Chapter 10
Multilevel Governance

Jan Merok Paulsen, Mona Strand, Elisabet Nihlfors, Ulf Brinkkjær, Pekka Kanervio, and Seppo Pulkkinen

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

J.M. Paulsen (✉)
Faculty of Teacher Education and International Studies, Oslo and Akershus University
College of Applied Sciences, Pilestredet 46, 0130 Oslo, Norway
e-mail: Jan-Merok.Paulsen@hioa.no

M. Strand
Department of Business Administration, Hedmark University College,
Telthusvegen 12, N-2450 Rena, Norway
e-mail: mona.strand@hihm.no

E. Nihlfors
Department of Education, Uppsala University, S-750 02 Uppsala, Sweden
e-mail: elisabet.nihlfors@edu.uu.se

U. Brinkkjær
Department of Education, Aarhus University, Tuborgvej 164,
2400 Copenhagen NV, Denmark
e-mail: ulf@dpu.dk

P. Kanervio
Institute of Educational Leadership, University of Jyväskylä,
P.O. Box 35, Building Agora D310, 40014 Jyväskylä, Finland
e-mail: pekka.kanervio@jyu.fi

S. Pulkkinen
Institute of Educational Leadership, University of Jyväskylä,
Samulinranta 27, 40520 Jyväskylä, Finland
e-mail: seppo.pulkkinen@jyu.fi

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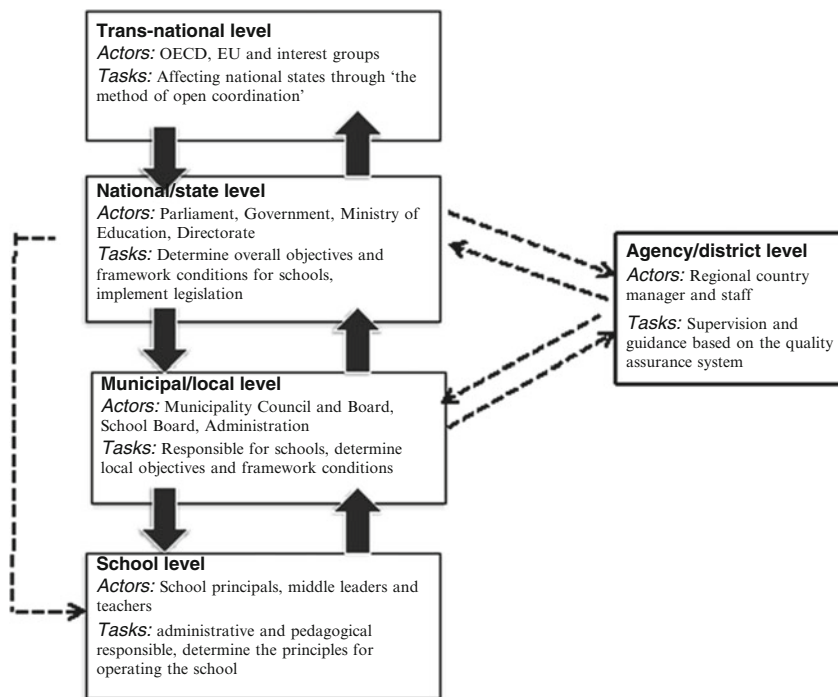
Fig. 10.1 Key actors in the multilevel system model (Source: Nihlfors et al. 2013)

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 ill 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.

---

[1] The 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 Lægreid 2001). Despite its status as "super-power" 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 market-place competiveness (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.

References

Aasen, P., Møller, J., Rye, E., Ottesen, E., Prøitz, T. S., & Hertzberg, F. (2012). *Kunnskapsløftet som styringsreform – et løft eller et løfte? Forvaltningsnivåenes og institusjonenes rolle i implementeringen av reformen* [The Knowledge Promotion as governance reform – A promotion or a promise? The role of the civil services and the institutions in the implementation of the reform]. Oslo: NIFU-STEP.

Bache, I., & Flinders, M. V. (2004). *Multi-level governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baldersheim, H., & Ståhlberg, K. (1994). From top-down to bottom-up: Free communes and the politics of administrative modernization. In H. Baldersheim & K. Ståhlberg (Eds.), *Towards the self-regulating municipality. Free communes and administrative modernization in Scandinavia*. Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Company.

Christensen, T., & Lægreid, P. (2001). A transformative perspective on administrative reforms. In T. Christensen & P. Lægreid (Eds.), *New public management: The transformation of ideas and practice*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Christensen, T., Lægreid, P., & Wise, L. (2000). *Active administrative policy: Presumptions and practice. The case of Norway, Sweden and the USA*. IPSA World Congress, Quebec, Canada.

Christoffersen, H., & Klausen, K. K. (2012). *Den danske kommunekonstruktion. Kommunedannelsen med og efter strukturreformen: professionalisering, organisering og performance* [The Danish municipality construction. Municipal structure in and after the structural reform: Professionalization, organizing and performance]. Aarhus: Syddansk Universitetsforlag.

Datnow, A. (2002). Can we transplant educational reform, and does it last? *Journal of Educational Change, 3*, 215–239.

Ekholm, M. (2012). Many cooks will not spoil the broth: Educational policy in Sweden. In K. S. Louis & B. Van Velzen (Eds.), *Educational policy in international contexts. Political cultures and its effects*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Engeland, Ø. (2000). *Skolen i kommunalt eie – politisk styrt eller profesjonell ledet skoleutvikling* [The municipal ownership of schools – Politically governed or professionally lead school development]. Oslo: University of Oslo.

Engeland, Ø., & Langfeldt, G. (2009). Forholdet mellom stat og kommune i styring av norsk utdanningspolitikk 1970–2008 [The relation between state and municipality in governing Norwegian educational policy 1970–2008]. *Acta Didactica Norge, 3*(1), 1–16.

Guzzo, R. A., Yost, P. R., Campbell, R. J., & Shea, G. P. (1993). Potency in groups: Articulating a construct. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 32*, 87–106.

Hagen, T. P., & Sørensen, R. S. (2006). *Kommunal organisering* [Municipal organizing]. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Helgøy, I., & Aars, J. (2008). *Flernivåstyring og demokrati* [Multi-level governing and democracy]. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Homme, A. D. (2008). *Den kommunale skolen. Det lokale skolefeltet i historisk perspektiv* [The municipal school. The local school field analyzed from a historical perspective]. Doctoral dissertation, University of Bergen, Bergen.

Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2010). Types of multi-level governance. In H. Enderlein, S. Wälti, & M. Zürn (Eds.), *Handbook on multi-level governance*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Jenkins, B. (1997). Policy analysis: Models and approaches. In M. Hill (Ed.), *The policy process. A reader*. Essex: Pearson Education.

Johansson, O., Holmgren, M., Nihlfors, E., Moos, L., Skedsmo, G., Paulsen, J. M., & Risku, M. (2013). Local Decisions under Central Watch – A new Nordic quality assurance system. In L. Moos (Ed.), *Transnational influences on values and practices in Nordic educational leadership – Is there a Nordic model?* Dordrecht: Springer.

Larsen, H. O., & Offerdal, A. (2000). Political implications of the new Norwegian Local Government Act of 1992. In E. Amnå & S. Montin (Eds.), *Towards a new concept of local self-government*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Louis, K. S., & Van Velzen, B. (2012). *Educational policy in international contexts. Political cultures and its effects*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Lukes, S. (1997). Three distinctive views of power compared. In M. Hill (Ed.), *The policy process. A reader*. Essex: Pearson Education.

Lundgren, U. P. (1990). Educational policymaking, decentralisation and evaluation. In M. Granheim, M. Kogan, & U. P. Lundgren (Eds.), *Evaluation as policymaking: Introducing evaluation into a national decentralised educational system*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Mc Beath, J. (2013). Foreword. In L. Moos (Ed.), *Transnational influences on values and practices in Nordic educational leadership – Is there a Nordic model?* Dordrecht: Springer.

Meyer, H.-D., & Benavot, A. (2013). PISA and the globalization: Some puzzles and problems. In H.-D. Meyer & A. Benavot (Eds.), *PISA, power and policy. The emergence of global educational governance*. Oxford: Symposium Books.

Moos, L. (2006). What kinds of democracy in education are facilitated by supra- and transnational agencies? *European Educational Research Journal, 5*(3 & 4), 160–168.

Moos, L. (2013). Prelude- tuning the instrument. In L. Moos (Ed.), *Transnational influences on values and practices in Nordic educational leadership – Is there a Nordic model?* Dordrecht: Springer.

Moos, L., & Kofod, K. (2012). Denmark: Bildung in a competitive state? In K. S. Louis & B. Van Velzen (Eds.), *Educational policy in international contexts. Political cultures and its effects*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Nihlfors, E., & Johansson, O. (2013). *Rektor – en stark länk i styrningen av skolan* [The school principal – A strong linkage in school governing]. Stockholm: SNS Förlag.

Nihlfors, E., Johansson, O., Moos, L., Paulsen, J. M., & Risku, M. (2013). The Nordic superintendents' leadership roles: cross national comparison. In L. Moos (Ed.), *Transnational influences on values and practices in Nordic educational leadership – Is there a Nordic model?* (pp. 193–212). Dordrecht: Springer.

Olsen, J. P., & Peters, B. G. (1996). Norway, slow learner or another triumph of the tortoise? In J. P. Olsen & B. G. Peters (Eds.), *Lessons from experience: Experiential learning in administrative reforms in eight democracies*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

Pedersen, O. K. (2010). *Konkurrencestaten* [The competitive state]. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Røvik, K. A. (2007). *Trender og translasjoner. Ideer som former det 21. århundrets organisasjon* [Trends and translations. Ideas that form the organization of the 21st century]. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Sahlberg, P. (2011). The fourth way of Finland. *Journal of Education Change, 12*, 173–185.

Skedsmo, G. (2009). *School governing in transition? Perspectives, purposes and perceptions of evaluation policy*. PhD thesis, Department of Teacher Education and School Development, Faculty of Education, University of Oslo, Oslo.

The Royal Ministry of Education and Research. (2006). *The knowledge promotion*. National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education and Training, Oslo. http://www.udir.no/Stottemeny/English/Curriculum-in-English/

Weick, K. E. (1976). Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 21*, 1–19.