and international comparisons is also a question of balance between political or bureaucratic/managerial forms of accountability (c.f. Kelly 2009).

Findings show that most of the board members are satisfied with the competencies of the local school administration and that they are also satisfied, to some extent, with pupils' learning outcomes. Moreover, there is a strong belief among the board members, including the chairperson, in their capacity to influence decision-making processes related to education in the municipality. The board members' sense of influence and impact on decision-making processes is strong within the political system when they relate to the municipal council, municipal board, and the school administration. At the same time, a significant portion of the board members experience tension between the interests of the local and national actors.

9.5 Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The findings show that the dialectical nature of school governing, in terms of coexistence of loose and tight couplings, underscores the combinations of tight and loose couplings. The school administration and the school system are characterized as loosely coupled systems (Weick 1976) which among other things lack coordination and give room to adapt local contexts into problems that have to be solved. What we see in our data is a mix of loose and tight organizational control. Questions can be raised whether the control in some ways is too tight and in other ways too loose with respect to what should be achieved (c.f. Orton and Weick 1990). Based on literature studies and our empirical data, we have identified four types of tensions:

- Tensions between national quality assurance procedures (inspection and state supervision) and local municipal autonomy
- Tensions between transnational forces and national cultures
- Tensions between school boards and the administrative apparatus (depoliticization)
- Decoupling of school boards from the “core business of schooling”

9.5.1 Tensions Between National Quality Assurance Procedures (Inspection and State Supervision) and Local Municipal Autonomy

The framework for the quality reports is decided by politicians at the national level. The reports are written by the professionals at the local level, and they are used for decision making by the local school administration and the school boards.

There are political or ideological questions embodied in what is measured, what is good quality, and what is valued both nationally and locally. We know by experience that things that are measured very often become important. The mission in the curricula is broader than the current measured areas, so what is not measured? The board members often have to relate to results when they haven't been part of formulating the questions or the purpose behind the questions.

The country case reports illustrate tensions activated by top-down quality assurance routines, such as inspection and state supervision. As noted in the Norwegian sample, a significant portion of the school board members sees state supervision as bureaucratic external control imposed on them by the state agency and also a redundant control procedure that leads to more reporting work. On the other hand, a significant portion of the same sample also sees state supervision as activation procedures for school improvement at the municipal (i.e., school owner) level – which help the politicians to form better school strategies. In Sweden, we see a similar pattern when it comes to the school board members' perception of school inspection, yet they are more positive to inspection compared to the Norwegian politicians.

9.5.2 Tensions Between Transnational Forces and National Cultures

New governing modes are influenced by global trends and transnational bodies such as the OECD and the EU (Meyer and Benavot 2013) which can lead to that some priorities to a greater degree are set outside the national educational context. The discussions about different international results, for example, PISA, are held on international and national levels. These tests are made by experts for the international arena (Pettersson 2008). Also, at the local municipality level the results are compared with national results, but the results are very seldom translated to the context of the single municipality or specific school (Gustafsson and Yang Hansen 2011). When the board members get the results from the quality reports made by single schools, the results often are aggregated to the municipal level.

9.5.3 Tensions Related to Depoliticization and Increased Management

There are several indications of depoliticization of school boards in the data material. At different stages of the policy process, we see tendencies that initiatives are mostly taken by school superintendents. For example, the superintendents are in a position to control the information stream to the boards, and they are key agents in agenda setting. Moreover, in terms of stakeholder influence on decision making, the board members assess the influence exerted by school administrations and superintendents as strongest. Taken together, these data suggest a pattern of depoliticization of the

school board's work, because the administration is a relatively dominant actor in the important steps in the policy process: information, agenda setting, and choice of solution (Jenkins 1997).

9.5.4 *Decoupling of School Boards from the “Core Business of Schooling”*

In line with research that shows weak connections between quality assurance reporting (data aggregation and reports) and school improvement initiatives taken by the school principals, we see a similar pattern of decoupling in the studies undertaken in the Nordic countries. In a similar vein, the school boards perceive that their influence towards school-based decision making is low, significantly lower than towards the policy processes in the municipal council and municipal board. The members are close to inactive in formation, selection, and implementation of local assessment practices, which indicates that they implement national routines without interference rooted in local policy making.

There is a need for dialogue between several links in the governance of schools to strengthen the ideological linkage. Government processes have transformed from focusing primarily on input factors, rules, and conditions to emphasizing assessment of education in terms of school achievements retrospectively (c.f. Skedsmo 2009; Wahlström 2002). “We see a gradual shift in capacity to monitor measure and evaluate performance within and across systems, accompanied by a move away from reliance on expert judgment or professionally controlled assessment.” (Ozga et al. 2011, p. 101).

The relations between the professionals' own judgment of the curricula, local culture in the nearby society, and the politicians in school boards need further research to find out how and to what extent these relations affect and influence the quality of education.

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Chapter 10

Multilevel Governance

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Abstract Contemporary education is embedded in larger communities, such as municipalities, regions, nation-states, and international communities. Therefore, municipalities and their school-focused politicians are important players in both transnational and national politics and that national policies are mediated through local structures and policy preferences (shaped by local history and culture) towards school principals and teachers. Facets of these policy cultures work as local “filters” when national policies, organizational fads, and fashion face the local government level in the municipalities. The systems of school governing in the Nordic countries

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embrace local government – that is, the municipalities – as a mediating level between the state and school professionals embedded in strong norms of local democracy. Specifically, the political design of municipalities has included a local school board, or educational committee, that is expected to play a key role in mediating the power of the state in educational matters. Although a range of major restructuring projects have taken place in the municipality sectors of the Nordic countries, the country chapters in this book show that it is still fair to expect school boards to exert influence in local school governing based on democratic decision-making processes.

10.1 Introduction

Educational demands are often that the state imposes on the municipalities are often coordinated by regional actors, such as educational governors, within a specific geographical area (Johansson et al. 2013). In Norway, for example, this kind of regional coordination has grown to be a key function in the quality assurance system conducted since 2000. Furthermore, a visible tendency of transnational influence has been observed during the last decade, not at least from the OECD through the PISA studies (Moos 2006). On one hand, PISA has prompted a range of school improvement initiatives, in which researchers and practitioners analyze data in order to find ways to improve schools and school systems. On the other hand, there is little doubt about the role of PISA as a global standardizing force in educational governance (Meyer and Benavot 2013). Along the horizontal axis at all levels, a range of professional bodies and working life representatives also participate in the policy process (Jenkins 1997), with the aim of exerting influence on educational decision-making (Lundgren 1990). Overall, we see a range of actors at multiple levels involved in educational governance in all the Nordic countries, which makes it possible to understand school governing as a multilevel system (as illustrated by the model in Fig. 10.1 below).

However, there are also significant differences among the Nordic systems. One such difference refers to municipality structure, size, and scale, which also – specifically whether the state shall interfere in local democracy in terms of forcing (small) municipalities to merge. Norway, with its scattered structure of 428 municipalities, represents a unique case. Denmark, on the other hand, is dissimilar to Norway after it comprehensively restructured its entire municipality sector in 2007, resulting in 98 municipalities with a threshold of 30,000 inhabitants as the critical demarcation. In Finland, there has been a long and intense debate regarding municipality merging due to financial constraints. A second dissimilarity dimension across the Nordic countries is the tendency of the state to bypass the municipalities in governing schools. In the Swedish school legislation, some of the regulations directly concern the school level, which means that the state bypasses the school owners; that is, the municipalities. The state-mandated school inspectorate in Sweden also directs initiatives directly towards schools. This development is

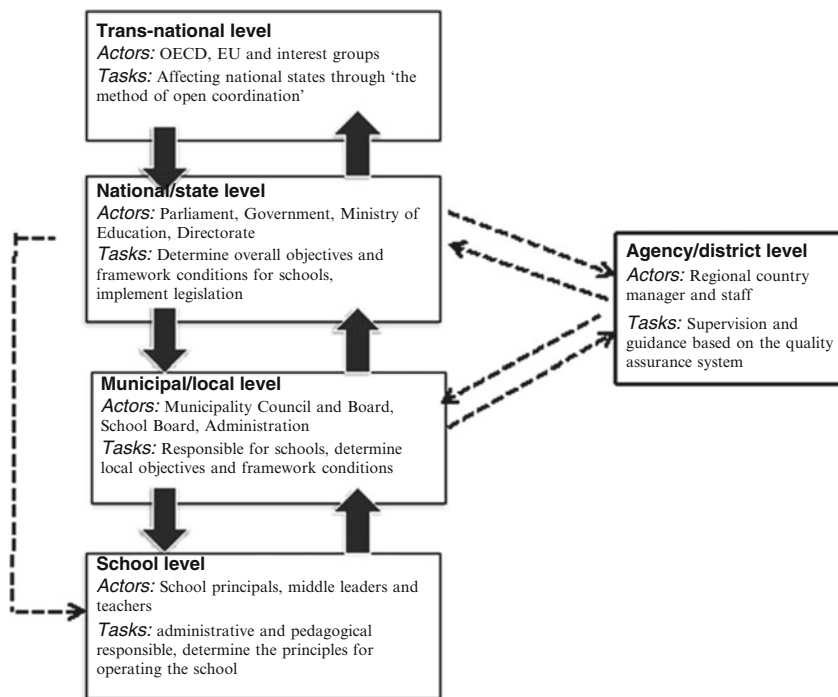


Fig. 10.1 Key actors in the multilevel system model (Source: Nihlfors et al. 2013)

amplified by the fact that the school law has strengthened the rights of pupils and parents not only to choose schools but also to test decisions taken by the law in court. The State Inspection has stronger possibilities than earlier to act against schools that do not fulfill the law.

A third dimension refers to state regulation directly towards schools alongside a separate system for allocation of money between state and municipalities. This would appear to have strengthened the relationship between the state and the school and weakened the relation between the schools and the municipality, as is the case in Sweden (Nihlfors and Johansson 2013). Compared to Sweden, Finland again emerges as a dissimilar case, where the state handles the municipalities with care and is reluctant to take intervening initiatives towards schools (without addressing the issues through the municipalities).

Fourthly, tendencies to delegate school issues to the schools vary across the Nordic countries. In the Danish case, direct delegation to schools can be seen as a consequence of a model in which the school system is administratively run by a board of managers as the top apex that conducts strategy, coordination, and development. Responsibility for daily conduct is then organized in decentralized schools (Christoffersen and Klausen 2012). In the upfront case of Norway, the municipalities act as a mediating level between the state and the schools in formal terms. This

means that the state has delegated formal power, authority, and responsibility to the 428 municipalities to organize their school owner functions in accordance with their own priorities. Finally, it must be considered that municipalities, and thereby school boards, may utilize their space for maneuvers in different manners across the Nordic countries. For example, some commentators have suggested that Norwegian municipalities seldom utilize their degrees of freedom in pedagogical matters and instead restrict their political initiatives to legislative control (Skedsmo 2009).

10.2 Theoretical Framework of Multilevel Governance

10.2.1 *The Conceptual Properties*

There is an inherent ambiguity in the concept of multilevel governance (Bache and Flinders 2004), since the term denotes a theoretical model of public sector governing on one hand and an analytical tool to describe how public sector governing *actually* takes place within a political system on the other (Helgøy and Aars 2008). In the terminology of Hooghe and Marks (2010), multilevel governance is defined as a system of jurisdiction that operates at only a few levels that distributes power in broad policy fields, such as education. Decision-making powers are dispersed across two or three levels, but “bundled in a small number of packages” (Hooghe and Marks 2010, p. 18). The third property of a multilevel governance system is a system-wide architecture that enables legitimate actors to govern an entire policy field. As such, this concept captures the traditional governing mode of the welfare states in the Nordic countries quite well: a system-wide architecture and legal, administrative, and financial interdependence between levels of jurisdiction (state, municipalities, schools) within the same policy domain (compulsory education).

10.2.2 *Policy Culture*

When general ideas about how to govern schools, principals and teachers effectively meet the various levels of implementation across the levels of the system, they are “filtered” through policy cultures, embracing longstanding values and institutional norms (Røvik 2007), and local varieties of the same cultures, as Louis and Van Velzen (2012) showed. Perhaps the strongest political values in the Nordic countries are “decentralism” and “openness,” which denote that municipalities play an important role in adapting central aims to local preconditions for schooling, as well as ensuring legitimate access for a great number of actors to take part in the educational discourse at all levels (Ekholm 2012; Moos and Kofod 2012). In the Nordic countries, the fact that primary education is an important constituent of the local communities means that local voters are engaged in school policy issues. On the other hand, as is the case in Norway, local politicians perceive that state steering in

education is stronger than in other policy areas (Hagen and Sørensen 2006). At the same time, the local authorities tend to have a “generous” attitude towards compulsory schooling by increasing school budgets above the levels set and allocated by the government (Homme 2008).

10.2.3 The “Blueprint” Hypothesis

When actual influence and local autonomy in school policy issues are investigated empirically, a mixed message emerges from the research. In a review of local school governing in Norway between 1970 and 2007, Engeland and Langfeldt (2009) concluded that independent school policy formation and policy initiatives are seldom observable in Norwegian municipalities. The time span of their review encompasses the implementation phase of the systemic school reform that has become known as The Royal Ministry of Education and Research (2006), which paradoxically presumes a substantial local engagement in policy formation through delegation and decentralization (Engeland and Langfeldt 2009). Specifically, the government presumed that the municipalities should fill in the gaps with regard to the vague and underspecified goal formulations in the curricula of The Royal Ministry of Education and Research (2006) with their own local strategies, policy initiatives, and prioritizations.

However, Engeland and Langfeldt find that this is not the case. For example, municipal policy goals and local educational strategies, as observed in written documents, are general and vague in nature and leave the impression of being “blueprints” of national policies. This is particularly the case when it comes to the content of the curriculum; that is, ideological steering of schools. In this context, locally developed evaluation criteria (towards school principals and teachers) as well as local curriculum development are seldom found. Further, as Engeland noted, the intended level of municipal autonomy inherent in the Local Government Act of 1992 (Baldersheim and Ståhlberg 1994; Larsen and Offerdal 2000) is *not* utilized within the policy domain of primary education (Engeland 2000). Moreover, since the turn of the century, a series of standardized measurement instruments have been implemented in order to assess the student achievements and the quality of student learning, which is assumed to de-stimulate local policy formation and strategy formation in the municipalities. Therefore, the notion of multilevel governance also boils down, to some extent, to an analytical and empirical question.

10.2.4 The Potency Assumption

A contrasting assumption posits that a multilevel system should be a “meeting place” for conflicting perspectives and competing ideas between state bodies and local actors, as well as between professional actors and politicians in the local community. Empirically, such an assumption can be measured by means of the

school board members' perception that they are influential actors in the local policy process of schooling (Jenkins 1997; Lukes 1997), and the policy process focuses on pedagogical matters, such as pedagogy, assessment models, local curriculum development, and choice of targets. We have labeled this hypothesis *the potency assumption*¹ (Guzzo et al. 1993). If the hypothesis is supported, we would expect to see school board members having substantial perception of influence in strategic decisions (in educational matters) and local educational priorities being set on the agenda and made effective towards superintendents, principals, and schools. We would also expect to see distinct demands and expectations to the superintendent beyond keeping the budget. We expect to see educational matters high on the task preference structure, not just financial and administrative issues. The contrasting hypothesis we have labeled *the blueprint assumption*, as noted in the previous paragraph.

10.3 School Boards in Multilevel Governing

Following the line of reasoning above, multilevel governance can, from the board members' perspective, be analyzed across three interrelated dimensions. The first dimension refers to the extent to which the school board members believe that they have a certain level of political "potency"; that is, the board members' belief that they are able to materialize their efforts into tangible (and strategic) influence on educational decision-making processes within the municipality organization. In this case, multi means "more than the state" in terms of proactive political agenda setting and prioritizations that reflect local preferences and norms and also the capacity to implement these issues. The point is, for example, operationalized in questions that measure the extent to which the *school board members feel that they can make strategic decisions* and that they *perceive influence on educational decisions* towards the municipal council/board as well as towards schools.

Conversely, an alternative hypothesis will typically posit that the school board works as an "expedition office" for state initiatives or initiatives from the administrative core of the municipality organization. A second and nested theme is the existence of a *local discourse* that is manifested in political agenda in terms of an experience of local capabilities in educational matters. Finally, the extent to which national and local authorities empower schools to make independent decisions, and thus include the school level in the governance chain, can be analyzed under the umbrella theme of multilevel governance.

¹The term potency has been established in work group research in organizations, denoting that the group shares a belief that it can be effective in its future endeavors. The concept builds on Albert Bandura's self-efficacy construct and conceptually adapts it to the group level. In the present setting, potency fosters a self-belief among school board members that they have the capacity to utilize the degrees of freedom in local school policy.

10.3.1 Perception of “Upward” and “Downward” Influence

When asked about their perception of the school boards’ political influence in municipal governance, the Norwegian board members felt that they are influential, especially in the municipal council and board’s strategic decisions and economic prioritizing. They also perceived that their work has a significant impact on primary schooling in their municipality. However, the perception of influence among school board members decreases significantly when it comes to downward influence, in terms of agenda setting at the school level. Interestingly, only about 20 % of board members agreed and strongly agreed that they were empowered to make *decisions about local curriculum development*. There are also very few examples of direct linkages between the school board and the schools within the municipality.

In Finland, the school board members’ felt that the school boards had a strong political influence in municipal governance. As board members, they also felt that they can influence the decisions made by the school boards. School board members also believed that they have an impact on schools agendas. They felt it was important to know about curriculum issues when making decisions, even though curriculum issues were not dealt with very often, because the national core curriculums are only changed every 10 years. Members are especially interested in being school board members because they want to and feel that they can have an influence on school issues.

In Sweden, the overall finding on perceived influence is that three-quarters of board members believe that they contribute significantly to the development of schools within their own territory. A similar proportion reported that they enjoy high status among school staff, in terms of being treated with respect. Moreover, 60 % assess that they have the expertise required to deal with the challenges of school board governing. Similarly, 52 % of the board members see themselves as influential, in terms of their viewpoints being taken into consideration, when it comes to the municipal council’s decision-making processes. These reported data cluster around a high self-perception of competence, status, and influence on the policy process in their specialism. On the other hand, only 20 % of the members in the sample rated their boards as being good at suggesting solutions to problems that arise within the school sector. With regard to perceived stakeholder influence on the board’s decisions, there is a significant difference between municipal school administration and school principals, which leaves the impression that the administrative core of the municipality organization is a lot more influential on local school policy processes than school principals.

The Danish chairs and members found that the school boards are influential, especially in strategic decisions and financial prioritizing within their area of responsibility. In assessing the extent to which the school board members and chairs influence the board’s decisions, the chairs feel that they have a bigger influence than the members do. The boards also believe, to a lesser extent, that they are able to set the agenda for how schools prioritize. Both groups feel that the board has great importance for

development in the schools. Similarly, they both find that the municipal council gives great consideration to the board's views in educational matters. Consequently, the board members and chairs consider themselves to be important for the municipal development of the schools.

On the other hand, the Danish chairpersons and members both found that the municipal school administration has moderate influence on the committee's decisions and that the municipal school administration is only moderately able to lead the dialog with the schools about the quality reports, to suggest solutions on problems in the school sector, and to analyze the national PISA tests. Members and chairs both felt that school leaders only partially have a significant influence on the school boards' decisions. This is consistent with the fact that, in many municipalities, there is a wide decentralization of decision competences to the individual schools. Close contact and tight organizational couplings between the school board and the schools are rare, which means that there is no significant direct influence either way (Weick 1976).

10.3.2 Can the Boards Make Strategic Decisions?

The country cases raise several questions related to the school board members' experience and belief that they can make self-dependent strategic prioritizations within their municipality. In the Swedish case, for example, 54 % of the members in the sample answer 5 or 6 (on a six-grade scale) on the extent to which they feel that they can influence the way the strategic decisions are formulated. Similar results were found on items that load the respondents' experience of having an impact (making a difference) on schooling. Similarly, the Norwegian case illustrates a relatively high score on the board members' perception of influence on their municipal board and the municipal council's strategic decisions. Notably, when the focus is shifted towards downward influence on school level decisions, the level of perceived influence decreases. However, with regard to documentation of independent political initiatives that reflects local priorities in, for example, assessment methodologies and content of schooling (within the framework of the national curricula), the data does not provide much precise information. Notably in the Norwegian case, "local curriculum development" is a typical low scorer (approximately 20 %) in task preference structures of the board.

The latter point gives rise to a critical discussion of the competence of school board members to interfere in the national educational discourse by way of their own pedagogical initiatives. In the Finnish case, the school boards have influence on strategic decision-making at the municipal level concerning educational matters. The very high scores found regarding the influence of municipal strategies on decision-making at school board level demonstrate that municipal councils' strategic definitions policy significantly affects school boards' decision-making. The results also show that the independent political initiatives are not important in the school boards' agendas.

Among Danish school board members, 69 % (and an even higher percentage of chairs) found that the school boards have possibilities for influencing strategic decisions. More than 70 % of both groups assessed that the school boards are able to conduct economic prioritization. Members and chairs both found that the boards do influence strategic decisions.

Eighty-seven percent of the chairs assessed that the chair can affect decisions from the school board, more than double the 42 % among members. Comparatively few chairs and members (62 % and 51 %, respectively) assessed that decisions in the boards can influence how schools prioritize.

10.3.3 Perceived Capacity on Behalf of Their Municipality

In the Norwegian policy context, there is a recurrent debate on the municipality structure. The backdrop is the disperse structure of 428 municipalities. At the national level, one of the predominant policy discourses raises critical questions about whether small municipalities are capable of ensuring good learning conditions for all children. Moreover, it has been questioned whether small municipalities are capable of recruiting competent teachers due to a perceived lack of attractiveness. Against this backdrop, the Norwegian survey instrument assesses school board members' perceived capacity in two areas: their home municipality and small municipalities in general.

First, a large and homogenous majority of the sample of school board members expressed a view that municipalities, both large and small, are capable of fulfilling their role as school owners. For example, approximately 80 % of the sample falsifies (disagrees and strongly disagrees) that "our municipality is too small to fulfill the obligations of primary schooling set by the state." Similar disagreement was shown to the statement that "our municipality is too small to ensure good learning conditions for all pupils in the future." A similar portion of close to 80 % of the sample perceived that "our municipality will be capable of offering school provisions that are attractive for the choice of the parents also in the future." Moreover, they did not see small municipalities as problematic, as is the case in the national policy discourse in Norway, where the dominant political coalitions currently express willingness to force small municipalities to merge.

The discussion in Finland has been similar to that in Norway concerning the mergers and state's interference into local democracy in terms of forcing municipalities to merge. The latest debate has been about whether the 320 municipalities should merge to 100 municipalities so that the population of each municipality is over 30,000. This move has been proposed in order to secure services in municipalities, especially concerning the financial capacity. Even though the members of the school boards felt that they have adequate know-how to develop the schools, they also felt that the school administration has a good capacity to lead quality work in the school sector. The school board members felt that the offering of school provision is quite attractive and the school is functioning well. The members of the

boards also felt that they have been able to recruit well-educated teachers. In Finland, all teachers have Master's degrees in education or in the subject they teach. Teachers are not evaluated or ranked, which makes it almost impossible to compare the skills of different applicants. It seems that the board members believe that they get the best teachers anyway. The finding that the differences between teachers in different schools are at acceptable level ensures the perception that the boards are happy with the recruited teachers.

In Denmark, the number of municipalities, and thus the number of school boards, was reduced from 275 to 98 in 2007. Similarly, the structure within the schools has been continually reformed in such a way that schools have been closed or merged, while only a few new schools have been established. Approximately 40 % of members left the questions assessing the schools unanswered. Of the remainder, more than half felt that their municipality offers attractive schools that are recruiting well-qualified teachers. Similarly, they found that the local school culture promotes learning and teaching. There is less conviction among members, as well as among chairs (44 % and 61 %, respectively) that the local school structure is well-functioning or that the variation between pupils' output at different schools is acceptable. However, only around one-third of the responses felt that the level of variation in teacher competences between different schools is acceptable.

10.3.4 Delegation of Responsibilities to Schools

In the Norwegian case, there are mixed tendencies. On one hand, a state-mandated supervision regime is increasingly targeting the schools. On the other hand, a recent advisory corps, also formed by the state directorate, allows schools to influence their own course. Both streams indicate more initiatives directed directly towards schools from state bodies. On the other hand, schools have greater degrees of freedom in order to influence agenda setting when they approach the state-mandated advisory corps. In the Norwegian state supervision system, municipalities are free to couple their schools rather loosely to the supervision practices and work with the yearly quality report.

Sweden has a strong state (educational act, curriculum, and inspection) but the municipalities are in charge. The money for the schools comes to the municipalities without any earmarks, which means the municipalities have to allocate resources between elderly care, culture, spare-time activities, and education. Principals have their duties and responsibilities by law (Education Act and Curricula) but do not have enough power (regarding budget, recruitment, etc.) to create their organization. We see tendencies of mistrust in the organization between the national level and the municipalities and between politicians and principals.

In Finland in the early 1990s, the inspection system was abolished from the school legislation. In 1994, a core curriculum for the first time introduced the idea of a local curriculum and schools' own curriculum. Also, the evaluation was delegated to the municipal and school levels. In 1995, the government increased the

municipals' autonomy in legislation in Finland. All of the abovementioned changes form the basis to changes at municipal level delegation. The second reason for delegating tasks to the school level is financial, due to the regression in the early 1990s (as explained in the Power and Influence chapter). One of the most radical delegations has been the responsibility to recruit personnel to school level. Only the recruiting of principals is decided at the school board level. That was started in the bigger municipalities in the early 1990s; nowadays, it is only in some smaller municipalities that the school boards make decisions on recruiting school personnel. Consequently, staff management has also been delegated to the school level. Later in the 1990s, financial decision-making was delegated to the school level. Due to these facts, principals' duties in particular have been increasing all the time. The delegation of tasks has decreased the number of tasks performed at the school board level. Due to the delegation of recruiting to school level, the school boards' work has changed radically. Earlier, the school boards were more political, and board members had more individual "agendas" concerning recruitment of personnel. The change mitigated the work in school boards, to some degree, and also showed trust in the principals' professional skills. The schools also received more power to build their own personnel.

10.4 Discussion and Concluding Remarks

10.4.1 *Interdependencies in the Multilevel System*

Across all the Nordic countries, municipalities are significant players in school governing, not least since current educational reforms tend to delegate certain amounts of responsibilities for quality assurance procedures to the local authorities. Specifically, municipalities intervene in schools in cases where legal students' rights are not fulfilled in accordance with the legislation. Also, as shown in Chap. 9, municipalities play a pivotal role in the information routine of the national quality assurance systems, in terms of aggregating data among the schools (within each municipality) and transmitting it further to state bodies. Moreover, policy issues are set on the agenda in municipalities based on the same data aggregation systems. This means that there is significant interdependency in educational governance between the state and municipality sectors in all Nordic countries. A similar interdependency is visible between the individual municipality and its schools when it comes to resource allocation and distribution. The state allocates lump sums to municipalities based on criteria, and the municipalities reallocate these funds to schools based on predefined national criteria supplemented by local decisions and priorities, which means that some variation in resource level between municipalities must be accounted for (Aasen et al. 2012). On the other hand, municipalities often also tend to allocate extra resources to primary schooling as a function of local priorities. Therefore, there are mutual interdependencies between state bodies and municipalities and between schools and their respective municipality, and this

pattern is an important constituent of school governing in the Nordic countries, where the public school system is a cornerstone of the local democracy and vice versa (Mc Beath 2013; Moos 2013).

10.4.2 Variation in Transnational Influence

However, there are significant differences across the Nordic systems. First, the influence from transnational agencies is transformed into national policy processes in different ways (Christensen and Læg Reid 2001). Despite its status as “superpower” in PISA studies, Finland has to a minimal extent been influenced by the global reform movement characterized by accountability, devolution, and import of solutions from the corporate sector (Sahlberg 2011). Norway has been influenced by NPM ideas to a greater degree than Finland has, at least at the rhetorical level, although the former has been characterized as a “slow learner” (Olsen and Peters 1996) and reluctant implementer (Christensen et al. 2000). Denmark, on the other hand, has been more strongly influenced by NPM ideas, as discussed in Chap. 10 of the present book. Denmark has been described as a “competitive state,” with a strong emphasis on employability as overarching policy goals paired with marketplace competitiveness (Pedersen 2010). Sweden differs from the other Nordic countries in that it has implemented a nearly commercial-free school system since the turn of the millennium, where corporate entrepreneurs are free to establish primary schools and steer them as they would any other business. This pattern provides specific challenges for local school boards. Overall, the above shows that transnational trends are “filtered” into national policies differently in the Nordic countries.

10.4.3 Different Municipality Structures

The linkages between the state, the municipalities, and the schools are also tied differently across the Nordic countries. As a result of the municipal merger wave in Denmark in 2007, the couplings between the municipalities and the schools in that country are looser than in Finland and Norway. As discussed in the chapter on Denmark, fusion of municipalities paradoxically leads to depoliticization and disintegration of schools at the municipal level and a more school-based management model in practice. The Danish state is steadily moving towards European collaboration and global competition, which generates changes regarding how to governing public sectors. The trend in these changes can, on a general level, be described as a move from democratic, public sector governance to businesslike marketplace relations. Thus, new forms on governance are emerging. Similarly, we are witnessing a contradicting trend towards treating schools as freestanding, self-governing institutions that are governed directly from the ministry. These tendencies gradually replace indirect governance through municipalities. Concurrently, municipal administration

is moving away from broad and flat organizations towards steeper hierarchies. The implementation of this three-layered corporate model has been conceptualized as professionalization, in which power is organized more hierarchical and less subject or cause oriented. New relations, positions, and influences are produced when public sectors are transformed. One illustration thereof is the task and composition of political boards and their expectations towards the future. School boards are engaged in adjusting structures and finances and educational concerns.

Moreover, Sweden has established an autonomous and state-driven inspectorate to bypass municipalities in a range of educational matters. In Norway and Finland, many municipalities are the target of political initiatives, and only in minor cases do state bodies bypass municipalities. The examples illustrate different couplings between different levels in the governance chain. However, it is fair to assume that the state's propensity to bypass municipalities in school governing will also increase in Norway in the upcoming years, not least as a function of the massive upscaling of the national Directorate of Education and Training.

10.4.4 Perceived Capacity in Decision-Making

The school boards in the Nordic countries have expressed a strong belief in their capacity to influence their political territory (i.e., the municipal council and municipal board) in strategic and overarching educational issues. They also see themselves as powerful key agents in terms of allocating and distributing resources to schools. However, there are few signs of political initiatives towards schools as agents in pedagogical matters; therefore, the boards do not see the school principals as influential actors in their own decision-making processes. There is, therefore, support for both the “blueprint” and the “potency” assumption in the Nordic cases. Taken together, it seems like the state is in a strong control position in terms of educational content, assessment models, and curriculum development, whereas the local level is potent and powerful regarding how to spend the resources for schooling. Finland, again, seems to be a deviating case, in terms of local autonomy in curriculum development.

10.4.5 Concluding Remark

Educational reform research suggests that “intelligent couplings” between the levels in an educational system are important prerequisites for successful implementation (Datnow 2002). Therefore, we see the concept of multilevel governance as a fruitful conceptual tool in analyzing what happens when national policies and transnational trends meet the local policy level in school boards. As noted, the concept of multilevel governance denotes, firstly, a level of interdependence between two or three levels of jurisdiction in governing the school system. Second, the totality possesses a system-wide architecture of structures, procedures, and rules that crosses all levels. By asking

whether multilevel means “more than the state,” this chapter has elaborated different forms of interdependencies between state bodies and the municipalities and between the municipalities and their respective schools across the Nordic countries. Nonetheless, running through the school boards of all country cases is a pattern of significant self-experience of political influence towards their municipal organization, yet significantly weaker towards schools. Moreover, there is an evident image that local capabilities have the self-belief to act as school owners at the system level.

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Chapter 11

Globalisation and Europeanisation of Nordic Governance

Jan Merok Paulsen and Lejf Moos

Abstract Power relations between state, regional, municipal, and school levels have changed over the past decade or so. This shift is clear from an analysis of data from our survey of school board members and chairs in the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden – and from country reports and thematic chapters in this volume. School board members also have exposed their new roles, tasks, and functions in municipal and political bureaucracies, government and governance, and therefore, new relationships between politicians and administrators, and between political boards and municipal administration, are formed. Also relationships between municipal policy and management agencies and government have been transformed so that in some cases, the traditionally strong municipal role in the “chain of governance” has been weakened or bypassed.

Even so, we see that changes to specific influences and the translation of policy ideas are done on the basis of national or even regional or municipal cultures, habits, structures, and histories. Therefore, we see similarities in the ways Nordic systems react to contemporary challenges, but we also see differences. As Nordic researchers of Nordic societies, we find it interesting to look into the “facts or dreams of Nordic-ness.” We are interested in finding out if special relationships and understandings are preserved or newly constructed in the hurricane of international discourses, or are the external influences so strong, that our ways of thinking and acting are homogenized?

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11.1 Introduction

Power relations between state, regional, municipal, and school levels have changed over the past decade or so. This shift is clear from an analysis of data from our survey of school board members and chairs in the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden – and from country reports and thematic chapters in this volume. School board members have demonstrated their awareness of their responsibility for governing education in schools and municipalities while also managing policy development in other public sector areas such as childcare, elderly care, and culture. They also have exposed their new roles, tasks, and functions in municipal and political bureaucracies, government, and governance and, therefore, new relationships between politicians and administrators and between political boards and municipal administration. Also, relationships between municipal policy and management agencies and government have been transformed so that in some cases the traditionally strong municipal role in the ‘chain of governance’ has been weakened or bypassed.

Changes and transitions are often implemented with inspiration from transnational agencies, preferably the European Union’s European Commission (EC) and the OECD or UNESCO. As the EC has decided to collaborate closely with other agencies in the global arena¹ (Lawn and Grek 2012), it is difficult to distinguish between a global and a European influence, but taken together, national governments and policy makers experience massive pressure to ‘choose’ to homogenise their governance systems. In fact, much of the influence from those transnational agencies takes the form of soft governance, or ‘persuasive and unobtrusive power’ (Lawn and Grek 2012).

Even so, we see that changes to specific influences and the translation of policy ideas (Røvik 2007) are done on the basis of national or even regional or municipal cultures, habits, structures, and histories. Therefore, we see similarities in the ways Nordic systems react to contemporary challenges, but we also see differences. As Nordic researchers of Nordic societies, we find it interesting to look into the ‘facts or dreams of Nordic-ness’. We are interested in finding out if special relationships and understandings are preserved or newly constructed in the hurricane of international discourses, or are the external influences so strong that our ways of thinking and acting are homogenised?

11.2 Transnational Influence on Nordic Educational Policy and Governance

Both the OECD and the EU have developed their capacity as powerful players in the global field of educational politics and governance during the last decades. Yet until now, the OECD has *not* been positioned, and the EU has not desired to make

¹The Organization for Economic Cooperation, (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP).

educational policy on behalf of member governments, in terms of direct forms of power like regulations, and ‘they are therefore developing ‘soft forms of governance’ (Moos 2009, p. 398) – a term commonly used to describe the utilisation of indirect steering instruments and social technologies by agents in a policy network for the purpose of exerting influence on other public sector policy-making and governing. Moreover, soft governance is only lightly regulative (since actors typically do not use hard governance mechanisms such as legislation and directives) as they work through self-managing mechanisms. In addition, soft governance typically operates in a depoliticised, marketplace context in which priorities are based on benchmarks, performance indicators, and rankings, and the main targets are economic effectiveness and improved international rankings (Lawn and Grek 2012).

Whereas the EU has developed the ‘open method of coordination’ (OMC) (Lange and Alexiadou 2007), the OECD has conducted a portfolio of indirect methods of peer pressure to affect member nations’ policy-making, based on comparisons of international panel data studies such as the EURYDICE, Eurostat, PISA, and TIMS (Moos 2006a). Moreover, both the EU and the OECD are very much in accordance with the World Trade Organization (WTO) decision to include education services in the area of free trade, thus transforming education into a commodity (Lawn and Grek 2012; Moos 2006a). Yet while the EU initiatives are mostly policy based, the OECD works in a research-based manner to affect member nations’ educational policy-making and governance. A major feature of the EU’s OMC is reflexivity: member states and institutions should inspire each other through peer reviews and policy learning and through the adoption of ‘best practices’. An important tool is the work on EC *indicators* in structural and performance areas described to identify ‘best practice’ (Lange and Alexiadou 2007). The indicators are monitored by a Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (Lawn and Grek 2012). Through the range of these indicators, benchmarks, and ‘best practices’, the EU aims to affect member nations directly.

Both the EU and the OECD agencies distinguish between hard and soft governance in the manner in which they seek to influence educational policy-making and governance in member countries. The social technologies used by the two transnational agencies seem to follow the same pattern, which builds on the liberal core concept of citizens’ (or consumers’) *choice*. Choice presupposes that citizens are given a screen, a background upon which to make their choices; therefore, there must be *comparisons* between competitors and, eventually, some kind of *indicators* that can function as yardsticks for making the selection, the national *interpretations*, and forms of *accountability* (Moos 2009). As a result, the couplings between the central level and the local and school level have changed rather profoundly over the past decade as demands for national standards and accountability have moved from political discussions and discourses to administrative practices based on national testing and participation in the OECD panel studies (Moos 2006b). Although hard governance (laws and regulations) influences people’s behaviour through compliance, ‘soft governance’ seeks to influence the way people perceive and think about themselves and their relationships with the outside world. Therefore, soft governance influences agents in much deeper ways.

While these methods of influence might seem softer, or more educational, the effects of soft influence are harder and more profound (Moos 2009). One should not forget that soft governance of national agencies can be transformed into hard governance in relation to local agents, if the government so wishes. Over and above all, this development means that European educational policy-making and governance has become *globalised* (Lawn and Grek 2012).

11.2.1 Nordic Responses: An Overview

Denmark, Finland, and Sweden are EU members, whereas Norway is coupled indirectly to the European Community policy sphere through the European Economic Area, EEA. In practice, most regulations and directives from the EU are implemented administratively at the national level in Norway, with very few cases of national reservation. All the Nordic countries, as such, are strongly influenced by this method of soft influence of educational policy and governance. The work on European standards and statistics has direct implications for school boards because it shifts the focus of the local political work from educational politics towards economic politics. As an example, the main focus of school boards in all four countries is on budgets and structures. The European focus, together with other initiatives with OECD inspiration (like the quest for more central steering), also changes the relationships between public levels, so that the standards are national and therefore comparable to other national standards. Standards and tests developed at the national level – with inspiration from EC indicators – are directly influencing and shaping practices at the school level, ‘bypassing’ the municipal and regional levels.

Another set of initiatives that also elicits different kinds of ‘bypassing’ the municipal levels in governance is the ‘free-setting’ of schools: Instead of being accountable to and funded through municipal authorities, as is the case with most public schools in the Nordic countries, we see a tendency to make schools self-governing, mostly in Denmark and Sweden, which means that schools have their own board of governors directly accountable to the ministry. These schools are also funded directly from the ministry. In Denmark, this model is being used at universities, university colleges, gymnasia, and some schools that have been established parent groups. Unlike Swedish schools, Danish self-governing schools are not allowed to make a profit. In this model of marketplace, corporate-like governance resembles many schools and systems in England and the USA.

11.2.2 Standardisation of Education

During the last decade, the OECD has become a strong force in educational governance, not the least through PISA studies, in terms of an international standardised reform movement towards global transparency, accountability, and de-professionalisation

(Moos 2006b). As argued, PISA's dominance in the global educational discourse standardises educational policy *'for the sake of hitching schools more tightly to the bandwagon of economic efficiency, while sacrificing their role of preparing students for independent thinking and civic participation'* (Meyer and Benavot 2013, p. 9). Specifically, OECD-initiated discourse undermines important sides of equity as democratic pillars in European welfare states. Within this discourse, a reductionist approach to equity seems to blur its complexity and multifaceted nature (Meyer and Benavot 2013). The OECD influence basically takes the form of country reviews (e.g., based on PISA results) and policy recommendations advising member nations' governments to take specific national actions, mostly based on their international standardised tests. For example, based on PISA 2006, OECD recommended that Norway strengthen national quality assurance of literacy art in primary education, which later was reflected in the curriculum reform known as the Knowledge Promotion (2006) and in the testing and indirect control of literacy skills having become a central target in the national quality assurance system (NQAS), implemented from 2006.

Also as described in country chapters in this volume, the OECD and EC have imposed a consistent tangible influence on national government policies in Sweden and Denmark in terms of a radical shift towards testing students' achievements in mathematics and literacy skills defined as core competencies, which represents a shift in educational governance from input-governing (resources and frames) towards output-governing (Skedsmo 2009). Moreover, the achievement-oriented focus on these subject domains is powered by national test regimes. PISA changes the focus of education from democratic participation, 'Bildung' (Moos and Kofod 2012), and artistic talents, to pragmatic, *lifelong learning, employability, and basic skills*. As documented in the chapters on Sweden, Denmark, and Norway and the analysis in Chap. 9, in this volume, the governments have initiated national quality assurance systems to tighten the couplings between the national policy environment and the priorities of school leaders and teachers. We see this movement in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway as a bow towards transnational influences, first of all those of OECD (Travers 2007). This development has implications for school boards in Nordic systems (less in Finland than in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) because it shifts the boards' focus away from education in a practical way. The information that school boards get about education in the local school is concentrated around outcome results, prominently through international and national test results. Very few school board members are directly attached to schools, unless they are parents of schoolchildren, and boards do not get information directly from schools, but rather through the school administration and the superintendent, who span a wide field of institutions and therefore cannot give detailed information on each one. As a result, school boards rely on the fairly restricted area of test items when they discuss education. Equity of students is not one of them.

Contributing to this trend is the tendency in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden to change the educational legislation. Traditionally, school legislation is very short and overarching, stipulating general aims and intentions and leaving a more detailed description of aims and means to the local, municipal authorities. Most often governments issued guidelines for curricula, and municipalities reworked

them, adjusting for local circumstances and aims, to create the binding curricula. Often, this work involved local professionals and politicians, typically from the school board, and was considered an important aspect of their job. With the new, centralised standards and accountabilities, this level of governance is also bypassed. In some cases, the school boards approve the guiding curricula but do not change anything in them, a political practice we term ‘blue-printing’ the national curricula. Here, Finland is different, as school boards are still expected to be actively involved in approving the curricula.

11.2.2.1 The Finnish Paradox

According to PISA, Finland has been regarded as *the* most successful nation in the world for more than 10 years, yet its educational governance system represents a ‘paradox’ to the OECD reform movement (Sahlberg 2011). With its cultural roots in social-democratic and agrarian egalitarianism, Finland is the *one* country that most distinctly deviates from the Anglo-Saxon accountability movement in basic education, which emphasises making school principals and teachers accountable for students’ learning outcomes. Moreover, Finnish municipalities have resisted implementation of studies that could be used as ranking lists (Silander and Välijärvi 2013; Varjo et al. 2013). As discussed in the Finnish chapter in this volume, Finland does not have any school inspection, and national evaluations do not rank schools; however, education providers have the obligation to attend to national evaluations and to conduct local self-evaluations. The school board data confirms that school board members are quite satisfied with the evaluation system. They seem to think that evaluation reports compiled by the schools themselves give boards a good picture of the real quality of individual schools. National tests were not considered significant, and state sanctions of municipalities for not meeting their obligations according to deadlines did not receive much support either.

11.2.3 *Tightening the Couplings by Means of External Control Devices*

Drawn from the classical work of the new institutional theory in the 1970s and 1980s (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Meyer and Scott 1983; Weick 1976), two nested images of school governance have been widespread. The first image refers to the school’s technical core as only loosely coupled or even decoupled from the administrative core and from the school district’s policy environment. The second image posits that schools primarily seek legitimacy in the institutional environments through mimetic isomorphism of organisational forms (Rowan 1982) and ‘pedagogical fashion’ (Hanson 2001). As noted in a more recent institutionalism work, the global movement of standardisation and accountability has modified this image significantly (Meyer and Rowan 2007; Rowan 2007). Through standardisation,

external control, and accountability demands, a strengthening of the couplings between the policy environment and schools' work has been observable. Specifically, by means of curriculum control (Rowan and Miller 2007) and standardisation of assessment practices, the couplings between the central policy environment (of state agencies) and schools' work are strengthened. However, as noted by Spillaine and Burch (2007), the patterns of tight and loose couplings between policy and administration on one hand and classroom work on the other follow different paths: In literacy and mathematics, as prioritised by OECD bodies, the global tendency is for tight couplings and control, whereas in other subjects like social sciences, loose couplings are still a predominant pattern (Spillaine and Burch 2007).

The chapter on quality assurance and on control shows several modes of tightening the couplings, which in many ways bypass school boards' political governance. *First*, state inspection is targeted in Sweden towards core subject domains in line with those defined by OECD/PISA. Thus, the couplings between the central policy environment (of state agencies) and school professionals are tightened through external control devices. Moreover, there is in the Swedish case a visible tendency to bypass the municipalities in terms of direct organisational routines towards schools. *Second*, in Denmark and Norway, a softer mode of external control is implanted by means of state supervision. As described in the country chapters, municipalities are targeted for state supervision in Denmark and Norway, centred on the quality report based on aggregated school data. This element represents tight couplings by means of aggregation of performance data from the technical core of the schools. *Third*, state supervision towards municipalities is supplemented with school visits. However, this is a more loosely coupled system than in the Swedish case. Using the Norwegian system as an illustrative case, municipalities can buffer schools by selecting which schools will be visited. *Fourth*, in the Finnish case, couplings between state agencies and single schools are loose, not the least by the general curriculum. Moreover, municipalities enjoy certain degrees of freedom in creating local curricula.

The simultaneous trends of 'bypassing' and 'bottom-up pressure' are evident in the Nordic case. As noted, many decisions that previously were handled at the national level are today delegated to municipalities, yet the state still exerts significant control over schools through directives and change initiatives sent directly to school principals. In that respect, municipalities as school owners are bypassed in the governance chain at the same time as responsibility for resource allocation and funding is delegated to the municipalities. On the other hand, as shown in the Swedish chapter, when principals need support, they use 'bottom-up pressure' to make demands to the municipal school owner, which in many cases are demands for financial resources. As noted, these negotiations affect the relationships between the principals and the municipal school owner and between principals, teachers, and parents, who often have been involved. Taken together, 'bypassing' and 'bottom-up pressure' leave the school board in a squeezing situation of tensions and powerlessness, since they may be decoupled from the governance chain (through state 'bypassing') even as stakeholder alliances at the school level (principals, teachers, and parents) seek to increase the inflow of resources through imposing demands on

the school board. As shown in the Swedish case, this enduring dilemma is further amplified when the legal rights of pupils and parents are strengthened towards municipal school owners, and state Inspections are positioned to interfere against schools that do not fulfil these legal requirements. State ‘bypassing’ and strong coalitions at the school level strengthen the relationship between the state and the schools and weaken the relationship between the schools and the municipality (Nihlfors and Johansson 2013).

11.2.4 Enduring Tensions of the Board’s Position in the Municipal Hierarchy

Two major themes are visible in cross-country contextual differences in the school board’s position in the municipal hierarchy. The first theme refers to integration of larger areas of jurisdiction under the school board’s responsibilities. For example, Danish school boards gained larger jurisdictions as small municipalities merged to form units of at least 30,000 inhabitants. As a result, each board is responsible for a broader field of activities; for example, our survey identified combinations of school, preschool, and leisure time institutions; social affairs; Danish education for immigrants; adult education; and culture (Moos 2011). The Norwegian case is similar, but the integration of municipal services is less comprehensive than in Denmark, as social affairs are seldom the school board’s responsibility. Notably, the trend to integrate areas of jurisdiction implies downplaying the ‘educational specialism’ that traditionally has been the school board’s main territory.

A second theme related to the school board’s position in the municipal hierarchy is the transfer of political specialism from local school politicians to the municipal administration. As Anne Homme (2008) showed in her study of municipal school ownership in Norway, a series of school specialism issues were transferred from the school board’s domain to the municipal school administration. We see this pattern as a consistent trend of ‘bureaucratisation’ and ‘professionalisation’ of local school politics, which resonates in the country cases in this volume. However, this pattern does not necessarily mean that the school board’s agenda is empty, but rather, the number of issues that the school board takes up and processes is fewer than earlier. More important, the issues Homme considered in her study of Norwegian school boards were typically strategic ones, with implications for the entire municipality and beyond the school sector (Homme 2008). In a similar vein, as Homme (2008) observed, when local school issues appeared on the municipality’s policy agenda, these issues (and the policy process they were part of) typically were assimilated into a broader field populated by multiple players: leadership and boards of multiple institutions (like childcare and culture), the municipality’s CEO, the mayor, the central administration, the dominant political coalition, and external stakeholders. In these cases, the school board loses its exclusive ownership of local school policy and governance.

11.2.5 Agents in Local Policy Processes

The school board data across all the Nordic countries shows a strong agency in local democracy. We see this pattern as a case of institutional path dependency linked to the common school institution in all the Nordic countries (MacBeath 2013; Moos 2013). The boards emerge as proponents of local democracy in education, and the data portrays tight couplings between the boards and the strategic apex of local government in the municipalities – that is, municipal councils and municipal boards. There are also tight linkages between the boards and the administrative core, and board members expressed a significant belief in their own capacity to influence local policy processes. Moreover, board members saw their municipality as a capable school owner, with the ability to provide sufficient education to children and to maintain a fairly good quality of the provisions, including recruiting competent education professionals. However, this form of agency is mostly linked to local democracy and municipal governance at a general level, yet seldom visible in policy initiatives in pedagogical matters. For example, local curriculum development and assessment practices are not very high on the agenda, which supports an image of local school policy mainly as administrative, financial, and organisational governance and loosely coupled to school level pedagogy.

11.3 School Boards' Political Affiliation: Do Political Parties Matter?

Samples from the school boards in the Nordic countries showed a strong social-democratic representation as in Denmark, or a social-democratic/centre coalition as in Norway. In the Swedish sample, both the bourgeoisie and socialist parties had each 35 % of the votes in the local election. When political representation within the boards is compared with the results of national elections (in cases where it is possible), few deviating patterns are visible. Yet in Norway, the Centre Party systematically tends to be overrepresented on school boards at a cost to the right-wing Progressive Liberal Party. On Danish school boards, the socialist block is overrepresented in the chairman positions. Sweden has two strong competing blocks in the political landscape, yet there is seldom a clear party cleavage between them at the local level, as local politics tend to be rather pragmatic. We suggest that this pattern is fairly representative for local school governance in the Nordic countries, which implies that internal party conflicts play only a modest role in the policy process. Rather, we see a pattern of tension in educational politics between the municipal board and the state and municipalities, as discussed in Chap. 8. The board members across the country perceive that the state interferes significantly in local school matters, an asymmetric power relationship that the municipal board members do not find entirely satisfying.

11.4 Motivational Structure and Sense of Political Efficacy

Motives for being elected to school boards in the Nordic countries are rooted in strong beliefs in the societal importance of schooling paired with personal interests in school politics. Moreover, this belief is manifested in a fairly strong sense of self-efficacy (Bandura 1997), that is, the board members' belief that they possess the capacity to wield a tangible (and strategic) influence on educational decision-making processes within the municipality organisation: a proactive political agenda and priorities that reflect local preferences and norms, and finally the capacity to implement these issues. The point was apparent in questions measuring the extent to which school board members felt that they could make strategic decisions and their perceived influence on educational decisions of the municipal council/board and of the schools. As shown in the country cases, board members had a stronger sense of decision-making influence in their municipalities' political and administrative organisations than in school-level decision-making and priorities. Taken together, the data from the school boards in our study uniformly expresses the board members' strong motivation for educational improvement paired with their belief that they can exert influence in decision-making processes and play a role in governance.

11.4.1 *Empowerment and Disempowerment in Educational Matters*

Although school board members' self-reported sense of efficacy and influence in decision-making portrays them as influential local politicians, other scholars have critically questioned the actual influence of municipal politicians. As discussed in the previous chapter, Engeland and Langfeldt (2009) concluded in their review of Norwegian school policy covering 1970–2007 that independent school policy formation and policy initiatives *in pedagogical matters* have very seldom been observable in Norwegian municipalities. This is particularly the case when it comes to the ideological steering of schools such as locally developed evaluation criteria of school principals and teachers and local curriculum development. Engeland and Langfeldt found that policy goals and local educational strategies, as observed in written documents, were general and vague and seemed to be 'blueprints' of national policies. This finding concurs with the descriptive data presented in the country chapters: On one hand, school boards are more firmly integrated into municipality policy-making in strategic, organisational, and financial matters, and on the other, their previous educational specialism is minimised. For example, local curriculum development, assessment practices, and pedagogical matters in Norway were typically ranked low among the boards' preferences. Moreover, the major sources of external influence on the boards' decisions came from the municipality's administrative core.

We suggest that this pattern can be understood as a coexistence of empowerment and disempowerment in local educational governance. The empirical cases underpinning this book show that school boards see themselves as strongly integrated and influential in strategic, organisational, and financial issues critical for the municipality but as significantly less influential and impactful regarding school principals and teachers. Moreover, pedagogical specialism tends to be absent from school boards' agendas, which underscores the amplified state control through quality assurance systems, standardisation, and testing. However, the local school board has a certain amount of discretion to determine how schools should be organised to achieve these objectives, such as which to use and how the premises are designed and, to some extent, which staff are employed. Regardless of how a municipality decides to organise and operate its work, it must guarantee all children and students the same standard of education.

11.4.2 Relation to Superintendents and School Principals

Due to their position in the municipal organisation, school boards are uniquely positioned in relation to the superintendent, the municipal school administration, and the school principals and the quality assurance systems. However, the relationships between these agents are differently structured, as shown in the previous chapters. Moreover, relationships differ across the Nordic school boards. *First*, a major finding is the tight coupling between school administration/superintendent and the school board in organisational, strategic, and financial matters. The country chapters indicate that school boards are relatively strongly integrated into the municipal organisation's core issues of public management: finance, strategic development, and resource allocation. Moreover, when strategic educational issues arise, such as school structure, financial prioritisations, and location of educational services, the school board does not operate in isolation but rather calls upon a range of political actors and stakeholders (Homme 2008). *Second*, the country cases suggest that school boards are only modestly active in independent pedagogical initiatives, a pattern that is most visible in Sweden in terms of 'bypassing'. The relationships between the school board and the school principals are relatively weak and infrequent across the country cases, yet with cross-national differences. In Sweden, board members seldom visit schools. On the other hand, school principals tend to mobilise stakeholder support and thereby tighten the couplings with the municipality and the school board in financial negotiations; however, the board is decoupled in core issues of schooling. In Denmark, this pattern is mainly due to a decentralised school-based management model, where the ties between the board and the principal are weak by implication. As Danish chairpersons and board members noted, the school board rarely experiences close contact or tight organisational couplings with the schools, so there is no significant direct influence either way. Also in the Norwegian case, the direct linkages between the school board and the principals are generally weak and infrequent.

11.5 Board Members' Propensity to Employ Accountability Devices

This study examined the propensity to which school boards hold the superintendent accountable for performance and procedures. In short, boards tend to monitor superintendents' work in relation to budget, financial targets, and student learning indicators. When deviating practices and results are detected, the boards expect the superintendents to examine the reasons, to establish dialogues with the underperforming schools, and to take collectively actions. Thus, the school boards' self-reports seem to be influenced by accountability rhetoric. Finland does not have a system of school inspection, and national tests are not used to rank schools; however, education providers are obligated to attend to the national evaluations and to conduct local self-evaluations. Finnish school board members seemed to be fairly satisfied with the evaluation system. They indicated that evaluation reports compiled by the schools themselves give boards a good picture of the real quality of individual schools. They also considered national evaluations to support principals' work in developing their schools and to provide a reliable picture of the quality of local education. On the other hand, the Finnish school board data revealed tensions between the state and the municipalities, particularly concerning municipalities' financial resources and topical issues such as decreasing the intake into upper secondary vocational education and cutting down upper secondary general school networks.

11.6 Conclusion

In these trends, we see significant moves towards strong, detailed national steering of curriculum, preferably through indicators, standards, and accountabilities, in line with European Union governance. But this finding plays out differently from one country to the other, one political tradition to the other, and one culture to the other, as shown in some detail in this book. Fundamental change in educational governance can occur only at the expense of the middle layer, the municipalities that are losing influence on curriculum. The local curriculum, traditionally a characteristic of Nordic education, is disappearing to make room for national, and thus transnational, indicators and standards. Finland is the exception in this trend, as it is on PISA.

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