

Chapter 1

Introduction: Governing Chains – Support, Control and Intervention for Local Schools



Olof Johansson and Helene Ärlestig

Abstract How schools become successful is important for the individual students as well as the local community and the national state. A vast quantity of research has looked at what happens in schools and classrooms. At the same time, national governance and politics as well as local prerequisites are well-known to influence schools and their results to a high degree. Societal priorities, problems and traditions provide variety in how governance is executed. There is a lack of publications that give an international overview of the similarities and differences between school agencies and how their work influences schools.

1.1 Introduction

How schools become successful is important for the individual students as well as the local community and the national state. A vast quantity of research has looked at what happens in schools and classrooms. At the same time, national governance and politics as well as local prerequisites are well-known to influence schools and their results to a high degree. Societal priorities, problems and traditions provide variety in how governance is executed. There is a lack of publications that give an international overview of the similarities and differences between school agencies and how their work influences schools.

This book describes and analyses national authorities and agencies' organisation, functions and influences on local schools in 20 countries around the world. Besides describing the agencies' organisation and functions, we were as editors interested in gaining a theoretical perspective on governance and support for schools. Please note that by 'state', we mean a country or a state within a country. In the description and analysis of the countries, the authors were asked to write their chapters in relation to the following themes:

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- The organisation of school authorities in the state and the role of the government in public education.
- A description of the development of the authority and agency structure with a focus on the period after the millennium.
- A description of the different authorities' and agencies' mission, place and importance in the system and a connection and explanation of their analysis in relation to theoretical models.
- A report on the discussion today. Are there any special trends or criticisms in the discussion that will change an agency's structure in the near future?
- A description of the link between authorities, agencies and the local level, as well as power structures, degrees of discretion for the local school district and schools in relation to state or national policy and their importance to the quality of the school system.

To be able to answer these questions, the authors need to write about the governing chain in their respective country from both a theoretical and descriptive perspective. The concept of the stability and rigour of the governing chains has been challenged, and some researchers consider the chain to be broken (Moos et al. 2016; SOU 2015:22). A view that comes forward in this book is that the chain is still present but often has deficits. It is necessary to have a more nuanced understanding of how actors on various levels in the governing chain contribute to support, control and interventions. The links in the chain are joined in a way that the political decisions on one level do not dictate in detail what the next level should do (SOU 2015:22). There is always space for understanding and interpreting political and administrative intentions, which here is called 'the governing chains intervening space'. In the intervening space, administrators on different levels try to adjust the political intentions of the law to what they think is right in their situation and organisational level. The rationality of the law in the governing process is adjusted to the level of the organisation, that is, state, regional or local. If the governing chain is vertical from top to bottom, we find that the intervening spaces operate on a horizontal level, for example, at the school board level or local school level. (Moos and Merok Paulsen 2014) This means that in the intervening space, laws are transformed into practice, routines and actions which later will be called the policy of the school board or local school. (Lindensjö and Lundgren 2014). Therefore, various levels of the same organisation will have competing policies explaining and interpreting the same law. Some policies will be more general and abstract, and others will be concrete and detailed. When many different policies are linked to the same law, we talk about low accuracy of the law. This is inevitable to capture complex societal issues. In cases like that, we then sometimes get researchers who try to understand the meaning of central aims and concepts in the law to make it powerful enough to make a change in the society. One such example is laws on equity in relation to schools. Equity almost always means creating equal opportunities for all children's learning. Transnational policies on the 'equity' theme can be found in all democratic states. A recent research report by the Swedish Expert Group in Public

Economy, ESO¹ presented new policy proposals for equity linked to implementation of the law. These research policy proposals on existing laws can be very powerful in policy formation process and for changes in the law-making process. Sometimes the suggestions are too radical for the political system and stay as policy proposals with no impact on the law-making process. Sometimes these policy proposals can be viewed as the seed for policy trends that are discussed on different levels in regard to the effects of the law's interpretation and its intentions.

In sum, we are interested in how the organisation of school authorities uses their authority structures to get their mission implemented in the system and how these power structures influence the quality of the school system and the individual school. In this first chapter, we discuss policies related to the governing chain, the relation between political intentions and organisational understanding and policy implementation. We also touch on leadership for teaching and learning and the global impacts on students' learning.

1.2 Theoretical Foundation of the Project

The theoretical framework and study design of the different chapters must all display how the authors understand the policy concept. Policy, in a very formal meaning, can be equal to the legal system. However, in a practical way, policy is always a complement to the law, explaining how different administrative levels work with and practice the law. Our early reading of the country chapters shows that all of the countries have formal legal educational structures decided by state parliaments. The strength of the legal system can differ but is often described as a governing chain from the government to individual classrooms (Leithwood and Louis 2012). How tight the chain is varies in relation to the accountability regime that is in place. For example, in most Scandinavian countries, the accountability regimes are soft, while other countries have more firm inspection systems and clearer governing chains (Skedsmo and Mausethagen 2017). The chain can be tight in relation to certain regulations and looser in relation to others. Despite that, it is fair to say that in most countries, the governing chain has what we called intervening spaces above. There are clear differences in how agencies work in relation to administrative and political structures, cultures and global influences. When the influence is global, it is often described as transnational and the effects as diffusion between countries (Karvonen 1981). How power is used and distributed between different levels and how control and autonomy are balanced are underlying topics in each chapter.

Policy can be seen and viewed as processes in the educational organisations on different levels and understood as the glue between legislation and actual actions on different levels in the organisations' governing chain. When policies are viewed as processes, educational decisions are interpreted and transformed into actions in the

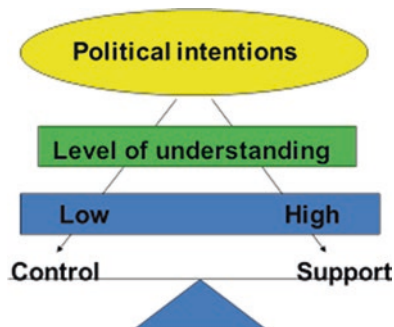
¹https://eso.expertgrupp.se/rapporter/2019_1-lika-for-alla/ retrieved 2019.11.11

intervening spaces—actions which are not always regulated in detail by law, a situation in which local structures, cultures and civil servants’ interpretations affect the decisions on all levels of the governing chain. One early publication of political scientists Jefferey Pressman and Aron Wildavsky (1984) was called *Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington are Dashed in Oakland; or, Why It’s Amazing that Federal Programs Work at All*. Pressman and Wildavsky point to the fact that laws are implemented by persons who have different understandings of the meaning and sometimes do not view the decision as important for putting into effective action. In schools, this happens all the time in relation to the teacher’s freedom to teach. There is a drift in understanding every time an implementation process goes from political decision to administrative process.

Figure 1.1 shows the relationship between political intentions and organisational understanding. Usually, political decisions concerning schools are intended to improve teaching and learning. How well the leaders in the schools understand the intentions of the decision will affect the way they decide to present the policy. For instance, if the understanding is low, leaders can understand a new policy on quality as a new control measure, but after some discussion and deeper reading, the policy’s intention to focus on improvement activities can be seen as support to improve teaching and learning. This is again an example of how interpretation on each level affects the relationship between intentions and outcomes. The higher the level of understanding is in the implementing organisation, the more likely it is that the policy will be understood as support.

There is a large amount of implementation, institutionalism and neo-institutionalism research. These studies vary from the idea of putting political ideas into action as a rational process to critical research in relation to New Public Management and New Public Governance (Moos et al. 2016). The latter are theories influenced by societal changes and ideas of efficiency. Another example is new institutionalism, which focuses on the effects of new ways of handling decisions in and about public policy actions. The focus is on how the people in the organisations together interpret the lawmakers’ intentions within different created structures and cultures. Rules, functions and practice create identity and meaning. Other perspectives include rational actors and the role they play in the structure and culture of the community. Almost all agree that the variation within states and between states can

Fig. 1.1 The relationship between political intentions and organisational understanding



be attributed to the political system on national, regional and local levels and to local interpretations of a law's intention and conversions of content into policy (March and Olsen 2006).

An additional aspect to understand in the role of authorities and agencies is their work with both stability and change. Often the change is incremental, even if the political ambition is to create school improvement directly after a reform has been decided. Often reforms are presented as urgent solutions for meeting identified deficits and global recommendations. Over the last 50 years, many Western democracies have moved in a neoliberal direction with increased privatisation and competitive markets (March and Olsen 2006). There has been a huge increase in literature about school improvement, which can be helpful in relation to how agencies act and have changed their governing methods (Leithwood and Louis 2012). One recent development is to acknowledge trust in and between different governing levels as well as the increased focus on professions and their freedom to act when laws are implemented. In the literature, the concept of implementation is often used when describing these actions within an organisation (SOU 2018:83).

When analysing how new political ideas and societal changes are put into practice, the authors were encouraged to interpret the political intention within the legal system. The focus is not on problems in the governing chain; instead, it emphasises the political intentions and expectations for change in the system. In a final section in each chapter, the authors describe the tendencies for development and policy drift they find in their countries.

The chapters give a picture of the differences between the political intentions and expectations and the administrative reality. By studying implementation and processes on all levels of the governing chain, it is possible to understand more about the support and challenges of a local school system. To understand the complexity of agencies' work and its effects on the local level, several perspectives are necessary. Some researchers argue that

...policies rarely tell you exactly what to do, they rarely dictate or determine practice, but some more than others narrow the range of creative responses (Ball et al. 2012, p3).

The term they use to describe what we called the glue in the intervening spaces above is enactment. Ball et al. use the following language and focus more on the will, rights and responsibilities of individuals in an organisation to be creative and work for the best possible results within given parameters. Enactment or, as we prefer to call them, effecting processes are dependent on the bureaucratic structure and culture of the educational structure and must work in such a way that they can create trust for the actions and interpretations of different policy decisions, but trust must be followed by accountability (Leithwood 2018).

Government law or policy decisions become an implementation process, which, in regard to a state agency, transforms into an effecting process. The effecting process includes interpretations and adjustments to structures and cultures on each level that have to deal with the policy before it becomes possible to implement it at the next level down. When the state agency is ready to send it down to the local level, the government decision becomes a state agency demand for implementation,

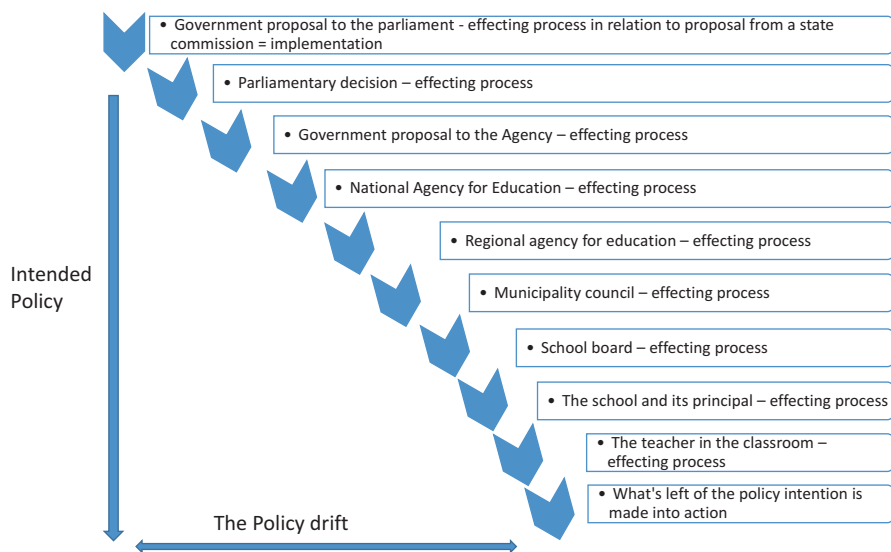


Fig. 1.2 The co-variance between implementation and effecting in a drifting policy

and when it reaches the school board, a new effecting process starts. When the state agency sends a demand for implementation to the school level, a new effecting or enactment process will start. Due to several interpretations and effecting processes before a policy decision becomes an activity in the local school, there has probably been a substantial drift away from the policy's original idea and intention. Figure 1.2 shows the drift as going in one direction, but the drift in law understanding can also go back and forth. This is becoming truer with increasing external control and higher transparency on how different levels interpret the same policy. A situation exists in which formal hierarchies can be bypassed to be sure that the next level get the message (Johansson and Nihlfors 2014). Therefore, the question becomes, 'What's left of the policy intention when it is put into action in the classroom?' To answer that kind of question, another type of project must be constructed that focuses on the policy drift in the governing chain. In this project, the focus is on the lawmakers' intentions with their governing processes.

It is also interesting how principals and teachers at a local school will view the intentions of the policymakers. As can be seen in Fig. 1.3, the relationship between the school professionals' views and the policymakers' intentions are two different dimensions influencing the successful or unsuccessful implementation of policy into practice (Gu et al. 2018). One dimension represents whether it is actually the intention of the policymaker to implement the decision or whether the decision is only symbolic and politically expedient. The other dimension represents whether education professionals believe the intention of the political community is a real or symbolic decision.

	Is the intention of the political community to implement the decision?	
	Yes	No
Does the learning community believe that the political community want to implement the decision?	Yes	A real decision
	No	A real decision seen as a symbolic decision
		A real symbolic decision

Fig. 1.3 Typology of political decisions. (Adapted from Johansson and Bredeson 1999, p. 58 and Gustafsson 1987)

Depending on the clarity given by both politicians and professionals, there can be situations in which all cells are used. One example is if the political community decides on an important reform with a substantial cost increase but does not provide extra resources. In such cases, the professionals will think that the political community does not want the reform implemented, even if it is an important election promise to the electorate. The professionals will characterise the reform law as ‘a real symbolic decision’. If such a decision should be viewed as ‘a real decision’, the learning community must see that resources are supporting the decision. In that way, the understanding of the learning community in relation to the political intentions always affects the implementation process (Danzig and Black 2019).

Change occurs not solely in relation to new reform decisions; it can also be linked to the concepts of improvement and successful and/or effective schools. The state agencies’ role in school improvement is crucial, especially in an era of comparison and competition both within and between states. The international community of school leadership researchers has been using the terms ‘successful’ and ‘effective’ interchangeably and with not much agreement as to what these two terms really mean in a particular context.

In fact, what successful and effective mean seems to depend on (1) the degree and level of centralisation/decentralisation of the education system of a specific country, (2) the accountability and evaluation mechanisms in place and (3) the ability of parents to choose schools for their children (Pashiardis and Johansson 2016). The country chapters will attend to these challenges and display how the agencies’ work on school improvement in their country might vary with the political structure and culture of each country. More specifically, successful and effective school leadership is enormously varied in its conceptual foundations, depending on where researchers and practitioners live and work as well as from where they receive their epistemological influences (Ärlestig et al. 2015).

These processes can be described and analysed in effecting terms. School leaders, for example, are not limited to bureaucratic functions, as used to be the case; on

the contrary, they have an increasing repertoire of roles and responsibilities. One such role is to lead the schools' teaching and learning program or take charge of creating the necessary vision, culture and structures for the school to improve in a safe environment (Moos et al. 2011).

Driving this book and the collection of perspective presented here is the view that successful schools are those that can facilitate student mobility in a society. In effect, through the school, every student gets a chance to develop irrespective of the social class to which he or she belongs, the 'social class ceiling' breakdown within a successful school. This is done through the creating the learning processes and putting positive social systems in place, thus creating something like a jump board from which everybody can jump onto educational processes that might lead to success for an individual and his or her fellow students (Pashiardis and Johansson 2016). It can also be described as an equality challenge in which academic and social focus and optimism in the school should lead to great hope for the future of all children (Wu et al. 2013).

In what way do organisations enable or constrain schools in relation to sustainability and improvement of students' learning? This also addresses the difficult issue of how far one can use national arguments in a text in the country/state without acknowledging the transnational nature of contemporary policy flows (Pashiardis and Johansson 2016). Policymakers are influenced by and dependent on networks of policy actors from a range of organisations, including supranational governments such as the EU; supranational organisations such as the OECD and World Bank; international consultancy companies such as McKinsey and Company or PricewaterhouseCoopers; and a range of other policy actors such as NGOs (Moos 2013). These international organisations all present results and try to mirror what is efficient and best practice, and their reports affect the state or national policymakers and their ideas. It is more questionable if the reports affect the local level, that is, school districts and local schools (Johansson and Bredeson 1999). Effects from these agencies occur first when the state policymakers have made changes in regulations and policies, which in most countries is a very slow process.

Some of the systems analysed in the book have a very clear hierarchal tradition, and others have a clear, decentralised democratic administrative system. There are clear links to New Public Management and New Public Governance theories as well as relationships to global actors such as the OECD and other organisations for comparing countries' efficiency and quality of education.

This makes the different chapters even more interesting because the nations and states all have different political systems that cannot be understood using only one common theoretical frame. Most of them have elections to a parliament that can make binding decisions for the education sector. However, the political culture and the system of control of political policy intentions differ in terms of how and why education authorities are constructed the way they are. Among the explanations, we will also find organisational and governance theories that problematize how centralisation, decentralisation and deconcentrating meaning affects how states influence transfer to the local or regional level. Of course, this will be an interesting

aspect when comparing Germany or France with small countries like Norway and Scotland (Årlestig et al. 2015).

1.3 Organisation of Chapters – The Country Case Studies

After this introductory chapter, which gives the theoretical rationale for the book and describes the organisation of chapters, there will be 20 chapters which will describe and analyse each state in relation to how authorities and agencies approach, enable and constrain school districts and schools' work based on different theoretical constructs. The chapters will be grouped in clusters with similarities in organisation. These clusters of chapters will be followed by concluding chapters that highlight theories and effects on schools in the clustered countries. What influences state agencies have on schools in the different states is another interesting comparison, as well as how the organisation and tasks among the agencies are related to governance from policymakers down to the individual schools.

In the concluding chapter, we will reflect on each group of countries, in relation to theories of policy, implementation and organisation. Our intention is to develop a comparative analysis of the function of state education authorities and their relation to the school on a local level. Of special interest are the different state authorities and agencies for education and their functions, such as their normative and regulating functions, support to school improvement, special pedagogical support, inspections and follow-up on reforms.

We will also highlight the trends described in relation to governing of education in all the 20 states and look for similarities and differences as well as for general tendencies of changes that can be explanations in relation to variations in global policy and give a hint about the way forward.

The chapters will be presented in groups. Some of the countries qualify for several groups. In those cases, we have been pragmatic to avoid some groups becoming too big.

1.3.1 *The Nordic Countries*

In Chap. 2, Lejf Moos writes about the level of Denmark's educational governance and the national and policy context. This is followed by more detailed descriptions of the national governance players/agencies and analyses of the preferred model of governance, the contract. An important source of inspiration, the transnational agency, is included in the description of the development of a contemporary national governance model. A critique of the basic features of the models is given, building on the concepts of disintegration, competition and incentivization. A discussion on how practitioners deal with and enact policies in their professional life completes the chapter.

In Chap. 3, Mika Risku and Meng Tian examine how Finland is developing its educational governance to meet the challenges of its changing operational environment. For our examination, we applied two theoretical frameworks on education policy development. Applying different theoretical frameworks, they were able to examine and describe the evolvement of Finnish state and local educational institutions and their transformation from centralised, norm-based and system-oriented governance into a decentralised, information-based and results-oriented form. In addition, they found that the distinction between interpretation/translation and implementation/enactment proved purposeful for understanding education policy development.

In Chap. 4, Sigríður Margrét Sigurðardóttir, Börkur Hansen, Anna Kristín Sigurðardóttir and Femke Geijsel write about educational governance in Iceland and the establishment and role of the national agency in education. They explore development in education policies in Iceland, especially changes in governance during the last 20 years and the establishment and role of the national agency. Furthermore, they look into who the main players in the field are and shed light on the major challenges that affect educational governance in Iceland. The recently established Directorate of Education is the only national agency in the country. Although rooted in the Nordic model of education, neo-liberal emphasises in policies, together with instability in educational governance, have ruffled the education system. For that purpose, the state level must take more responsibility to support the work of the local and school levels.

In Chap. 5, Kirsten Sivesind and Guri Skedsmo disentangle the organisational structures of national policies for basic education in Norway and examine how state boards and agencies fulfil their institutional responsibilities and roles within the education system. In the last two decades, state authorities have encouraged national reform programs to create innovation and change across policy realms and levels. They have also enacted changes by reorganising their own administrative apparatus at the national level. By investigating the current reorganisation of state agencies, the chapter also demonstrates how gap management is employed at the state level to enable or constrain the ways in which school reforms change policies and practices.

Chapter 6 describes Sweden's high policy ambitions with soft accountability. The structure and culture contribute to a well establish governing chain that has deficiencies that directly affect the local school. The chapter shows that there are three apparent system in place at the same time Old Public Management (OPM), New Public Management (NPM), and New Public Governance (NPG).

1.3.2 The Middle European Countries

In Chap. 7, Philip A. Woods, Amanda Roberts, Joy Jarvis and Suzanne Culshaw examine the school system in England, concentrating on developments since 2010. During this period, a radical refashioning of the school system in England has taken place as large numbers of schools have moved from being the responsibility of local

authorities to becoming ‘independent’, though still state-funded, academies operating within the framework of and accountable to national authorities. The chapter explores the claimed institutional and professional autonomy integral to the idea of a self-improving school-led system influential in the national policy driving this change.

Maie Kitsing and Hasso Kukemelk provide a clear overview in Chap. 8 of how Estonia started with the order-oriented school governance culture typical of the Soviet period and, after making difficult decisions, turned towards a modern inclusive and evidence-based governance education system. The state provided broad autonomy to schools and heads to make decisions regarding the content of the education they provide through the learning environment and administration system. The Lehrplan school approach was changed to a curriculum-based approach, and the teachers had to start selecting the learning material and content for themselves. School development was linked to institutional self-evaluation procedures and materials.

Municipalities as the owners of the schools are involved in school governance via different smart administrative bodies to achieve the targets of the national strategy, ‘Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020’.

In Chap. 9, Romuald Normand describes France, which has a tradition of centralised governance and has yet much resisted neo-liberal influences and travelling policies. The chapter examines how the French Ministry of Education is currently implementing reforms which, despite some oppositions and resistance, lead to a kind of French ‘third way’ inspired by New Public Management and accountability principles. This enacting policy reveals not only an implementation gap due to bureaucratic guidelines and the lack of local autonomy but also attempts from interest groups and professional bodies to buffer international influences according to their own values and ideologies. The emergence of national agencies in this new landscape is at stake, while the French Ministry of Education regularly meets challenges to reduce the implementation gap.

In Chap. 10, Stephan Gerhard Huber analyses the Federal Republic of Germany, which comprises 16 states, each having its own school system. The governing of each ‘state’ is organised according to a rather traditional bureaucratic governing model over three to four levels. In this chapter, the organisation of educational state agencies in Germany and their role and function as to quality management is analysed and critically discussed, and current developments and future trends are identified, among them professional development programs for school leaders and supervisors. The specific tasks related to improving failing schools and school turnaround are outlined.

The Scottish school system is described by Tom Hamilton in Chap. 11. The chapter outlines the politics of Scotland within the United Kingdom and how they affect education. A summary of the structure and organisation of the education system is given. International influences are considered and analysed, particularly in relation to policymaking by the Scottish government. Various theoretical frameworks are used for analysis, and the chapter concludes by considering the limitations of minority government on education.

1.3.3 The North American States – Canada and the US

In Chap. 12, Charles F. Webber and Jodi Nickel analyse the province of Alberta, Canada, which is regarded as having a strong education system that serves a highly diverse student population well. This report regarding Alberta's education system begins with a comparison of competing perspectives on the current condition of education and school improvement and then summarizes Murphy's (2013) framework for school improvement. After presenting the organisational framework in Alberta and the drivers that have shaped educational change in the province, the report applies Murphy's architectural framework to summarize the building materials, construction principles, supports and integrative dynamics in Alberta.

The report concludes with a summary of key strengths and challenges in Alberta's education system. Admittedly, the system still wrestles with meeting the needs of diverse learners and with contentious issues such as opposition to standardized testing and legislation on gay-straight alliances.

In Chap. 13, Brenton Faubert and Elan Paulsons describe and analyse the province's K-12 public education governance system in the province of Ontario, Canada. Using the concepts of centralisation, coordination and hard/soft power as a sense-making framework, the chapter describes the three-tiered formal authority structure as well as the constellation of school agencies that compose the wider education governance system. Conceived by the authors as an 'echo chamber', the centralisation that characterizes the province provides a structure for amplifying and reinforcing dominant narratives about educational goals, while other agencies contribute tenuous coordination efforts that nuance those narratives.

In Chap. 14, R. D. Nordgren describes an ambitious reform agenda of California, which is the most populous state in the U.S., a reform that has the potential to be a pivotal point in the nation's school accountability movement. For the past 30 years, the U.S. has been hyper-focused on standardized testing, and all major school reforms introduced since the 1980s have utilized test scores as the primary measure of success--or failure. Initiated in 2013 and foreshadowing a similar but less ambitious national reform, 'The California Way' attempts to de-emphasise testing as well as place more power and responsibility on local authorities, specifically school principals. A discussion of the political/ideological background for the reform attempts to underline the importance of its continuance and its potential impact on school reform across the U.S.

In Chap. 15, Nicola A. Alexander and Karen Seashore Louis describe and analyse Minnesota's school system. The U.S. national policy pendulum tends to swing between devoting more resources to one set of value preferences over the other. Three key tensions have repeatedly emerged in the policy landscape of the United States: (1) choosing between equity and efficiency, (2) varying reliance on centralised versus decentralised structures and (3) switching between 'civic' and market-driven policy levers. We choose to highlight Minnesota because it illustrates many of the policy tensions and contradictions apparent on the national landscape. These trends exist in the context of an increasingly diverse student body, stable or shrink-

ing school budgets and expanding demands on the purpose of schools. While systemic reform has been the mantra for many U.S. states, Minnesota legislators have tended to tinker around the edges and emphasise voluntary rather than mandated change.

Chapter 16 is called ‘Educational Authorities and the Schools: Conflict and Cooperation in South Carolina’ and is presented by Hans W. Klar, Kathryn Lee D’Andrea and Seth D. Young. They write that school leaders in the United States today are expected to implement an ever-increasing flow of policies enacted by education authorities at the federal, state and district levels. These policies are developed under the assumption that their implementation with fidelity will ameliorate the challenges policymakers perceive to exist in schools. Thus, in order to realise the benefits of education authorities’ influences on schools, it is necessary to better understand how this dilemma between policy and practice can be resolved. The purpose of this chapter is to describe and analyse the development and implementation of an education policy initiated by state-level education authorities in one U.S. state. We conclude the chapter with an example of a policy recently developed and implemented with more cooperation and offer recommendations for successful policy implementation in the future.

1.3.4 Commonwealth Countries

In Chap. 17, the Australian education system is described by David Gurr. The chapter describes the complexity of Australian school education, identifying dominant and peripheral institutions and major issues such as funding, government control of education, the influence of student testing programs, parental choice and school quality. The dominant institutions are the federal government and six state and two territory governments. The state and territory governments are responsible for government education, which accounts for two thirds of all students, whilst 32 dioceses govern a Catholic system that accounts for one fifth of all students. Matters such as funding clearly have a direct impact on schools, and state/territory governments and dioceses often mandate matters that will have a direct impact on schools. It is less clear how service organisations impact schools, but generally, their impact will be indirect.

‘Robust or Burst: Education Governance in Kenya after Promulgation of the 2010 Constitution’ is the title of Chap. 18, written by Lucy A. Wakiaga. She writes that Kenya’s education system is undergoing major reforms, especially regarding the curriculum and the human resource aspects. The reforms are aimed at fulfilling Kenya’s national and international goals of education, which are assumed to ultimately support the realisation of the nation’s development goals. The education governance structure is reflective of the devolved system of government, even though education is a preserve of the national government rather than a shared responsibility with the county government. This chapter examines Kenya’s education governance structure using the top-down and bottom-up perspectives.

Cathy Wylie writes in Chap. 19 about New Zealand, which has a very decentralised system of self-managed schools. Each of the 2431 state schools is governed by parent-elected boards of trustees, who employ the principal. Boards are legally responsible for the school's smooth running and are accountable to the government through annual reporting. The national curriculum provides a framework which is not prescriptive. The Ministry of Education is responsible for policy and funding at the national level and has 10 regional offices to support policy rollout and schools. Included in this chapter are accounts of the three key national policies, as well as the factors that helped or hindered their realisation in schools.

Chapter 20 is on South African education authorities. During the apartheid era in South Africa, education was organised along racial lines. The apartheid policy of separate development partitioned the country into racial lines where each population group and homeland designed specifically for blacks had their own departments of education, 18 such departments that centrally governed public schools. All decisions regarding school education were taken by the respective departments of education, and schools had no authority to take decisions. After the dismantling of the apartheid regime in 1994, the democratic government devolved education to local communities. The education challenge in South Africa is demonstrated by the fact that education is seen as a priority at all levels of government. This chapter focuses on how South African education authorities have introduced far-reaching policies to improve the standards of school education.

In Chap. 21, David Wei-Loong Hung describes Singapore's education system as a centralised–decentralised model. The chapter covers the historical development of Singapore's education system and the introduction of major policies and initiatives. It then discusses the future of Singapore's education, which must be guided by what we frame as 'purposeful learning'. Unfortunately, it appears difficult to leave behind some of the institutional features and cultural attitudes that made the successes of earlier phases possible. In our model, we hypothesise that the middle or 'meso' layers of each level of the system are the highest points of leverage to sustain ultimate change throughout the whole system. Nevertheless, major system change over time is not a matter of simple multiplication. Our Scaling Change through Apprenticing and Ecological Leadership (SCAEL) model shows it has to be an iterative process that encourages organic changes with respect to local conditions.

In Chap. 22 Olof Johansson and Helene Ärlestig makes comparative analysis of central aspects in each of the four groups; the Nordic countries, the middle European countries, the north America; US and Canada and finally the Commonwealth countries. In the chapter similarities and differences are highlighted and commented on as well as the used theoretical models.

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