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Nordic Superintendents: Agents in a Broken Chain

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Foreword

Janus and the Superintendents

Having served as the superintendent of the inner London's secondary schools in the late 1980s, I understand how important, and yet also how challenging, the role can be. The superintendent has to be aware of the priorities of national politicians, provide professional advice to local ones and then communicate their adopted policies to the schools' leaders and teachers. It clearly helps if they possess a deep understanding of the purposes of education. Superintendents also have to draw on many competences to make the local system work effectively for students, their families and the wider community. Like the Roman god Janus, the superintendent has to face simultaneously in two directions—towards elected politicians and towards those who are in schools either to learn or to teach.

Moreover, as this book makes clear, the role is especially challenging at a time when former certainties, resting on established hierarchies and mutually accepted conventions, no longer apply and new approaches, based on the more aggressive world of new public management (able to bypass regular channels) together with the dominance of the market, are all jostling for power and control.

As a researcher who, for many years, worked at the interface between education theory and schools' daily practice, I welcome the approach used in this book. Relating the perspectives of superintendents from the different Nordic countries to a range of theories—educational, organisational and economic (e.g. transaction cost theory)—helps make sense of the dilemmas all of us involved with education today face. The book also enables the often-ignored distinctions between the different Nordic countries to be identified and the genuinely common features to be noted.

Another important feature of this book is the authors' interest in communication and their determination to explore the possible meanings implied in the phrases adopted by both intergovernmental and governmental agencies. They note the increasing tendency to apply the language of the business world to the matter of schooling.

As an admirer of the strengths of the various Nordic systems of education, as well as a critic of their weaknesses, I welcome the analyses and the insights generated by this book. Although clear answers to important questions cannot always be found, the framing of better questions helps to take our understanding to new levels. Where conclusions are clear, I hope the book's readers will heed the warnings these knowledgeable authors dispense.

Globalisation, surely, should be about diversity rather than conformity or compliance. Yet, in the non-Nordic systems most affected by global trends noted by the book's contributors, we see too many instances of powers wrested from local authorities by central operators who relish top-down 'diktat' and who—in the absence of trust—seek to transform classroom practitioners into compliant technician-teachers safely delivering teacher-proof courses. Too often in these countries, we also see the analyses of detailed information about educational methods and organisation, generated by organisations such as the OECD, neglected and surveys used principally to create league tables of countries and regions.

Will the next step in the process of globalisation be the transfer of powers over a nation's education system from governments to transnational corporations? The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the USA and Europe illustrates the type of powers being sought by the multinationals: powers that will exceed those of many national governments and which can be used in secret negotiations to generate greater profit.

The education systems of the Nordic countries—with their traditional commitment to Bildung, their conscious preparation of students for life in a democracy and their constant strivings for equality—have much to teach the rest of the world. Superintendents have been key players in fashioning these attributes. This important book demonstrates that their role needs to be re-energised and the holders of these important posts need to be encouraged to develop further their competences. In this way, people who understand the complexities of schooling can help the evolution of new systems better adapted to our modern world but built upon the sound achievements of the past.

Richmond, England, UK   Peter Mortimore

Emptying Local Education Governance of Education

Since the 1950s, the Nordic systems of welfare and education have rested on similar ideas and have been governed by a similar kind of active, redistributive welfare state (cf. Esping Andersen 1996; Telhaug et al. 2004). Their education policies simultaneously have aimed at social equality, social cohesion and, which is sometimes forgotten, promotion of economic growth. Prevailing egalitarian and inclusive aspects—e.g. free education from compulsory to higher level, late division of students on different tracks, high degree of integration of special needs students in 'ordinary' classes and low variation of results between schools—have made

researchers conclude that it is still justified to speak of the five Nordic countries as a distinct group. Nonetheless substantial reformulations and restrictions of their social-inclusive policies during have taken place in a period of neoliberal initiatives, meaning that the economy gets more weight (Antikainen 2010; Arnesen and Lundahl 2006). In parallel, the steering of schools has undergone profound changes in all the Nordic countries since the 1980s and 1990s in most respects: the actors and levels involved, their mutual relationships, the steering mechanisms used and not least the changed functions and expressions of state governing itself, as reflected in the concept *the competition state* (Ball 2009; Pedersen 2011). The welfare and education systems in all the Nordic countries have thus been affected by ideas of public choice and new public management—Finland the least, Sweden the most and the other Nordic countries situated in between.

Today school actors—politicians, superintendents, school leaders and teachers—increasingly have to relate to two major sets of conflicting or hardly compatible values and related rules, the values of the egalitarian and inclusive school on the one hand and the competitive, excellently performing school on the other. But rather than treating this and other conflicts and dilemmas as political, educational governance tends to use seemingly apolitical or neutral instruments and technologies such as standardised indicators and assessments, inspections, international comparisons and market competition where the 'best' are assumed to win and 'the worst and weakest' will disappear (Lundahl et al. 2013).

It is highly interesting to analyse and compare various aspects of the education systems in the Nordic countries because of their apparent similarities *and* notable differences, not least with regard to how they have encountered and incorporated neoliberal ideas of education governance. The complex and tension-filled combinations of social-egalitarian and performativity-oriented education policies in the Nordic region have been analysed by a host of researchers, most of them however addressing single countries and rarely applying a Nordic perspective. For example, when I and Anne-Lise Arnesen in 2005–2006 wanted to conduct an overview and analysis of Nordic education policies in terms of their socially inclusive components, we mostly had to refer to single nation studies from the five countries with different foci and empirical data that were not directly comparable (Arnesen and Lundahl 2006). Since then the situation has improved (e.g. see Blossing et al. 2014), but still there are very few attempts to *systematically* analyse the contemporary educational systems and policies of the Nordic countries using a common theoretical framework, common research problems and similar datasets.

Having such a design, this book makes a substantial and much welcome contribution to the field of comparative studies of education in general and the field(s) of governance and school leadership research in particular. It is of considerable interest not only to readers in the Nordic countries but also to a far wider international audience. Based on extensive surveys in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, the authors set out to analyse the chain of local education governance—politically elected school boards, superintendents and school leaders, situating the school superintendent in the midst of it. Four country-specific chapters on how the local governance chain is constructed and related to global and national forces, the divi-

sion of responsibilities and the work of the superintendents, are followed by rich thematic cross-country analyses in five chapters. Here the conversation between the empirical material and the theoretical framework, in particular consisting of neo-institutional theory, network theory and governance theory, turns out to be highly fruitful.

One of many important conclusions of the book concerns the emptying of local democratic governing and influence that has taken place in most of the studied countries (Finland being the notable exception) when the local political level is bypassed in various ways and local school boards and superintendents primarily are concerned with resource management rather than educational goals and school development. The municipal level tends to develop into *a noneducational system* (Chap. 6). And when the context of superintendents' work is changed to emphasising *effectiveness and cost-efficiency in service production*, the role of the superintendent is transformed accordingly (Chap. 6). The analysis of legitimation and sense-making—a neo-institutional concept that has a central place in the analysis—of such changes in the chain of governance is one of the major contributions of the book.

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Globalisation or Not: We Are Travellers in the Same Leaking Boat

Not so long ago, in fact 18 years ago, I wrote my doctoral thesis in Stockholm University, Sweden. It was called *Structural Violence as a Constraint to African Policy Formation in the 1990s*: *Repositioning Education in International Relations*. In that meta-analysis, I followed various global imperatives, which make global relations impact on national level policy spaces and policy formation in Africa and how, together, they combine to form a very toxic combination in African policy-making. It argued that as the International Financial Institutions tighten their grip through the Structural Adjustment Programmes over African countries, and donors steadily shift their ground and push conditionality beyond economic policy into institutional arrangements in the 1990s, the issue of political sovereignty of African countries and of indirect rule through aid becomes a key concern.

Reading this fantastic book on Nordic superintendents, I could not help but draw a delicate thread through what I saw then almost 20 years ago and what the Nordic cousins have come up with in this book. The policy domain, whether it be at the level of superintendents or a board running a school, or even the municipal council, plays a very important role. Policymaking defines the functions of the state, and the policy arena is one in which state policies are objectified and elaborated. Precisely because the policy arena is one in which values, ideologies and principles are given concrete expression, it is also this space that researchers need to be aware that it is a hegemonic space (Odora Hoppers 1998). The moment this space is taken for granted, national autonomy is at stake also. Critical skills needed at the level of policymaking and its effects on implementation do not lie in 'knowing the right answers, but asking the right questions' (Christensen 2009). The right questions give rise to salient and insightful answers.

In our increasingly interdependent world, it is now understood that it is a matter of military, economic, social and environmental survival that we understand better—not what makes others tick, but how others, be they Japanese, Hungarian, South African, or Chilean, attempt to solve the same kinds of educational problem that is faced in our part of the world as George Z.F. Bereday wrote in 1964: 'Education is a mirror held against the face of a people. Nations may put on blustering shows of strength to conceal public weaknesses, erect grand facades to conceal shabby backyards, and profess peace while secretly arming for conquest, but how they take care of their children tell unerringly who they are' (Beauchamp 2002 in the Series Preface to Daun 2002, citing Bereday 1964).

I agree that the neoliberal approaches with their strategic shift of education from a public good to a private one and with combined policies aiming at decentralisation and marketisation targeted the Nordic model without a doubt. Other may disagree academically. Let them be. But the fact is that so many held values bring us to the womb of the Scandinavian model with its democracy with a solid popular base, good governance, and deep consensual corporatist governance, combining both collectivism and individualism with activist, participatory and egalitarian characteristics

(Amnå, 2007), and the introduction of the neoliberal approach put the Scandinavian model *under threat*!

So the authors of this book have delved into the middle belt of the Nordic school system with research finesse and unearthed that transnational influences and national policies go through a transformative model when they meet the implementation level at local school districts. I agree that it is very important to gain a better understanding of the institutional context and the historical and societal background in and against which educational governance and leadership is situated, since thinking and practices, as well as individual and community social capital, 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. Policy transfer is not a passive process. It is mediated, shaped and given form by local policymakers, so the travelling reform undergoes many modifications depending on the political situation. As the authors state, the regulative pillar, the normative pillar and the cultural-cognitive pillar all play a role! I hope that in the foreseeable future, the Nordic countries align these pillars and gain the trust of the world once more.

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What Ever Happened in the Far North?

What is happening to Nordic countries? What is happening to the mythic qualities of 'Nordic-ness'? What has become of relatively strong states, relatively strong local authorities, comprehensive education and collaborative leadership since, according to Hofstede, these northern countries enjoy the smallest 'power distance' between those highest and lowest in the social hierarchy?

What has been the impact of global policy, differing in effect across four Nordic countries which are, nonetheless, joined by deeply embedded social and cultural values? What has been the impact on school leaders, teachers and young people? Benign or malign? Empowering or undermining? Growth promoting or disenfranchising?

The authors of this compelling volume have lived the history of change and the tightening grip of a performativity culture. Historically, a signal strength of Nordic schools has been lateral support and collegiality. It has defined itself by a common sense of purpose. The advent of New Public Management, it is argued through these texts, has effected a fundamental reorientation towards a vertical relationship, a reordering of power relations and, perhaps most significantly, a progressive undermining of social and professional trust. As Richard Elmore has argued elsewhere, professional development which focuses on the individual is unlikely to lead to much change in practice. By contrast, collective learning is a more potent force in bringing about desired change. The challenges for the Nordic system, as elsewhere in this brave new world, lie in helping to shape the environment in which professional learning and accountability are connected to a shared sense of essential values. '*Hier stehen Wir. Wir können nicht Anders.*'

While individual autonomy in the classroom has been a potential weakness in Nordic schools, the policy response might more profitably have been directed to promoting a stronger sense of lateral accountability and collegiality. 'One becomes human only in the midst of others,' wrote Asante (1998, p. 200), or as a teacher once remarked during an international workshop, 'the shortest route towards our own selves takes the long way round—through others'.

As we are reminded throughout this book, decentralisation of the educational system, while holding on to the reins of power, changes the balance between professional and political influence at all levels. Devolution of responsibility to principals and teachers has to be repaid in meeting prescribed targets. So the handmaid of decentralisation is a powerful re-centralisation of curricula and assessment, leaving schools the relatively thankless task of managing finances, human resources and day-to-day administration. As Lundgren counsels, evaluation becomes an important instrument for governing, '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' (Lundgren 2007).

In this 'mix mode' of regulation, the present governance model appears to be a joint regulatory enterprise between the state, through a range of 'soft' steering instruments and quality control, and in the municipality sector, through direct ownership and decentralised decision making power. 'Educational policy is increasingly moving toward a governance space developed by experts and agents and depoliticized through standards and data' wrote Nihlfors and colleagues in Chap. 9.

As one of the numerous strands running through these chapters, we are returned repeatedly to the nature of the discourse, an insidious reframing of the meanings carried by words. As Alice in Wonderland was informed by Humpty Dumpty, 'words can mean whatever you choose them to mean'. It is a lesson that governments virtually everywhere have taken to heart. After all, who could argue against

'quality'? Indeed who could argue against responsibility, accountability, standards, choice and performance? Is it not a wish for all our children that they perform well? That teachers too perform well, striving for excellence with a commitment to high standards? How could it be otherwise?

Yet we are divided by what appears to be a common language. This is a book written by Nordic academics, speaking four different languages but adopting what Lejf Moos has described as 'cultural isomorphs'—theories or concepts that look alike but conceal widely differing cultural reference points. The surface features of centralised systems attempt to conceal the ideological systems, which lie below the waterline. The much vaunted value of 'transparency' refers specifically to the deceptively commonsensical features of rational management and professional responsibility. Is this not the 'business' of schooling after all? 'Changes in the Nordic countries are in many aspects a mirror of changes in the global arena, such as changes in response to the world economy, the Bologna process and increasing international comparison of results in different subjects in relation to school success'(Johanson and colleagues, Chap. 5).

Our attention is also drawn to the inherent tensions. These play out in the interface of government and municipal authorities. They centre around the latitude for political and professional responsibility. They then play out at school level as responsibility assumes new hierarchical definitions and 'authority' is recast and reinforced. How, in this emergent dystopia, is the authority of the teacher and the authority of the student to be understood? What have we been persuaded to adopt as a definition of 'accountability'? Where now does the balance lie between accountability to one's students and accountability to one's political masters? As Nihlfors and colleagues argue (in Chap. 8), while school leaders, superintendents and school board members are actors on different levels, they share, or ought to share, a common interest in enhancing pupils' learning. Yet this is a vain hope without an environment which makes the connections between individual engagement and joint competence, in which good sense trumps common sense. As Peters has written, 'Social contract disappears in favour of a disaggregated and individualized relationship to governance' (in MacBeath and Moos 2003).

These are the challenges that face the superintendency and they are at the very heart of this book. Yet, as Glass (2000) cautions against easy generalisation, 'In fact, there is no such thing as the superintendency; instead, there are many superintendencies. Often they are more unlike, than like, each other'. As it is argued, we have to understand the nature of leadership tasks and behaviour of superintendents as deeply embedded in context—geographic, political, demographic, organisational, cultural and psychological. 'Successful superintendents exhibit context responsive leadership in which they are actors who continually navigate and interact with uncertain and challenging situations of practice.'

As a critical mediating influence, how do superintendents create and recreate their role? How do they, and how ought they to, position themselves within a highly

politicised administrative system? How do they support progressive pedagogy and professional autonomy? These are the themes confronted, explored and perhaps not entirely resolved, within this engaging volume.

Cambridge, England, UK   John MacBeath

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Chapter 1
Directions for Our Investigation of the Chain of Governance and the Agents

Lejf Moos, Elisabet Nihlfors, and Jan Merok Paulsen

Abstract School superintendents are at the heart of the governance of municipal education, whether this is seen as a chain or networks of governance. Because educational governance and structures in the Nordic countries are currently undergoing much restructuring and reconceptualisation at the hands of national governments influenced by transnational agencies, the research project presented here investigates the functions and relations of school superintendents in four Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. In our presentations of the project's surveys of superintendents, school boards and school leaders, we use a number of overarching theories – theories of comparison, of new institutionalism and networks, and of translation, power and social technologies. We investigate our subject from two perspectives. One is the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish country reports, written within a shared frame so as to give national images of superintendents; the other is the cross-cutting, thematic Nordic and international investigations and discussions. We begin this opening chapter with an account of our starting point, our interests and our methods, and an introduction to the theories examined; we end it with a discussion of our work in a comparative perspective and a further discussion of some of the themes chosen for the thematic chapters.

Keywords Nordic • Superintendent • Investigation • Governance • Comparison • Bypass

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1   Our Perspective

Almost all basic schools in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden are public. Thus the school superintendents are civil servants and the school boards are politically elected.

Since the Second World War, authority in the Nordic educational systems has been envisaged and structured as a straight line from one level, elected politicians and appointed practitioners/administrators, to the other levels: from parliament and government, through the municipal council and administration, to school board and school leaders. This formal structure was always accompanied by informal lines and activities, even in periods when the state was seen as monocentric. But ultimately there was only one centre of authority, one parliament that governed the state.

With the emergence of globalisation in the 1970s, the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish states and societies grew more complex and evolved a somewhat polycentric structure. This process is often described as a movement from a welfare state towards a competitive state (Pedersen 2011). Much authority and power was dispersed to a plurality of centres and networks that took part in governance of the state and its institutions (OECD 1995; Pedersen 2005). The image of one straight line was gradually transformed into multiple new models such as networks with nodes and many-faceted relations between politicians, administrators, production life-agents and citizens, although some traditional bureaucratic agencies and positions were retained in new, informal combinations and with changed responsibilities and powers. One sign of that is that the superintendents in our surveys gave between 16 and 30 different job titles for their positions.

The straight chain of governance is still a powerful image and model, but that chain is often broken. Agents such as superintendents thus face new challenges and opportunities in their endeavour to act as active agents in practice. The question that follows was the core of our investigation:

> How do Nordic superintendents, political boards and school leaders see the function and the structure, the challenges and opportunities, at this middle municipal level, in times when the political and practical context and culture is undergoing change and being shaped by transnational inspiration and national and local interpretations.

2   Our Point of Departure: Transnational Influences and Local Interpretations

We know from the research literature on state education policy in our countries that the influence of transnational agencies, particularly of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), is very visible over the last 20 years. We therefore wanted to investigate 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 particularly influential: *Governance in Transition*: *Public Management Reforms in OECD Countries* (OECD 1995). This was produced in accordance with a well-known OECD 'soft governance' strategy, the 'peer learning' method, by which member countries report trends in their public management to the organisation, where the complex picture is clarified and simplified, and 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
4. Providing responsive service
5. Improving the management of human resources
6. Optimising information technology
7. Improving the quality of regulation
8. Strengthening steering functions at the centre
9. Implementing reform
10. What next

These themes were presented not as regulations or orders, but as recommendations from the OECD to member countries: national ministries could take, transform or leave them (Moos 2009a). The language of the themes is however extremely clear and informative and reveals the OECD neoliberal political preference (Moos and Paulsen 2014).

The recommendations encountered country cultures, systems, traditions and politics, and were thereby transformed into new shapes and forms. The New Public Management approach had already been born, but with this report it was baptised, blessed and registered as a child of the OECD. Since then it has been adopted and transformed into many different incarnations (Hood 1991).

The Nordic countries are in a special situation, having for hundreds of years been regarded as a highly unified culture. This is so often repeated that the notion of 'Nordicness' 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 actual politics and practice in the Nordic countries to see if this is actually the case, or if parliaments, ministries and practitioners at many levels have evolved national and local forms and methods of public governance.

2.1   Autonomy

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

Decision % made at the local/school level

in 1998 and 2007, EAG 2008

■ 1998 ■ 2007
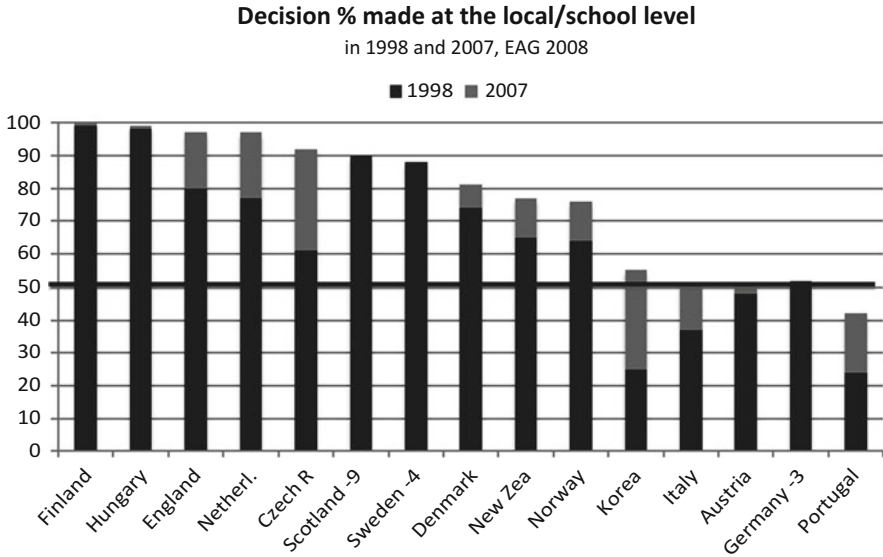
Fig. 1.1 EAG 2009, OECD Autonomy

outcomes in various different ways (Moos 2013d). The OECD has illustrated the diversity in the 'Education at a Glance 2008' (EAG) (OECD 2008) that gives their image of the level on which decisions are made. The black part of the columns indicates the levels in 1998 and the grey part the levels in 2007. Most countries have increased, however Scotland, Sweden and Germany have decreased the level of local level decision making (indicated in the country names) (Fig. 1.1):

This graph was constructed on the basis of a number of decision-making categories:

- *Organisation of instruction*: student admission, time, textbooks, student-groupings, support, teaching methods
- *Personnel management*: hiring and firing of staff, career, salary scales
- *Planning and structure*: opening hours, study programmes, subjects taught, examination
- *Resources*: for staff, operating expenditures (OECD 2008)

The graph illuminates a number of transnational governance features: As neither the OECD nor the European Commission are empowered to govern through legislation or regulation in the field of education, both agencies have to make use of soft governance tools: in the OECD, peer pressure, and in the Commission, the 'open method of coordination.' The situation is clearly described in the working paper endorsed by the director of the OECD's Directorate for Education and Skills, which expresses the situation for both agencies: '*Since the EU does not have any regulatory power in this sector, it is an extreme case of a decentralized political structure.*' (Wilkoszewski and Sundby 2014)

One of the tools is comparison. When the OECD produces an image of this kind, member states are encouraged to reflect on their own position: is the degree of decentralisation in our system sufficient, below or above the average? In this case they are encouraged to look at the 'autonomy' of their institutions. In framing the matter with a positively laden term like autonomy – which everybody likes – the agency is trying to influence thinking, and maybe even have us forget what is meant by autonomy in this particular case. The categories in this overview are of course constructed from within the education discourse of the OECD – management by objectives – and therefore the purposes and aims of education are not up for discussion but are without discussion a matter for the state. 'Steering from the centre' is, not surprisingly, the title of the working paper.

Reading the graph, one needs to bear in mind that the figures on which it is based are 7–8 years old (the circles) and in some cases (the columns) as much as 18 years old, and that much may have changed since the data was collected. Anyhow the graph shows big differences in governance, from 100 % decentralised decision-making in Finland to 22 % in Greece. We also see that the most decentralised systems are the Northern European countries (Finland, Scotland, Hungary, Sweden, England, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway), while the southern parts are the most centralised (Greece, Portugal, Italy, Spain) and some of the Central European countries are in the middle.

These differences are important for our survey of superintendents, as the degree of decentralisation has pivotal consequences at all levels. If most decisions are made either above or below the municipal level, the conditions for the superintendents' work will be so different that comparisons will not be realistic.

We know too little about the processes through which these sources of local autonomy are put into practice by school boards and superintendents. Moreover, it is evident that the nature of local policymaking in the school boards and administrations is also heavily affected by the local cultural and societal context within which the school boards are situated. We have therefore been strongly motivated to explore in some depth this interplay between context and policymaking at the local level. As local democracy is a core component in the national systems addressed in the study, a second objective has therefore been to explore whether local discourses as expressed by school boards differ from national policies and transnational influences (Moos 2013c).

2.2 Transnational Influences and Restructuring

When we look at the transnational sources of influence, it is clear that a number of well-known and mostly economic theories can help us to understand and explain the OECD's influence, and the national impact where this has encountered diverse perspectives, cultures and politics. The New Public Management approach is in many ways neoliberal, as its very core is to adjust public sectors to a new international understanding of the roles and functions of the state in governing institutions and

sectors in the public sphere. In many countries, public government has always been treated as a *political* set of relations, based on elections and with state power divided into legislative, judiciary and executive powers. Decisions in the legislative sector were based on political judgements and interests. However, in the past 40 years more countries have entered the global competition and thus the global marketplace, in which decisions are based on marketplace logics: profit, competition, consumers' free choice, etc. (Pedersen 2011). Economic theories such as principal-agent theory, scientific management theory, transaction-cost theory, and rational choice theory are clearly recognisable in the political arguments, in the New Public Management rhetoric, and in the OECD report.

Our argument can be summarised like this: First: the traditional Nordic welfare-state discourse describes a participatory democracy and comprehensive schooling with strong local community roots. Second: we assume that this policy culture is contested by transnational demands for accountability, standardisation and enhanced indirect steering from the state level (Blossing et al. 2013). Third, it is evident that transnational influences and national policies encounter a transformative model when they meet the level of implementation in the local school districts. However, the shapes and forms of the various transformation processes, and the impacts on school leaders, teachers and students, have been under-investigated. Fourth, the members of school boards are elected and represent political parties.

Education and its governance are part of the general public sector, and thus subject to general change and restructuring. Local municipalities that are too small are merged with other small municipalities for greater effectiveness and increased efficiency. The argument is of course economic. This is what has occurred in some Nordic countries, but in others the argument for local culture has prevailed over the economic argument. In some places we see intermediate levels of governance: agencies and authorities have been restructured and even closed down. The level of the municipality, by tradition the school-district level in all Nordic countries for primary and lower secondary education, has in some cases been bypassed, so that the traditional chain of governance is bypassed by the state and moves directly to schools (Moos 2013b).

Within municipal administration we can also see various kinds of restructuring, which can mean having fewer but larger and more powerful political committees or boards, as well as a greater distance between politicians and institutions. Some of these restructuring changes bring new responsibilities to the political board, and some take away traditional ones. In both cases, board members now face new tasks and responsibilities. Thus the structures and functions of school boards have changed in the Nordic systems, but not all in the same way. In some cases, new models imported from business life have been implemented in the public sector, as in Denmark (Pedersen 2005). Here the municipal board can be named the 'concern,' the management of a number of schools is named 'company,' and the internal management of a school site is the 'workplace.'

2.3 Comparison

An investigation such as this one embarks upon *comparisons* between the Nordic educational systems. Comparisons are employed as tools for research on policy and education, and also by policymakers themselves (Steiner-Khamsi 2010). Comparative researchers use comparisons to sharpen their optique in order to get a clearer picture of practices and politics; policymakers refer to them when setting policy agendas based on international evidence, best practice or international standards.

It is thus very important to gain a better understanding both of the institutional context (Leithwood and Riehl 2003) and of the historical and societal background against which educational governance and leadership is situated, since thinking and practices, as well as individual and community social capital (Bourdieu 1977), are formed by the society, culture and context of which they are a part. They are shaped not only by policies, discourses and literature, but also by national and local values, traditions, structures and practices.

International comparisons act as mirrors – just like educational outcomes or best practice – so that policymakers can reflect on the level of educational outcomes in their own systems and decide on their own reforms. We are increasingly seeing policymakers argue the necessity to meet 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 policymakers, so that the travelling reform undergoes many modifications dependent 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 ultimately absurd:

> Without contextual comparison it is impossible to understand the political and economic reasons why travelling 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 policymakers 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, like viruses, is changed or mutated in the interactions with local culture and values (Moos 2013a).

3 The Investigation

On the basis of surveys conducted from 2009 through 2013 (see below) to superintendents, political boards (members and chairs) and school leaders in all four countries, we have produced country reports within a shared framework, which we will introduce towards the end of this chapter. For the second part of the book we have

produced thematic analyses, taking on a number of important and central themes. Those chapters build on the data from the surveys, but also on newer data and theories.

In order to capture these situations, we make use of several theories, which we shall introduce here: new institutionalism, network theory, power, leadership and governance theory, and theory about relations between politicians and administrators.

4 A New Institutional Perspective

New institutionalism theories (Scott 2014) describe how organisations are shaped by societal and institutional frames, sets of regulations, societal norms and cognitive–cultural understandings that give a stable basis for performing activities. We find these theories well suited to the analysis and interpretation of the relationship between regulation and practice.

The *theory of decoupling* is often cited by institutionalists in relation to educational reforms to explain why 'reforms do not work.' When norms and perceptions in the environment do not correspond with established values and beliefs within the organisation, an assumption according to institutional theory would be that organisations develop double sets of structures and processes. These two sets are not allowed to interfere with each other and are kept separate, loosely coupled or decoupled (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Brunsson 1998; Weick 1976). Formal structures and processes can be designed as 'ceremonies' to comply with external requirements and expectations. Meanwhile, actual behaviour and core activities within the organisation may be governed by another set of structures and processes. Thus we can observe inconsistencies between the organisational structures that are visible from the outside, and the structures and processes that actually control the internal operations of organisations (Imsen et al. 2015, forthcoming).

Scott (2008) maintains that institutions consist of three pillars, and that this may also account for changes in governance. *The regulative pillar* refers to legislation and regulations. *The normative pillar* is the professional values, norms, conceptions, collective rules and worldviews of agents. These are closely linked to professional roles and to expectations from outside; in other words, to the process of legitimation. *The cultural-cognitive pillar* consists of '*the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made*' (Scott 2008, p. 57). This pillar is about meaning, both in conceptions and social actions, and may reflect 'the way we do things here.' If the three pillars are in alignment with one another, they may, according to Scott, represent a formidable force either for change or for resistance to change.

Moreover, a basic premise of new institutionalism is that institutions do not develop independently. Rather, their respective regulative, normative and culture-cognitive elements are embedded in various carriers (Jepperson 1991; Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall 2002), which diffuse and spread ideas and concepts of how

to govern organisations effectively. For example, organisations (e.g. inspectorates) and transnational bodies (e.g. the OECD) frequently serve as such carriers. Additionally, the development and growth of educational standards, not at least by transnational agencies, has developed as one of the strongest ever carriers of normative influence in education. As noted, '*the development of standards and standardisation constitutes a clear instance of institutionalised normative and cultural carriers*' (Scott 2001, p. 78). Specifically, standards have a strong symbolic power, since they embody the principles of rationality to an extreme degree. Once they are adopted at the top layer of an organisation, it is difficult for lower-level leaders to reject them, because doing so is seen as irrational (Brunsson 1998). To identify the carrier agents and the power mechanisms employed in the diffusion processes would potentially improve the understanding of implementation at the local levels.

5 Theory of Networks

A school governance system is per se grounded on the interaction between actors who are working in dispersed social locations but are mutually interdependent. In consequence, the nature of the relationship between these actors becomes an important part of the school governance process. Social network theory conceptualises the relationship between members as network ties (Newell et al. 2004). Moreover, since a social network is generally defined as a set of nodes, it is the ties that represent the relationship, or lack of relationship, between the nodes (Brass et al. 2004, p. 795).

'Nodes' here are understood to mean the actors of the network, which may include individuals, work units or organisations. Social network theory also emphasises the actual relationships between actors, not only those that are embedded in a hierarchical structure, and thus the perspective adds complementary value for the purpose of improving the understanding of governance (Rhodes 1997; Stoker 1998).

The content of the social relationship between network members is most frequently theorised through the conceptual pair of *weak versus strong ties* (Granovetter 1973; Hansen 1999). The strength of a social tie is defined as a function of the '*amount of time*, *the emotional intensity*, *the intimacy* (*mutual confidence*), *and the reciprocal services that characterize the tie*' (Granovetter 1973). Strong ties are thus characterised by *frequent interaction* and *close distance*, whereas the converse pattern marks weak ties. Further, the *density* of ties is an important property, highlighting the number of tasks, issues and projects on which the actors collaborate. Mediation is also an important property in networks. On a general basis, Gould and Fernandez (1989) define *mediation* as a '*process by which intermediary actors facilitate transactions between other actors lacking access to or trust in another*' (Ibid. p. 91). Mediation can thus be understood as a relation between three types of actors, in which two are parties in a hierarchy or a network, while the third works as a broker. For example, it is possible for a municipal superintendent to mediate conflicts between demands from the municipality's top administrative layer and those

of school leaders. Likewise, a superintendent can mediate conflicts between the school board and the professionals at the school level.

Supplementing this understanding is Weick's theory about loose and tight *couplings* between agencies and agents. Karl E. Weick (2001) defines loose coupling as evident in an multi-level organisational system '*when the components of a system affect each other* (*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). The crucial point in Weick's (1976) theoretical propositions is that some lack of correspondence can be expected between the formal organisational system architecture – in terms of plans, goals, strategies and routines developed by state agencies – on the one hand, and the negotiations, decisions, power distribution and operational activities carried out by the players in the municipalities on the other (Paulsen et al. 2014). Moreover, some parts of the *same* systems can be tightly coupled to one another, while others can be rather loosely connected – which underscores that the twin concepts of tight and loose couplings should be treated as a dialectical concept (Spillane and Burch 2006). Specifically, tight and loose couplings may be detected within the same local governance system, a phenomenon that is fairly under-investigated (Rowan 2006)

We shall also make use of Weick's theory on *sense-making* (Weick 1995, 2001). At a microsociological level, this theory has produced a concept that can capture the ways in which, in our continuous endeavours to understand a situation, other people's understanding of it and me, and my own understanding of myself, sense is reflected on and put into words, then enacted in continuous endeavours to get to understand the situation, the other peoples understanding of it and me, and my understanding of myself.

6   Governance, Leadership and Power: Nationally and Trans-nationally

The governance analysis (Dean 1999; Foucault 1976/1994) approach has demonstrated that it is not possible to govern a nation, its institutions and its individuals by economic and administrative regulation and legislation alone. Recently this understanding has been supplemented, perhaps even replaced, by the understanding that societies cannot be governed from one point, i.e. government.

Governments and other authorities must see themselves as 'leaders of leaders' through indirect forms of power located in a 'polyphonic setting' (Pedersen 2005), or in governance networks that can produce '*conduct of conduct*' – shorthand for Foucault's concept of power (Foucault 1976/1994; Sørensen and Torfing 2005). These indirect forms are intended to influence the ways in which institutions and individuals perceive, interpret, understand, and act. Actions themselves become less important in this approach. The values and norms behind them are more important

from a governmental point of view, because indirect forms of power attempt to influence values and norms.

This line of argument also makes us think in terms of diverse forms of power and influence, and thus of leadership and governance: (a) *regulatory leadership* (e.g. regulations, legislation, direct use of power and sanctions), (b) *institutional leadership* (can be societally constructed and naturalised in norms, discourses, strategies), and (c) *reciprocal leadership* (e.g. negotiations, dialogues, mediations and sense-making processes) (Moos 2009b).

Supranational and transnational agencies such as the OECD and the European Commission have not been authorised to use direct forms of power such as regulations on education and its governance and politics. They have therefore developed '*soft forms of governance*.'

Acts of law and societal structures are institutionalised influences, some of which might be called *social technologies*. Routines, methods, work forms, and tools can all be used as social technologies, that is, technologies with a purpose or meaning (Foucault 1991). These are used to influence people's behaviour and cognitive processes. They embody hidden decisions and influences (from other places or other times) and form the premises for decision-making. Some of these technologies evolve from daily practices, while others are imposed or applied from outside actual practice. These methods might change over time, but at any given moment they are perceived as the 'natural way' of working. As they are not discussed, the power invested in them is concealed. Other social technologies are brought to the field of practice from the field of business life or from educational policy, often described as 'natural' or 'neutral' tools for practitioners to use. Here again, power is concealed and therefore not discussed (Moos 2008). Social technologies therefore are, in any setting, powerful but silenced forms of power (Moos 2009b).

The comparability of the two sets of concepts introduced above – hard governance, soft governance and social technologies (from Foucault, Dean and Sørensen & Torfing, plus Moos), compared respectively with the Scott pillars of regulative, cognitive/cultural and normative pillars of institutions – is explored in more detail in the chapter on democracy. For example, there is a visible intersection between the concept of social technologies and the concept of organisational scripts that work as carriers of cultural-cognitive prescriptions, in Scott's terminology (Scott 2001, p. 77). Generally, a script is a schematic knowledge structure, i.e. cultural-cognitive, that guides people in how they understand events and indicates the behaviour or priorities that are regarded as appropriate in given situations (Gioia and Poole 1984). Scripts also work as prototypes that influence how actors try to reduce complexities and make sense in complex decision-making matters. Like social technologies, organisational scripts guide actors' behaviour through a knowledge structure that works as a prototype. Many of the contemporary school governance tools in use today, such as state supervision and national testing, can be understood as powerful scripts that influence actors in the school governance chain.

7   Theories of Politician–Administrator Relations

A basic question in a democracy is who should have the authority to shape the education of citizens (Gutmann 1987/1999). Relations between local politicians and, e.g., the superintendent take place in a larger community. Politicians are elected at both national and local levels, and on both levels they take decisions about education and can be part of the same or a different majority. Such multi-level governance entails both dilemmas and conflicts. Although municipalities can organise themselves as they think best, the rights in the Education Act can result in a conflict when a government decision is difficult to implement if the municipality cannot afford it. It can then be a struggle for a parent or pupil to get their rights. It is because of this interest that there is a balance between the state and the municipalities in terms of responsibility and economic resources. Democracy is dependent on the availability of impartial officials who can act as guardians of democracy and protectors of citizens (Lundquist 1998). One question is whether the superintendent can in fact act in that role today.

We have already introduced the new institutionalism theories above. To these we can add the newest 'new institutionalism' – discursive institutionalism. '*Discourse is the interactive proves of conveying ideas. It comes in two forms*: *the coordinative discourse among policy actors and the communicative discourse between political actors and the public*.' (Schmidt 2008). This approach could offer legitimacy combined with visible results by creating public confidence and trust in the organisation, based on respect on both sides for one another's knowledge and expertise.

Negotiation is part of the daily work of interaction between politicians, superintendents, school leaders and others. Here again we see the importance of trust and of mutual understanding that 'the other' is honest and sincere and seeks a solution. We search for signs of a deliberative democracy, i.e. that the meeting is open to different opinions, that the parties are willing to consider and reconsider different positions. Rather than reaching consensus, the principle here is to develop a mutual understanding.

The school's dual governing chain gives school leaders in certain parts autonomous status in the matters on which the Education Act directly addresses them. The necessary conditions to be able to make such a decision, however, bring the issues back to the administration and to the political committees.

The balance of power between politicians and civil servants has always been a matter for discussion. Officials can influence both the content of political decisions (by virtue of their knowledge) and policy decisions on a day to day basis (through their interpretation). It is therefore essential to ask what type of knowledge politicians and administrators/professionals on the various levels need, as well as their other prerequisites.

8 A Nordic Model of Educational Governance Relations and Agencies

Education and schools in the Nordic countries are by tradition seen as a state responsibility, as most schools were historically seen as part of the cultural governing system. Mostly the state devolved some responsibility to regional or local municipal authorities, and thereafter to the individual schools.

Figure 1.2 maps the levels and actors to be found in most Nordic educational systems. In the country reports we shall fill in the relations and couplings between levels and agents by using the concepts of governance (hard and soft governance and social technologies) or the Scott pillars (regulative, normative and cognitive-cultural institutions). Yet there are some minor differences across the Nordic countries when it comes to the educational governance chain, as illustrated in the model above. Schools in Norway, Finland and Sweden are not required to have a local school board (level 6) in municipal primary education. Further, in Finland, bypass is not a prevalent characteristic of the Finnish state's modus of steering municipalities and schools. Rather, the municipalities enjoy a substantial level of autonomy, while only a minority of decision-making cases are delegated directly to schools. The regional level is present in some countries, but not in others. At the municipal level there are differences even within countries between what we name (5a) *Education* and (5b) *Education plus*. In the (5a) version there is a political board and a superintendent exclusively for schools. 'Superintendent' refers directly to the municipal director. In the (5b) *Education plus* model, we have political boards and directors spanning several kinds of institutions (e.g. schools, daycare/preschool).

Fig. 1.2 A model of the Nordic Chain of Governance
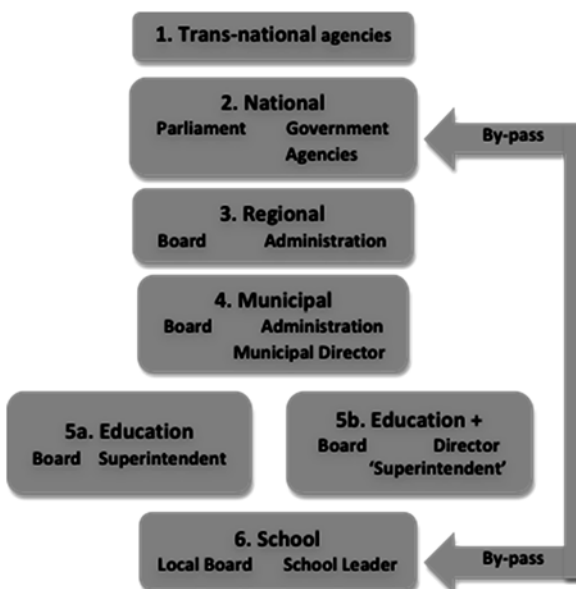
Table 1.1 Year of each survey in the countries

Survey to…	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
Superintendents	2009	2008	2009	2009
Members and chairs of school board	2012	2012	2011	2012
School leaders	2012	2013	2013	2012

Superintendents with direct relations to schools alone are subordinate to these broad boards and directors.

The country reports will also analyse the shift from a traditional model to a contemporary model, including a growing private sector, several semi-autonomous agencies and changes to the governance chain.

9   Facts About the Surveys: Method and Reliability

This book is based on a number of surveys conducted between 2008 and 2013 in the participating countries. Some country surveys cover a different time period (Table 1.1).

The design and content of the questionnaires was worked out by the Nordic research team, which comprised researchers representing different academic disciplines. The survey questions were adjusted to the national context when necessary for understanding in the local context. The questions were based on earlier research carried out both in the Nordic countries and in the United States (Glass et al. 2000). The theoretical framework guiding the design is a combination of curriculum theory with a perspective of multi-level governance, contingency theory and implementation and political science perspectives.

Data was collected in each country by the country research teams, and reported both nationally and internationally. The data analysis was carried out in the particular country and then, in the next step, cross-analysed in the Nordic research group to find country-specific and Nordic contexts. The data was supplemented with other official data. The accuracy of the research process itself can be considered satisfactory. The data was also made accessible to the other teams, as well as to other researchers outside the group constructing the surveys for publication within the project frame. Below are some comments on each survey.

9.1   Superintendents

The questionnaires to the superintendents in the Nordic countries were sent to all superintendents in each country. The response rate varies between countries from 50 to 80 %. In Denmark the survey was sent to all municipality administrations, with instructions to pass it to the superintendent. In Norway a preliminary

investigation was made to collect the names of superintendents. In Finland and Sweden names were collected through the association of superintendents in combination with the municipalities' webpages.

In general, the reliability and representativeness of the respondents to the superintendents survey must be considered good. In Finland, which had the largest percentage loss in response rate, almost half the loss can be explained by the fact that not all municipalities have a superintendent. There is no clear pattern in the loss in response rate in any of the countries. Based on sex, age, background, experience, education and characteristics of the municipality, there is a good representativeness in all country surveys.

9.1.1   Survey Construction

The surveys consisted of two parts, one with questions with solid options for the answer and one with open questions and answers where the respondents had to write their own answers. In the part with solid answers, Denmark and Sweden had a six-point scale in which where 1 = Do not agree at all and 6 = Totally agree. Finland and Norway chose a five-point Likert scale in which 1 = Do not agree and 5 = Totally agree. The other type of question, with open answers, was analysed both by summarising and categorising, depending on the question.

9.2   *School Boards and Chairs*

Sweden conducted a survey of chairs and vice chairs of school boards in 2009, the same year as the study of superintendents. As this gave many interesting perspectives, the Nordic team decided at that time, together with a US team led by Professor Tom Alsbury, to design a survey of both chairs and members of school boards. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to complete this for all the Nordic countries. The Nordic team decided to send out the questionnaire to members of the school boards, including the chairs, within the timeframe for their project timelines. In this book it is the results of this survey that are used.

In Denmark the survey was sent to all municipality administrations, with instructions to pass the survey to all members of the school boards. The response rate in Denmark was about 50 %, and the respondents are a good mix of the various positions on the board. In Finland almost the same method was used as in Denmark: the survey was sent to the superintendents in the municipalities, who were asked to pass it to members of the board. The response rate in the Finnish survey was around 25 %, but there is a good representation of the various municipalities (geographically) among their respondents. In Sweden, information about the politicians on the various boards was collected from the municipalities' webpages. The response rate on the chair/vice chair survey was about 75 %, and for the survey to both chairs and members around 50 %. In Norway also, all municipalities were contacted to collect

email addresses. Not all municipalities answered, and some had no political board for school issues. Around 80 % of the municipalities are therefore represented, with the response rate just over 40 %.

In general, the reliability and representativeness of the respondents to school boards and chairs is good. There is no clear pattern in the loss in response rate in any of the countries. Based on the respondents' sex, age, background, experience, education, characteristics of the municipality, political party and occupation, there is good representativeness in all the country surveys.

9.2.1   Survey Construction

The surveys consisted of two parts, one with questions with fixed options for the answer and one with questions with open-ended answers in which the respondents themselves were asked to write their answers. In the part with fixed answers, Denmark, Finland and Sweden used a six-point scale in which 1 = Do not agree at all and 6 = Totally agree. Norway chose to use a five-point scale in which 1 = Do not agree and 5 = Totally agree. The other type of questions, with open-ended answers, was analysed differently across countries both by summarising and categorising, depending on the question.

9.3   School Leaders

School leaders are both principals and preschool leaders; they work both in municipalities and in independent schools. In Sweden, all these groups of school leaders received the questionnaire, but the main challenge was to reach out to all school leaders in the independent schools. Names were collected from the municipalities' and the independent schools' websites, totalling 8063 persons. Just over 50 % responded, with a 50–50 split between municipality and independent schools. The reports on this study were divided between principals and preschool leaders, as some respondents from the preschools thought that some questions were not relevant for them. A special survey was therefore constructed so that preschool leaders could have complementary answers. Finland also sent the questionnaire to all principals of both public and independent schools, and the response rate was 28 %. All the various school forms are represented, as are the various sizes of school. Denmark decided to address principals of Folkeskoler (for children aged 6–16), and the response rate was 42 %. In Norway the response rate was similar; however, as the municipalities are solely responsible for the compulsory schools, the Norwegian survey was sent only to those principals. Also in Norway, addresses were collected through direct contact with all municipalities.

9.3.1 Survey Construction

The surveys consisted of two parts, one with questions with fixed options for answering and one with questions with open-ended answers, where the respondents had to write their own answers. In the part with fixed answers, Denmark, Finland and Sweden used a six-point scale where 1 = Do not agree at all and 6 = Totally agree. Norway chose a five-point scale where 1 = Do not agree and 5 = Totally agree. The other type of questions, with an open-ended answer were analysed differently across countries both by summarising and categorising, depending on the question.

To summarise: The data used in this book are from several questionnaires, supplemented in some countries with interviews and using additional sources of information such as official data. The database must be considered a rich Nordic database at a time when many transformations were occurring in educational policy in the Nordic countries, both internationally and nationally.

All questionnaires have the same design, with a mix of open-ended and fixed-option questions. The scale construction is of five or six steps, without fixed wording of other grades than 1–6 (or 5). Where we use expressions like 'most respondents' or 'few respondents,' we have chosen to sum up the two highest or the two lowest grades. Where we use answers with many 'Don't knows' or a high degree of missing answers on a specific question, we comment on this specially.

10 Frame for All Country Reports

We are focusing on the superintendent and their relations with other actors and agents, from three perspectives: from their own perspective, from that of school board members, and from that of school leaders. Our interest was in how school superintendents create their role, position and function in a political–administrative system. These chapters are written on a national basis, in order to be able to distinguish the characteristics of different systems. They are also the basis for the next section, the thematic chapters, as they contain the data from the surveys.

A. **National context introduction**: **restructuring municipalities and educational agencies with the following themes**:

- Transnational and national developments/trends: like numbers and indicators, from parliamentary towards marketplace, de-politicisation and changing purposes of education.
- Municipalities, their composition, positions and relations to the state level: like reforms and restructurings.
- Political and administrative structures within municipalities.

B. **Displaying of data interpretations in the following themes**: **superinten-
   dents**' **position**, **function and networks**

- Who are the superintendents, school board members and chairs and school
  leaders?
- Networks: municipal networks, school boards as networks, school leaders,
  peers
- What are the superintendent's motivational forces?
- How do superintendents get information?
- Accountability and responsibility

11   Introduction to the Thematic Chapters

The core point of departure of the chapter on 'Democracy in complex networks:
political leaders and administrative professionals' (Chap. 6) (Lejf Moos, Olof
Johansson, Jan Merok Paulsen, Mona Strand and Mika Risku) is that superinten-
dents in municipal administrations, politicians in school boards, and school leaders
in institutions share social, cultural and societal responsibility for educating and
bringing up the next generation. Responsibility for education is a very diverse field.
On the one hand, policymakers and civil servants need to be accountable for student-
learning outcomes, as described first and foremost by 'Management by Objective'
approaches in policies and in the ways outcomes are measured in tests. On the other
hand, we insist that education cannot be restricted to this narrow area of competen-
cies but must be seen as the comprehensive and all-encompassing democratic
Bildung. Our finding is that politicians and administrators find themselves in a
dilemma, pulled between democracy and efficiency. Municipal governance of
schools is thus educational governance, and not simply public governance. This
finding leads us to a discussion of superintendents' positions, tasks and competen-
cies. The chapter builds on a set of logics as filters for the analyses: marketplace
logic, managerial logic, public logic, professional logic, and ethical logic.

   The chapter 'Superintendent leadership in hierarchy and network' (Chap. 7) (Jan
Merok Paulsen, Elisabet Nihlfors, Ulf Brinkkjær & Mika Risku) discusses
superintendents' changing roles through two lenses: that of a hierarchical, tightly
coupled governance chain, and that of a loosely coupled social network. Some
superintendents are connected to their school leaders through strong, dense network
ties that are embedded in personal relations and in municipal school-leader groups.
Other superintendents have weaker network ties and see themselves more as coaches
than leaders of school leaders. In order to fill holes in the governance line and to
create the best possible match with their school leaders, superintendents utilise
informal network ties proactively. Moreover, the analysis shows that networking
with school leaders takes place both within school-leader groups and within
personal-relationship networks. Whereas the findings indicate that formal group-
level collaborations are important for strategic issues and for coordination, deeper

educational issues seem to require direct personal communication. Taken together, the analysis suggests that network engagement is an important avenue for superintendents to exert political influence and to practise educational leadership. Moreover, the inclusion of it is justified to include the social network concept in the theoretical modelling of contemporary superintendent leadership in the Nordic systems is justified.

In the chapter 'Political cultures' (Chap. 8) (Klaus Kasper Kofod, Olof Johansson, and Jan Merok Paulsen), we use the concept of political culture to analyse the relations that constitute municipal governance. The categories – openness, decentralism, egalitarianism, efficiency, quality and choice – are here used to flag relations and interests that we would otherwise not have seen: we can only see what a 'thing,' for example a culture, is, when we see what it is not. The chapter analyses both similarities and differences among political cultures in the participating Nordic countries, because a country's specific political culture impacts significantly on the way its educational system is organised. A number of Nordic trends have been identified that differ distinctively from trends in other parts of the world: a relatively strong state, relatively strong local authorities, comprehensive education, and a collaborative leadership. These strong trends build on national values that are in some ways alike, but also encompass differences. What we are looking for in this project is how the governing of the various country educational systems is executed. It is not possible to govern a nation and its institutions strictly by economic and administrative means, through legislation alone. Cultural norms, traditions, and values – in short, culture – permeates the way in which things are done, and we find new aspects using this set of lenses.

'Competence and understanding in the governance chain' (Chap. 9) (Elisabet Nihlfors, Hans Christian Høyer, Klaus Kasper Kofod and Mika Risku) continues the discussion in the democracy chapter. Education is of fundamental value for a society; in order to raise and foster a new generation of citizens in a global and local multicultural context, we thus need to identify the competencies needed to accomplish this mission in various contexts over time – and to ascertain whether politicians and professionals have these competencies. The underlying questions, of course, are what are the purposes of education, and who is empowered to decide how national decisions are to be understood, discussed and realised locally. In this chapter, some of the prerequisites for discussion of these questions are problematised. The focus is on political and professional leaders at the local level, and on their impact on the prerequisites for education. The analyses are inspired by a description of what is required in order to transform individual knowledge into shared competencies that in turn can increase the possibilities for action. Underscored is the importance of understanding one's assignment so as to increase – and share – competencies in an organisation.

In the chapter 'Governmentality through translation and sense-making' (Chap. 10) (Lejf Moos, Jan Merok Paulsen, Olof Johansson, Mika Risku), we look at the mechanisms through which system changes are translated into institutional and personal sense, behaviour, mindset and identity. We see how influence, decisions and ideas are taken from one level to other levels in the educational public sector, and

how they are interpreted and translated. How do groups and individuals, authorities and organisations find ways of operating and making sense in the stream of both external expectations and internal interests and motivations? A range of translation and sense-making practices are employed by municipal managers in order to make central aims adaptable at the 'street level.' Following this line of argument, superintendents may employ various repertoires of translation in their dialogue with school principals so as to make the work context manageable for both groups. Superintendents operate according to different translagtion modes in their relationships with school leaders and school boards. Whereas they typically operate in a modification modus in their daily dialogue with school leaders, they employ a more radical modus in their relationship with the boards.

The last chapter, 'Trends and tendencies' (Chap. 11) (Lejf Moos, Elisabet Nihlfors and Jan Merok Paulsen), continues and deepens the comparison of educational governance across borders. Now there are references to the country reports and the thematic chapters. The second half of this chapter discusses the findings of the thematic chapters under a shared perspective: what are the tendencies and trends in a broad, transnational educational perspective? We pull together the developments and discourses that led to the present situation, and describe our anticipations of the direction that Nordic municipal governance is taking. A crude summary here is that we are moving from education towards economy. The chapter analyses and discusses this transition in the light of changes in policy cultures, as well as areas where the influence from New Public Management values and norms have changed the normative and cultural-cognitive pillars of the Nordic public school institutions significantly.

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Part I
Country Reports

Chapter 2
Danish Superintendents as Players in Multiple Networks

Lejf Moos, Klaus Kasper Kofod, and Ulf Brinkkjær

Abstract The Danish educational sector is increasingly being drawn into the general public governance, in line with other municipal sectors. Thus it has been influenced by transnational thinking, by hard and soft governance approaches and by social technologies with international inspiration and origins. Municipal governance and administration is being restructured to fit new concepts. As a consequence, schools superintendents' position and relations are changing as the system moves from welfare-state thinking towards competitive-state thinking. The results of our surveys to schools superintendents, school board members and school leaders illustrate aspects of the new situation confronting superintendents located at the midpoint of governance chains and networks. The division of labour between political and administrative responsibilities is at the forefront of the images of emerging and changing networks of political, administrative and educational practitioners.

Keywords Networks • Chain • Public governance • Restructurings • Position • Function

1   Transnational and National Developments and Trends

This section focuses on national and international trends in Danish education. It will become apparent, first, that a significant proportion of national trends in the Danish educational field have been generated or inspired by *inter*national trends. It will also become clear that an important share of these changes and reforms can be characterised as moving towards the logic of a commercial market, in the sense that economic rationale increasingly penetrates all forms of pedagogical reflection and governance. In Denmark, as in the other Nordic countries, schools and education

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are paid for by taxes and the institutions are free to use their income as needed. It is not meaningful to talk about the educational system as a market. It is, however, evident in what local and national politicians say when they discuss the reform of education that a growing share of their arguments are based in what Weber would have labelled economic/objective rationality.

It makes sense to look back in recent social and political history, because even if past visions and policies have been superseded, they rarely disappear completely. Former policies still form an important basis for understanding recent thinking and practice. We can, with Pedersen (2011), trace a general social and economic development from a postwar welfare state to a more recent competitive state.

The welfare state was founded in equality and participatory democracy; the contemporary competition state is based on competition and readiness for the labour market. The Nordic welfare state emerged in the eighteenth century, growing from the self-help cooperative movement. Against this background, the state was considered the protector of citizens from surrounding threats and the safeguard of participatory democracy at both national and local level. Democracy was less hierarchical than it is today. In a context of prosperity and full employment, the distance between the top and bottom of society was small, and considerable influence was evident on the local level.

One of the central values of this period was to make school contribute to the development both of democracy and of democratic individuals. Thus the political centre-left endeavoured to develop a non-tiered school system in which social equality and democracy were core values. 'Social equality through education' was a central slogan of the era.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the economic context changed. Global interdependence became increasingly apparent. From something previously unknown, the international environment began to be a part of the educational system. Transnational agents emerged and grew in importance. Organisations and structures such as the World Trade Organisation, the OECD (the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), the International Monetary Fund and the European Union acquired increased importance. Countries were inspired to enter into and accept a new situation: a global market with free movement of finances, goods and labour.

From the late 1970s, Danish governments began to adjust their economic policies. Then adjustments of additional types of policies followed. These initiatives were triggered by economic recession and unemployment. Danish participation in the neoliberal global market was seen as a new route to prosperity. Among the effects was increased pressure on the public sector as the place where costs could be saved and work could be performed with greater efficiency and competitiveness. Various forms of New Public Management were established in order to prepare the public sector for participation in this competition, and to teach people to see themselves as a labour force, rather than as citizens or families. The inspiration for New Public Management was taken from the private sector, specifically from the design of rules on competition, performance contracts, measurement and documentation of institution outputs, users' 'freedom of choice,' and outsourcing. Recurring themes were decentralisation and market thinking. During this period, the dominant politi-

cal discourse on the core values of schools was transformed. Education for work and competition were emphasised as new core values. There were moves to dismantle one-for-all comprehensive schools.

During the same time period, relations between the state, the municipalities and the institutions also changed, in ways reminiscent of bureaucratic group hierarchies and of 'Principal–Agent' control. Politicians began to be seen as the school leaders who would take decisions, while civil servants began to be seen as agents executing the policies (Pedersen 2011). These structures were meant to secure Denmark's survival and success in the face of global competition. Local authorities and institutions increasingly came under the control of economic frameworks and national policy targets.

A series of social technologies was applied – including contracts, bench-mark quality reports, auditing, certifications and accreditations, privatisations, outsourcing, evaluations and documentations. To connect country objectives with intentions, a complicated web of negotiations between municipal and state levels was constructed. Taken together, these policies and initiatives represent a de-democratisation at the local level, and a concentration of political and economic power at the state level (Pedersen 2011, p. 225).

During these years, public schools were confronted with an array of changes. Some of these were the consequence of tense economic circumstances. One way to save or streamline operations was to dismantle small, unprofitable and technically insufficient units and merge them into larger ones. Between 2008 and 2011, as many as 400 of Denmark's 1317 schools were affected by such restructuring (Stanek 2011). Thus managing a school has developed from heading a school at one specific location to heading a complex entity of several institutions located at several different premises (cluster management). Simultaneously, changes in the culture within local administration have taken place (Moos 2011). We are witnessing a tendency towards an increase in hierarchies of single-stringed or unified management, accompanied by a growing distance between schools on the one hand and political and administrative management on the other. We also see that a part of this process has now entered into legislation, as was illustrated when the Danish school was relabelled in 2006 from a welfare school to a school for the competitive state.

The allegedly poor Danish results in international comparisons of test results (e.g. TIMS, PIRLS and PISA) have been interpreted as evidence of the deficiencies in the Danish school – as evidence that the knowledge and abilities produced in Danish schools are not satisfactory. The comparison of test results has become an easily communicated symbol for setting objectives. That was illustrated when the Danish government of 2007–2011 generated a slogan stating that Denmark should be among the top five PISA performers (without mentioning that none of the top five countries at the time were democracies). The comparisons also illustrate that the purpose of schooling has been transformed into a question of testable subject knowledge. Further illustrations of this were the national test of 2006 and student study plans.

Many of these changes followed local reaction to political discourses channelled by the 2001–2007 government's willingness to grant exceptions from the existing

law (Kamil and Strand 2011). The comprehensive school-for-all is gradually disintegrating under the onslaught of granted exceptions on the composition of classes and groups and grouping by ability. Some schools have been characterised as profile or talent-grade schools, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of gifted pupils. The same trend is seen in the increasing number of private schools: 14 % of Danish children were admitted to private schools in 2010, compared with 6 % in 1970. These figures do to some extent reflect parents' dissatisfaction with public schools: in 1990 60 % were 'Very satisfied,' while by 2007 this figure had decreased to 29 % (Gallup in: Kamil and Strand 2011, p. 25)

The degree of satisfaction with public schools has become a relevant indicator of support, firstly because it is possible for parents to move their children to private school, and secondly because the 2001–2007 government introduced 'free choice of school,' allowing parents almost unlimited power to choose their children's school across district boundaries and even in another municipality. The consequential increase in competition between schools has, among other changes, led some schools to move in a specific vocational or educational direction.

1.1 Conclusions

In parallel with schools developing profiles which may differ considerably from one another, a tendency for decreased transparency and unclear general profiling has developed. A bunch of different political interests are pulling in opposite directions on the very important questions of which values should form the basis of the public school and on which values should be developed. The highly varied profiling of schools and parts of schools has contributed to this development. So have the frequent changes in school legislation (18 changes to the education acts within 10 years), which on the one hand have made it complicated for school leaders and professionals to establish an identity for the Danish school and, on the other, make it difficult for the various stakeholders to discover the identity of a specific school. The continuous changes in the societal framework, as well as in the public structures of schooling outlined above, can be summarised as follows.

(a) *Numbers/indicators over political decisions*

The international PISA tests, combined with the increasing penetration of so-called objective or economic logic among politicians at international, national and regional levels as well as in commissions, think tanks and the media, have led to an increased emphasis on tests in the Danish school system. In accordance with this, the weight attributed to the results of such tests has increased, thereby further obscuring the fact that the standards discussion is a question of the *interpretation* of test results. The outcome is that politicians seemingly attribute increased meaning to technical matters, and less meaning to political issues. Political decisions thus appear to be based more on evidence and less on political considerations. In this sense, decisions in the area of school politics

can be described as emphasising quantitative indications and downplaying indications of *political* decisions.

(b) *From parliamentarianism to the market*

The increased weighting on and belief in tests has contributed to the view among politicians and public opinion that it is not only sensible but necessary that the Danish school and the politics of the Danish school should be driven increasingly by a rationality close to that of the market, rather than values and reflections on *Bildung* – the formation and distribution of educational wealth. Less obviously, such changes have also led to a kind of depoliticisation of educational governance. If questions about school content can be almost consistently answered by 'what the market wants,' then questions about necessary qualifications are no longer a question for political reflection for parliament and municipal councils, but a technical matter for labour-market experts.

(c) *Depoliticised school strategy for content and resources*

Particularly in the UK and the US, these developments have led to massive investments in measurements of quantifiable indicators of the type we see in 'school effectiveness' initiatives – something that was rare a generation ago. These initiatives do not change the fact that the politics of the Danish school has been for generations and still is developed and handled by politicians and by municipal administrations. Things have changed, however, with respect to two issues. Firstly, the changes entail a depoliticisation of school strategies, as we saw in (b) above. This means that when 'the market' (mediated by parliament and local administration) gives a greater part of the answer, then social and political values are giving a smaller part. This entails that issues of content and *pedagogik* or the theory of teaching will be treated as a technical rather than political matter. Secondly, with these developments a fair share of the pedagogical reflections and decisions on content and form are removed from schools and teachers, because national tests and standards entail answers on these issues. We are thus moving in the direction of seeing school as more of a technical matter than a didactic and pedagogical matter.

(d) *Changing the purpose of school and social technologies.*

One tendency in the changes discussed could be described as a sort of 'leaning' on school content, in the sense that it entails a trend towards those parts of the content that mean most in a market logic – that is, in qualifying the workforce. Other aspects of school, which qualify children for general navigation in society, for empowerment as a citizen and so on, are downplayed.

2 Municipalities, Their Composition, Positions and Relations to State Level

Denmark has 5.6 million inhabitants (Statistik 2013), with a high employment rate for both men (72.5 %) and women (69.5 %) (Beskæftigelsesministeriet 2012, pp. 13–15). Danish society was traditionally very homogeneous, characterised by

democracy and *equality* (a small power distance), and *inclusive* towards other cultures (a small uncertainty avoidance) (Hofstede 1980). Over the past decade, this image of a deeply rooted, unambiguous and homogeneous culture may have changed as Denmark experienced an influx of people whose mother tongue was not Danish.

The modern Danish municipal system dates back to 1841 with the introduction of municipal self-government (Johansen 1991, pp. 39–40). In 1970, as a result of municipal reform, the 1386 municipalities were reduced to 275 (Pedersen 1991, p. 33), and in 2007 these were again reduced to 98 through further mergers (Christiansen and Klitgaard 2008). Thus most municipalities are now bigger than before. With at least 20,000 inhabitants as a rule of thumb, they have acquired more tasks, are expected to play a more proactive role in a range of issues, and the role of the municipal democracy has changed (Christoffersen and Klausen 2012, p. 54), with more power concentrated around the elected mayor and the employed city manager at the expense of the politically composed elected municipal council (Sørensen and Torfing 2005). As municipalities have been merged into bigger units, many schools have been shut down or merged into departmental schools. In 2011 there were 1317 *folkeskoler* (as compared to 1708 in 1996, a decrease of 391 or 23 %).

The municipalities' self-governance is regulated through the Law on the Steering of the Municipalities (2013). Here it is specified that the municipal council, which has overall responsibility for municipal activities, governs the municipality's affairs. The council elects its own chairman, that is, the mayor. The immediate administration of the municipalities' tasks is governed by committees, whereas the mayor is in charge of the supreme daily management of the municipal administration (Lov om kommuners styrelse 2013).

A municipality is required to run their operation based on objectives and frameworks established by parliament and government. There is discretion in determining how the operation is to be organised in order to achieve the objectives. For example, what resources are to be used, how they are to be organised, how the premises are to be designed and, to some extent, what staff are to be employed. Regardless of how a municipality decides to organise their work, they must guarantee all children and students an equivalent education (Lov om kommuners styrelse 2013).

The municipalities are typically governed through standing committees, one of which the committee that has schools as its field of responsibility.[1] In these committees, the politicians have ultimate overall political responsibility for the operations of the schools. With the new, bigger municipalities since the 2007 municipal reform, the balance between the politicians and the civil servants has changed, so that the politicians' responsibility has become more of an overall political responsibility as opposed to a more hands-on political responsibility whereas direct responsibility for daily operations is taken care of by the superintendent (Christoffersen and Klausen

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[1]The name and the area of responsibility change from municipality to municipality, but there is always a committee that has schools as its responsibility.

2012, p. 58).[2] The law states that the concrete rules for the management of the municipality are determined in a steering ordinance passed by the municipal council (Lov om kommuners styrelse 2013, § 2,2). Therefore there are differences among municipalities on how the municipality is managed. As a consequence there are different steering mixes between municipalities, and even within single municipalities, between the various parts of the administration and the various sectors (Christoffersen and Klausen 2012, p. 67).

These ways of managing the public sector are in line with the neoliberal economic and steering rationales called New Public Management (Hood 1991) which, since the 1980s, have been dominant in the OECD, the European Union and the Danish public sector. Fundamental to this very broad and diverse tendency are the notions of marketplace and management: the idea that the public sector is best governed by ideas originating in steering techniques used in the private sector in the form of competition, consumer choice and transparent institutions. One sign of this tendency is the free school choice, both across school and daycare institution's catchment areas, and across municipal boundaries.

Following this tendency, a number of relatively new tools and social technologies for accountability were introduced. Parallel to the reforms from the ministry of education, a number of reforms were in evidence from the ministry of finance and the ministry of the interior – the restructuring of the public sectors. This latter wave of reform has influenced the political board and the superintendent level even more than the educational reforms.

There have been many changes in the school sector. During the 9-year period from 2001 to 2010, the Folkeskole Act was amended 18 times. The most important change was the 2006 shift in the Aims clause, which was modified from an emphasis on preparing pupils for participating in a democracy to one on making students employable in a competitive economy in a competitive state. These changes are in line with the transformation of Danish society from the traditional welfare society with a focus on citizens' rights to a competitive state with a focus on citizens as human capital in the global competition as a consequence of globalisation (Bauman 1999; Pedersen 2011).

The regulation of the Danish school system has changed in several important ways during the last two decades. At the beginning of the 1980s there was a strong general move to decentralise finances, personnel management and other areas from state level to the local municipal level, and in many cases from there to the school level. These changes were introduced at a time when the Danish economy was in some difficulty because expenses in the public sector had run out of control and because the exchange ratio between Denmark and its trading partners and competitors had deteriorated. At the end of the 1990s a re-centralisation of the goal-setting and evaluation of schools' work was also observed (Tanggaard 2011) in order that

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[2] When talking about how the municipalities are governed, it is important to stress that there is no single picture of how the municipalities are organised; there are variations among the municipalities because there is room for discretion in the law, so the description is an ideal type description.

the central authorities should regain control over and enhance the quality of the public sector output.

In order to remedy the calamities in the public sector, it was decided in the Danish parliament to focus on the public sector being 'close to the citizen' and that the greatest possible number of decisions should be taken at the local level, that citizens should have a say on what goods and how they should be provided with by the public sector, that public institutions should be transparent, and that they should compete with one another. In short, the public sector should be both efficient and effective (Finansministeriet 1983; Greve 2001; Klausen 1996; Pedersen 2011).

A few examples serve to illustrate this. The increased influence for parents at the school level by organising school boards, as well as parents' free choice of schools, management by objectives, and the goal- and result-oriented system, emphasised professional ability and responsibility on several different levels in the steering system, especially for teachers and school leaders. It was argued that if the state decentralised tasks to schools, local educational administration staff could be cut down (Torfing 2004).

3   Structures Within Municipalities and Its Effect

The 30 years in which New Public Management has been a dominant steering technology and ideology have witnessed the decentralisation of more tasks and responsibilities in Denmark from the state to the municipalities and to schools. The municipalities have become more responsible for providing educational services on the one hand, and on the other hand they have acquired more freedom regarding the organisation of those services. In order not to completely lose control, legislators and municipal politicians therefore perceived the need to strengthen the organisational couplings between the various administrative layers of the school system. New and different social steering technologies were developed in order to control a system now characterised by simultaneously being both strongly and loosely coupled. Among these technologies can be mentioned the use of assessment data, the monitoring and publication of student results, and accounting reports that represent new ways of coordinating and monitoring the school system. That establishes new ways of interaction between state, local authorities, and schools. These developments have resulted in decreased local autonomy and increased bureaucratisation on the one hand, and enhanced local autonomy among municipalities and schools through the decentralisation on the other (Paulsen et al. 2014). This has meant decentralisation and centralisation at one and the same time –centralisation inside the decentralisation.

When the educational system is either centralised or decentralised, the balance between professional and political power at all levels in the system is changed. The responsibility and professional ability of school leaders and teachers are enhanced, at the same time as evaluation becomes an important instrument for governing and '… *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). During a period which has strongly featured
re-centralisation of the content of schools (curricula and accountability), the schools
find themselves in charge of finances, human resource and day-to-day management,
and at the same time the municipalities have become an important factor in the
ministry's 'quality assurance system.'

The Danish school system, alone among the Nordic countries, has two school
boards. One is the political committee representing the municipal council, com-
posed of members of the municipal council represented on the committee according
to the parties' relative weight in the council. The task of this committee is to decide
overall policies on school and education matters inside the municipal's jurisdiction.
The other school board is the local school board of the individual school, with
parental majority, where the school leader serves as board secretary and teachers
and students are represented. This school board is supposed to lay out overall prin-
ciples for the organising of instruction, cooperation between school and home,
information for home on the results of students' instruction, the work distribution
between the teachers, and common collective activities arrangements for the stu-
dents (Lov om folkeskolen 1993, § 42–44; Moos 2003).

The political board and the schools superintendents used to be positioned at the
midpoint of a straight line or chain of governance from national to institutional
level, from the political committee (parliament) and the administrative agency
(ministry) at national level to municipal level. The first municipal level is the politi-
cal committee (municipal council) and administration (municipal administration),
the second is a school committee and superintendence. Finally, at the school level,
for each school there is the school board, with parental majority and a school leader-
ship. At the midpoint of this chain one will find the schools superintendent, who is
positioned in the municipal administration and thus accountable to municipal prin-
ciples and national regulation while servicing and monitoring schools.

The Danish educational system is part of and thus influenced by transnational
tendencies, but building on the Danish structures and culture. By tradition, the
municipalities have been important factors in the governance of the public sector,
and decentralised educational governance has according to the Danish 'free/inde-
pendent school' tradition been a central part of the Danish educational self-
understanding and, to some extent, also its practice.

This is in line with the systemic evaluation regimes that are in place in all the
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 actively uses financial resource allocation in combination with
reporting procedures as an indirect control instrument, so that municipalities have
to report their use of financial costs and human resources to state agencies on a
yearly basis. Finally, accountability is strengthened through making the results of
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 instru-
ments and quality control, and the municipal sector, through direct ownership and

decentralised decision-making power. There is a 'mixed mode' of regulation. This is important for understanding the current context of schools superintendent leadership in the various municipalities in Denmark (Moos 2009).

3.1 Developments in Public Governance

In numerous municipalities, new layers of middle managers, district-leaders etc., have emerged. This trend is illustrated in Fig. 2.1: from transnational through to national level, through to two-layer municipalities, and on to institutions.

In 1999, vocational schools and, in 2007, the general upper secondary school were restructured. Having previously been governed by regional councils, the upper secondary schools are now self-governed institutions with direct links to the ministry. This arrangement is similar to the governance of free or independent schools in the right hand line of Fig. 2.1. In 2011 there were 509 basic free-standing schools (an increase of 80 or 18 % compared to 429 in 1996). In 2011, 580,000 students attended *folkeskoler* and 96,000 attended free-standing schools, i.e. 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. There is the public chain from government through municipal agencies (be they two- or three-layered), and the enterprise model, where schools are made self-steering and refer directly to the ministry. This can be seen as a decentralisation of power over local management of finances and staff and of operations from national level to the schools, but it can also be seen as

Fig. 2.1 The Danish educational governance system
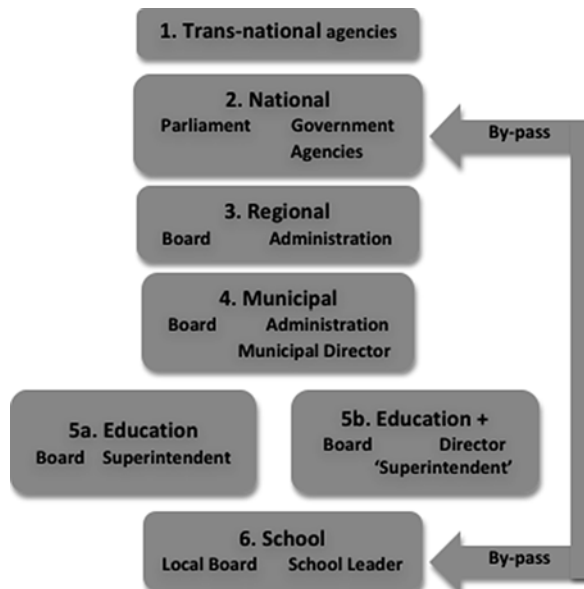
a move to circumvent local municipal influences and interference. Building on long traditions with independent schools, when it comes to free, primary schools, and on new tendencies also seen in the governance of higher educational institutions, like universities, when it comes to higher secondary schools. This 'bypass' of municipal democracy in the municipal councils and administration is a trend that is also seen in initiatives and regulations to govern curriculum and quality assurance from the national level.

4 Who Are the Superintendent, the School Board and School Leader?

We shall give short accounts of superintendents, as they describe themselves, and of the two major groups with whom they collaborate – the school board and school leaders – before we describe relations between these three actors in the municipal governance.

There are, as mentioned above, 98 municipalities in Denmark. Each one is a school district, with political boards and administrations with directors. The directors responsible for schools are usually called superintendents. In the survey, however, we found 17 different titles for this position, because more than half of the municipalities have allocated additional areas to the political board and administration such as daycare, leisure time, family matters.

4.1 Characteristics of Superintendents

Lead Paragraph The average superintendent is male, in the mid-50s, and recently appointed. His professional background is education: teacher education and teacher practice. That is slightly out of tune with superintendents' own criteria for their positions, namely, that candidates should be trained educationalists, administrators, and managers. Important note: there is no 'average superintendent,' as the position and the demands made upon it differ from municipality to municipality.

- *Gender*: male (only 25 % are female).
- *Age*: mid-50s (<50 years: 21 % | 51–55 years: 43 % | 56–60 years: 25 % | >60 years: 11 %).
- *Professional seniority*: most are relatively newly appointed (0–5 years: 77 % | 6–10 years: 18 % | >15 years: 5 %).
- *Professional background*: The background of the superintendents is clear and in many ways predictable: 88 % of superintendents were recruited from the educational profession.
- *Academic background*: the professional background resonates with the academic background. Among superintendents, 43 % were trained as teachers, 27 % have

a diploma in leadership, 13 % have a master's degree in the educational field. 16 % have a master's from outside the educational field. When asked if superintendents should be educated to university level, 43 % answered Yes, and said they should have a master's degree.

- *School district's criteria for superintendent positions*: When asked what kind of *qualifications* school districts should look for in superintendent applications, seen from the superintendent perspective we see that the ranking goes from generic leadership competencies, via educational specific competencies, towards administrative/managerial competencies.
- *Appointment procedures*: Following public advertisement, superintendents are appointed by the municipal board. The appointment is typically contract-based, normally lasting 3–5 years.
- *Superintendents' titles*: The restructuring of public sectors over the years has made the position, titles and fields of responsibilities of superintendents rather puzzling. This can be demonstrated by the following list of titles (numbers in brackets indicate the number of times this title was given): superintendent (31), chief of teaching (6), chief of school and youth (2), chief of school and leisure time (2), chief of school and institution (2), and chief of education (2). All other titles on the list were mentioned once each.
- *Next-in-line chief*: Only 11 % of respondents fit the description of superintendent that we used for the survey: 'Being directly subordinate to a political committee and being in charge of all municipal education.' At the same time, 89 % of respondents indicated that they were subordinate to the CEO or to a director. Most of the respondents have as their field of responsibility a broad field of education – childcare, adult education, culture and social affairs – and they are subordinate to other managers. All, however, are in charge of municipal education.

4.2   Characteristics of School Board Members and Chairs

Lead Paragraph   The average school board chair is male and in their mid-40s. The board members are in their 30s, and the chairs in their 50s. Many chairs have served on boards for more than 6 years, while board members have served for a shorter period, the current term. Both chairs and members are publicly employed and educated slightly above the national average. While all board members are appointed by the municipal council, they belong to the political parties of the city council. In the recent election term, one party was over-represented on school boards, the Socialist People's Party. All of the members took on this post because they were personally interested in education, and often they were employed in education. The chair accepted the office because they saw it as a good position in which to exercise political power.

- *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*: The age of chairs is very equally distributed from 20 to more than 58 years, while members are generally younger, with half of them aged between 20 and 48.
- *Board seniority*: 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.
- *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 %[3] – 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,[4] since the percentage having completed only basic school education is lower (approximately 20 % compared to 30 %), while 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.
- *Reason for joining the school board*: When subjects were asked why they had accepted a position on the political board, two main reasons stood out. Firstly, that education was their personal interest – and often their 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 development in the municipality (approximately one-third of the members and chairs answered this).

4.3 Characteristics of School Leaders

Lead Paragraph   The average primary school leader is male and more than 56 years of age. They have been recently appointed from a teacher's position and with leadership training.

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

[4] http://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/befolkningens-uddannelsesniveau/befolkningens-hoejst-fuldfoerte-uddannelse.aspx. December 2012.

- *Age*: Half of the school leaders are older than 56 years (20–45 years: 22 % |
  46–55 years: 30 % | >56 years: 50 %).[5]
- *Gender*: 63 % were men and 37 % female.
- *Leadership seniority*: The number of very experienced school leaders is low,
  while the experienced and novice groups are large (0–10 years: 45 % | 11–20
  years: 41 % | >21 years: 15 %).
- *Education*: 95 % were trained as teachers, of whom 58 % have a further leader-
  ship training.
- *Position*: 97 % of respondents head basic schools (folkeskoler: primary and
  lower secondary, from kindergarten class through ninth grade).
- *Next-in-line chief*: area leader: 17 %, superintendent: 58 %, director of depart-
  ment: 13 %.

*Comments on Relations Between Superintendent, School Board and School
Leaders*
One might expect collaboration between these groups of municipal actors to be
easy, considering the social and cultural capital they bring to the collaboration, with
education and educational training as the shared professional background. This
comparison only holds, however, when taking the averages as a point of compari-
son. When going more into detail and emphasising strong tendencies, we would find
differences. More superintendents are now coming from other professional fields
(managerial fields); school leaders are increasingly subject to management training;
and the school boards are increasingly engaged in a broader field of institutions and
tasks, which could attract a politically more diverse group of candidates.

5   Networks

Superintendents indicate that they prioritise *meeting school-leader groups over
meeting leaders in the administration*. School boards are not mentioned in these sets
of responses, because superintendents apparently do not see them as leadership
groups. Nevertheless we chose to analyse data on superintendents networking with
administrative networks, school boards, school leaders and peers.

5.1   Municipal Networks

Lead Paragraph Superintendents' field of work is being enlarged to cover the
whole of children's lives from one through 18 years. They are also becoming
involved in municipal governance beyond their particular field of work, in order to

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[5] In a survey from 2001 (Moos 2001), only 23 % were more than 56 years, while 56 % were 45–55
years and 235 were 'young' leaders.

partake in shared municipal coordination and policymaking to which they are supposed to be very loyal. The feel they are autonomous with plenty of room for manoeuvre – as long as they engage themselves with budget and finances. Unfortunately they find exactly these tasks less interesting and meaningful.

Superintendents participate in several working groups or networks with the municipal CEO or director on the management of crosscutting and overarching municipal tasks. When they prioritise *relations with the municipality CEO*, this includes them in the municipal management and leadership over and above their initial field of work. Superintendents indicated the following priorities: (1) I can also influence decisions outside my resort, education; (2) I see myself as part of the overarching municipal administration; (3) My main task is to lead development of the quality of education; (4) My main task is to defend my resort; (5) I see myself more as the representative of the ministry of education. The answers to these two questions clearly show that superintendents see themselves as members of the municipal administrative leadership, with prior loyalties to the municipal education and administration.

The main purposes reported of meetings with superiors and peers in the municipal administration are: coordination and producing development and coherence in the whole sector, across sectors and across the whole municipality. *These groups most often meet* once a month or every week.

Superintendents *participate in many* (*mostly between three and five*) *ad hoc municipal groups* in order to produce policy papers, administrative routines etc. Thus they experience being part of the municipal leadership when they participate in these overarching and coordinating meetings with leaders at several levels from several sectors.

5.1.1 Coupling with Superiors

As described by the superintendents, it seems that the formal couplings between themselves and their superiors are rather informal: Only 33 % of superintendents claim *they have a written job description*. The rest do not have one, but they indicate *that they are governed by*: my calendar, common sense, ad hoc tasks, firefighting, own judgements, tasks from the director, school leader approaches, political initiatives, etc.

Ninety-five per cent of the *respondents are assessed by their superiors*, annually (80 %) or every half year (11 %). Nine per cent are assessed by their political leaders. The main *reasons for assessment are*, in prioritised sequence: (1) in order to be accountable to known expectations, (2) in order to identify areas that need improvement, (3) to contribute to continuous political development, (4) in order to describe relevant goals, and (5) to identify strengths.

In answer to the question: '*How do you perceive the degree of your autonomy*?' 83 % replied in the two top categories, indicating that they feel they have plenty of room for manoeuvre. When reading the responses to other questions, however, it

seems that the feeling of autonomy is diminished because they have to prioritise most time for 'budget and finances' even if they find this *area less interesting and meaningful* in the section on superintendents' functions.

There is a weak tendency to see themselves as being *more policymakers than implementation-responsible/administrators*.

Comments on Relations Between Superintendents and Superiors
Superintendents collaborate and frequently meet with superiors in municipal networks or working groups. They feel that they have plenty of room for manoeuvre, also for acting as policymakers.

5.2   School Boards as Networks

Lead Paragraph School boards say that the two most important tasks for them are quality and curriculum, and structure and economy. Superintendents, on the other hand, expect school boards to develop and implement local initiatives and reforms, and to create conditions for collaboration between schools. However, the actual work of school boards differs from both sets of expectations as the most frequently mentioned items in meetings are economy, resources and budget issues, and information from the educational administration. Meeting practice is closer to the chairs' expectations than to those of superintendents.

There seems to be a political wish to have the board oversee the whole range of upbringing and education, from year 1 to year 18, and across the whole spectrum of daycare 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 daycare and primary schools are part of the municipality's responsibility. Chairs and members of the school boards observe that *many boards now have a wider area of responsibility*, as shown in the range of titles for the board: 66 % of titles mentioned by the chairs and 78 % of those mentioned by the members have the word 'children' in the title of the school board. Forty-two per cent 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 education and lives.

Issues most frequently processed in school board meetings 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 individual problems. It is in line with the forecast, expressed in the answers to the question: *Which – three – issues/areas are the most important for the board for this office period*?

1. *Quality and curriculum*: student learning, learning environment and teaching (board members 33 % | chairs 15 %)
2. *Structure and economy*: structure of schools and institutions, economy (board members 27 % | chairs 34 %)
3. *Daycare and youth education*: bridging the transfer between institutions (board members 14 % | chairs 21 %)
4. *Inclusion* of all students in schools and institutions (board members 12 % | chairs 12 %)
5. *Special needs education*, *coherent politics* (children age 3–18) and ICT (board members 14 % | chairs 20 %)

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

The focus on structure certainly reflects the fact that, at the time of the survey, political boards were in their second election term and had recently experienced extensive municipal restructuring. Additionally, 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.

We can see that superintendents have clear *understandings of what the school board expects from them*. The expectations were ranked almost at the same level: to develop and implement local initiatives and reforms; to create conditions for collaboration between schools; to evaluate the results of local initiatives; to collaborate with the political committee; to lead school leaders in their educational leading; to create changes that give better financial outcomes; to create changes that produce better results at national tests; to create conditions for collaboration with other municipal institutions; to develop and implement national reforms; to evaluate results of national reforms at local level; and to lead education (curriculum and teaching).

5.2.1 Influence

Lead Paragraph Both school boards and superintendents think they have a great deal of influence on the development of education in their municipality – even if economy is what they do in meetings. Both parties agree that the most important person on the school board is the chair, while the superintendent has only moderate influence on board decisions. When it comes to influencing schools and other institutions, school boards find themselves more influential than the superintendent, who in their view is not really competent to lead the dialogue with schools. It is worth noticing that superintendents identify school leaders as their most important network below school boards.

When asked about their perception of *the school board's political influence* '*upwards,' on municipal governance*, chairs and members believe they are indeed influential, and particularly so in strategic decisions and economic prioritising within their area of responsibility. Regarding the assessment of influence by the school board members and the chair on the board's decisions, the chairs feel they have a larger influence than do 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.

Superintendents find the following levels of *influence on local educational politics*: Politicians in our municipality are very interested in schools and education; Local quality assessments and evaluations influence decisions on committee; National quality assessments and evaluations influence decisions on committee; The chair of the Municipal Board has the biggest influence on educational politics; As the superintendent, I can influence the local educational politics.

The political interest in education in general and in quality assurance/assessment is high. This goes for both local initiatives and initiatives originating at national level.

When it comes to personal influence, superintendents point to the chair of the municipal board, the mayor. This could be an indication of a steep hierarchy in local governance: the top positions make the most important decisions, even if the structure of the political construction points to rather considerable decentralisations from the top down towards committees and their political members and chairs.

At the same time there seems to be an image of clear demarcation lines between the political actors and the civil servant: the superintendent.

The chairs and members of the school board think *the board is very important 'downwards'* 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. Both board members and chairs thus consider themselves to be important in the municipal development of the schools. On the other hand, both chairs and members think that the municipal school administration can exercise only moderate influence over the boards' decisions, and that the school administration is only moderately able to lead the dialogue with schools about quality reports, to suggest solutions on problems in the school sector, or to analyse the national tests. The board members and chairs do not hold the school administration in the same high esteem.

5.2.2 Board Processes and Procedures

Lead Paragraph Relations between the politically appointed school boards and professionally selected superintendents are changing at present, although expectations and rhetoric do not change: school boards are expected to engage in long-term strategies and development, and superintendents are expected to serve them as civil

servants. In real life, superintendent are taking more and more over, drawing up the agenda for the meeting, and of course being employed full time, whereas school board chairs can only spend 2–5 h preparing for each meeting, and members even less. Even if school boards claim that the most important sources of information are teachers and political colleagues, the fact is that the superintendent is the information channel to school board: all communication from schools (leaders, teachers, parents and students) is channelled through the superintendent and the educational administration. This is because the leadership of schools and other institutions is considered to be part of the administration to which they need to give total loyalty. None of the school board members and chairs has formal links to schools.

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, both chairs and members have a good knowledge of the schools. Ninety per cent of the chairs and 74 % of the members visit the schools a least once during the semester. However, we are unable to establish whether this is for private or professional reasons.

Political decisions in the school board are characterised by unanimity, to the extent that 61 % (nearly two-thirds) of chairs and 41 % of members say that decisions are unanimous. The difference between chairs and members can be explained by the fact that chairs often represent a majority on the board and therefore are more focused on the unanimous aspect than members, and that it is minority members that focus on the majority decisions.

Regarding who decides the school board's agenda for its meetings, the board members' answers are relatively clear: the decisions are increasingly being taken over by the administrative and judicial civil servants in the municipal administrations. Again, there is a difference between chair and member opinions, as 55 % of chairs and 35 % of members think the superintendent determines the agenda; however, a similar percentage in both groups (31 and 34 %) claimed that the chair decides. Municipal politics is becoming increasingly professionalised – or depoliticised – in the sense that elected members 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, 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, as the response rate for this question was very low, it is not possible to infer a great deal from these figures.

Comments on Superintendents' Relations with School Boards
The school boards' main tasks are seen as the economy, resources and budgeting, and secondly as structuring educational system and quality. Therefore they

influence politicians in this high-priority area. School boards and superintendents have differing views on superintendents' influence on school boards, but superintendents are seen to be gradually taking over more policymaking, especially when it comes to administrative and legal issues. Although school boards are further up in the political hierarchy than superintendents, they find that their relations with school leaders are more important than those with school board. School boards and superintendents have surprisingly diverse perceptions of many aspects of both parties' work and relations.

5.3   Networks: School Leaders

Lead Paragraph   Superintendents indicate that to them the most important actors in the municipal governance are school leaders. This is confusing, as there is a strong tendency to have superintendents taking care of multiple institutions and thus unable to collaborate closely with all of them. An explanation could be that the survey respondents are responsible for education and thus subordinate to the director of a wider field of institutions. This is consistent with them having no governance level between themselves and school leaders. The main purpose of the collaboration is giving support to school leaders and leaving school leadership to them. There are few direct connections between superintendents and teachers. Superintendents meet frequently with school leaders to give information from the municipal level and to discuss school development, continuous professional development and student development. School leaders are rather satisfied with these meetings, the annual or so conferences, and the support on administration, budgeting, legal issues, etc., that they can get from the superintendents' administration. They indicate that school boards primarily expect them to focus on budget, secondly on implementing national legislation, and thirdly on their capacity to lead education in their schools.

School leaders are the primary subordinates to or collaborators with superintendents. They describe their collaboration in terms of educational leadership, sparring, and fostering school development strategies and student learning. They communicate person to person in mentoring and sparring processes. And they support school leaders in thinking strategically.

5.3.1   Relations and Tasks

Relations between superintendents and school leaders are direct, as only 7 % of the superintendents said there is another *level of leadership between themselves and school leaders*. In other research projects (Lejf Moos and Kofod 2009), we hear school leaders in the new, larger municipalities complain that the ongoing and direct communication between school leadership and local administration/superintendent has been transformed into written communication. They complain that they seldom

have the chance to meet with the superintendent because they have so many institutions to look after. They therefore write many policies and principles.

School boards expect superintendents to play the active part in quality assurance with schools. When the administration finds that a school is underperforming, the superintendent is expected to take it up with school leaders. School boards can examine and discuss the situation, but are not active compared with school leaders.

Superintendents prioritise the face-to-face interactions with school leaders in the following areas: communication and sparring, but also work in respect of the school, municipal organisation, and the quality reports. The communication builds on the fact that both parties are educational professionals. Respondents were asked to write *the three most important tasks in their work with school leaders*:

- Priorities 1 and 2 by far surpass the rest. The focus here is on communicating with school leaders and on their development. Superintendents here indicate their interest in guiding the leaders of schools and giving them support.
- Priorities 3–6 are high priorities, focusing on developing the school organisation and school district, attitudes and resources. Sixth is working on the quality reports (we shall come back to this topic in a special section).
- Priorities 7–11 are middle-tier priorities and are rather mixed. They include: working environment, political decisions, strategies, decision-making and operations. These are issues of importance to school leadership on a general level and revolve around the question what the municipal administration can do to support development in schools.

Leading school leaders with respect to student outcome is done through accountability instruments and social technologies such as tests, quality reports and 'best practice,' and also through continuous political development.

One may wonder why the item 'Making teacher focus' is so low on the list. A number of superintendents made remarks on this: this is not my responsibility, it is the responsibility of the school leader, they write. The ninth priority, 'Making use of research,' indicates that the contemporary trend to focus on 'evidence-based practice' may not have reached this level in the educational system. Superintendents indicate that the focus is a mix of general structural, school and personal development on the organisational level. There is no focus on individual student learning, but on the means by which school districts can influence learning: that is, through supporting and organising the professionals and the frames for learning.

5.3.2   Forms of Relations

Superintendents do much of their work in meetings with subordinates (school and other institutional leaders), peers (other superintendents and leaders at the same level) and their superiors (municipal top managers, political leaders).

Meetings with subordinates are:

1. Groups with school leaders and leisure-time institution leaders (32 %)

2. Groups with school leaders (30 %)
3. Groups with school leaders and middle-level leaders in the administration (22 %).

The most *important tasks in those networks* are: strategy and development, coordination and collaboration, followed by operations and development, sparring and exchange of experiences, and, at the bottom end, the development of learning and teaching: 'With the main task to:....' These groups meet every week (13 %), every 2 weeks (26 %), once a month (57 %), or less frequently (2 %): '*How often does this group meet*?'

An overall picture of the interaction between school leaders and their superintendents is that the day-to-day operations and strategies are taken in regular meetings, while the deeper educational discussions are taken in infrequent conferences.

When asked if a *school leader should be educated* at university level, 37 % answered Yes. Of those who were favoured a university education, half said a diploma and half a master's degree.

5.3.3   Leader Expectations of School Administration

School leaders respond that *they can have assistance from the municipal level* on these tasks: administration (60 %), budgeting (63 %), economic administration (73 %), health (67 %), law (96 %), and staff management (95 %).

School leaders find relatively high levels of expertise in the municipal administration. The highest levels are mentioned in the fields of law, school politics and school leaders' qualifications, and the lowest are in the analysis of learning outcomes and the development of curricula. There is a clear picture of administrations skilled in organisational matters, but less skilled in educational matters.

School leaders report that superintendents make use of initiatives that are supportive to their work. High priority is given to meetings, dialogue and leadership education. Interesting are a relatively small number of responses, saying: the superintendent does nothing. Superintendents call their school leaders to meetings. The majority of these involve giving information, and considerably fewer concern education, quality and development of competencies.

We asked school leaders which *factors the superintendents stressed when assessing school leaders' work*. Most frequently mentioned (71 %) was assessing whether the school leader was performing according to known expectations, the next (56 %) was school leaders' ability to implement the policies of the school board, and third (32 %) was contribution to their professional development.

5.3.4   Leaders' Expectations of School Board

School leaders perceive that school board expectations of them are very high (82 %) on keeping to budget, lower (58 %) on implementing new school acts, and lower still (53 %) on the ability to lead education in my school. Other expectations were given lower than 50 % scores.

School leaders themselves expect to perform at a high level in leading education (89 %), lower on implementing new school laws (47 %), and even lower on keeping to budget (42 %).

Comments on Superintendents' Relations with School Leaders
Superintendents see school leaders as their primary collaborators. Superintendents act as leaders/critical friends to school leaders, while coaching them on educational as well as administrative issues. Much of the quality control is distributed to school leaders (on student outcomes and teachers' teaching), giving personal advice and leadership education, and offering expert support from the municipal administration.

5.4 Networks: Peers

Lead Paragraph Many superintendents indicate that collaborating with peers is important, but they seem not to make much use of it.

Peer networks are described as important in day-to-day work. This is where new challenges, tasks and opportunities are discussed and explored. These networks could be described as learning communities, but they are rather loosely coupled.

Work in networks of peers is described as: professional development, inspiration, sparring, knowledge-sharing, community-building, and maintaining and discussing political issues. Many superintendents describe the experience as a tight working community or collaboration with peers. These could be the outlines of professional learning communities bound together by a shared repertoire, shared tasks, and shared aims.

Two peer networks are mentioned most often: the superintendent association, and the superintendents in the region. Here superintendents find professional development, inspiration, sparring, knowledge-sharing, community, meet the politicians and discuss political issues: '*Are you a member of networks that work with school/educational issues*?'

On a scale from 1 to 6 (from Do not agree to Fully agree) superintendents were asked *how they profited from meetings with peers*. Some results are here the sum up of replies agree categories 4–6 (the high end):

1. 48 % responded that they 'experience a tight working community with peers'
2. 36 % responded that they 'collaborate with peers on many issues'
3. 30 % responded that they 'often contacted other superintendents to get advice'
4. But only 16 % positively answered the question: 'The collaboration with peers is more important than the collaboration with local actors.'

Comments on Superintendents' Relations with Peers
Support from peers from outside the municipality is valued very highly by superintendents, except for 16 %, who rated it less highly than collaboration with local actors.

6   What Are the Superintendent's Motivational Forces

Lead Paragraph Most often superintendents attribute the greatest importance to general policy and planning issues (political issues, development of schools, school development, budgeting and the generation of goals), and less attention to day-to-day issues such as financing, pedagogy, etc. Simultaneously, superintendents strive to develop schools and pedagogy, as well as supporting school leaders in their handling of staff. Subsequently they find it important to achieve goals set by the local council or the school board, as well as to advise politicians. Pedagogy in the sense of school development is presumably seen as an important issue for a superintendent, while in the sense of day-to-day practice it presumably is not.

In answer to the question what was their *most important task as superintendents*, popular answers were: development of the school and the pedagogy in use (48 %), management of school leaders and supporting school leaders' handling of staff (38 %), the achievement of goals set by the local council (30 %), and advice to politicians (32 %).

In answer to the question what were the *most important tasks for the chairman of the school board*, the most chosen options were: achieving the general objective and school politics, supporting and monitoring the school structure and overall school development, and managing negotiations in the school board.

Comparing answers from the *superintendents* in which they point out the most important tasks, the most time-consuming tasks and the most popular tasks, the following choices come up as the most frequent, all chosen by 14–18 % of the responses:

Most important	Most time-consuming	Most interesting
Development of schools	Budget and financing	Development of schools
93 %	95 %	97 %
Political issues	Development of schools	Pedagogical leadership
92 %	93 %	97 %
Planning and generating goals	Planning and generating goals	Political issues
90 %	92 %	93 %
Budget and financing	Political issues	Planning and generating goals
86 %	90 %	88 %

As becomes clear in the table, the three lists show distinct but very similar patterns. Political issues, work with development of schools, and planning and generating goals appear on all three lists, while budget and financing is in the top four regarding importance and time consumption, but not interest. On the other hand, pedagogical leadership appears in the top four interesting issues, but not in the top four issues which are important or time-consuming.

Comments on Importance, Time Consumed and Degree of Interest Ascribed by Superintendents

The table shows how *political issues* are ascribed greater priority when it comes to importance than when it comes to time allocation and – especially –interest, while pedagogical leadership only figures among the top four in the 'Most interesting' column. These few examples from the three lists indicate how superintendents work particularly with more general, long-term and strategic issues rather than more day-to-day issues. They also indicate a kind of tension between the three different lists: budget and financing, for example, is fourth on the list of importance, but first on the list for most time-consuming, yet does not figure on the list for most interesting. In an ideal world one might claim that the three lists should be identical. In this way there would be agreement between the importance, the time needed and how interesting an issue was. That this is only partly the case might indicate a tension between what is personally interesting for a superintendent and what is politically and organisationally necessary for an organisation.

Part of the tension might have to do with the fact that what the superintendent considers to be necessary can conflict with what (s)he considers to be interesting. Most superintendents were trained as teachers and could thus be expected to have schools and pedagogy close to their heart, while their relation to issues like administration and finance might be more on a need-to-know basis.

6.1   How to Bridge the National and Local Levels

Lead Paragraph Among the various national school reforms, the superintendents point to the school quality report as that which influences their work the most. Additionally, they tend to agree that national quality assessments and evaluations affect decisions in the school board, which is why they must be pleased that they do not find it difficult to motivate school leaders to work on such issues. School leaders are satisfied with how superintendents guide work on development of schools. When it comes to future reforms, the superintendents seems to prefer a higher degree of local influence on such issues.

Few of the superintendents experience that their work has been affected by international tests and assessment of knowledge. Few superintendents find it difficult to motivate the school board to make changes which originate from national decisions.

A majority of *superintendents tend to agree that national quality assessments and evaluations affect decisions in the school board.*

A little more than half the *school leaders assess that superintendents are giving good and competent guidance to school leaders* in their governance and in the work with development of schools.

Asked to *prioritise national school reforms according to the importance* each reform has for their work as superintendents, superintendents replied that the most significant resources are: the school quality report (61 %), pupil plans (26 %), the national tests (21 %), and political demands on youth education for all (14 %).

It is thus by far the *school quality report* that is assigned the greatest importance for their work.

Asked to point out *future reforms they would like to see* implemented, superintendents' answers are distributed over quite a range of possibilities. The most popular of these are: a higher degree of autonomy for the local administration and the school (16 %), the abolition of the concept of the school class (14 %), a focus on coherence and entirety (14 %), and the comprehensive school (11 %).

Comments on Wishes for Future Reforms
The abolition of the school class as we know it (around 30 pupils in a class) might add flexibility in planning teaching, since the teacher–pupil ratio could then be varied quite a bit more than is possible at present. In the Danish debate some argue that this might turn out to be a way to cut back on funding even further than today. Others argue that increased flexibility in planning would make it possible to invite interesting people from outside the school for just a single lecture, because a large group of children could profit.

Overall, the answers above indicate a general interest in decentralised influence on the school, which might indicate that local administrations both in the municipality and in individual schools experience the cost–benefit ratio as being to schools' disadvantage. This could indicate that schools and municipalities feel that value added does not correspond with the resources needed for the implementation of these initiatives and reforms.

6.2 What Do the Superintendents Prioritise?

Lead Paragraph Superintendents find it important that the chairman of the school board and the school leaders do manage overall objectives, and that they are effective in setting directions and implementing policies concerning the schools. Likewise, they find it important that school leaders care for the school structure and for school development. As part of this endeavour, the superintendents expect school leaders to chair and to set the agenda for work in the local school board for their specific school.

According to the superintendents, *the most important tasks* (*picked by at least 10 %*) *for the chairmen to attend to* were: the management of overall objectives,

directions and policies, development of the general school structure, and chairing negotiations in the local school board, including setting the agenda.

When we asked the superintendents '*What are the most important tasks which chairmen of the school boards expect you to take care of*?' the same tasks as above were the most popular. In other answers, fewer respondents noted issues such as dealing with complaints, producing unbiased and professional presentations on issues which are part of the political agenda, being well informed on what is going on, following up on specific single issues, being aware of the relation between citizens' needs and the politics pursued, and organising inspections of schools.

Our research identified five important tasks for superintendents. We asked them to prioritise these tasks, from the most to the least important:

Implementing the visions, tasks and goals of the organisation in order to facilitate employees realising them	36 %
Anchoring political expectations and clarifying the local achievement goals	32 %
Working to implement the organisational changes necessary for employees to be able to do their jobs effectively	30 %
Consulting with, shaping and actively leading the professional staff	23 %
Supporting others in performing their work by providing them with necessary materials and resources	11 %

Comments on Superintendents, School boards and Chairmen of Local School Boards

For the superintendents, the important issues for school leaders to address are those issues connected to the particular school. That is, the adaptation and implementation of overall objectives, directions and policies, as well as the suitable development of the school structure, chairing negotiations in the local school board, and setting the agenda. Given that a school leader is normally leader of a specific school, while the superintendents lead all schools in the municipality, these expectations are hardly surprising. In the present management structure, the superintendent cannot, and is not supposed to, interfere directly on the school level.

7   How Superintendents Get Information/Knowledge

Lead Paragraph The most important source of information on the real situations on schools and on school leaders' and teachers' circumstances is meetings and conferences with school leaders in the municipality. Most superintendents participate in or arrange such meetings on a regular basis.

Most *superintendents meet school leaders regularly* in internal conferences on day-to-day matters (S48), in which sharing of information is part of the formal programme.

Insight into the real situation in each school is seldom the primary reason for dialogues, networking, mentoring and counselling, but they contribute to it. So the fact that almost every superintendent has one to three management groups, as became clear above, does contribute to gaining insight. That many *superintendents discuss a series of issues with superintendents from other municipalities* also makes a contribution.

Comments on How Superintendents Gain Insight
As is made clear above, the most important – and perhaps therefore the most used – source of information is the regular meetings with school leaders and politicians.

8   Accountability and Responsibility

In what follows, we give an account of the superintendents' own perceptions of the actors or bodies to whom they feel accountable and what they feel responsible for. The chapter is divided into three paragraphs:

8.1   Issues Delegated by Politicians to the Superintendent

Lead Paragraph Not surprisingly, the closer the issue to the school's core business – the teaching and democratic *Bildung* of children – the more the professional issues are stressed.

Superintendents, board members and chairs are concerned with overarching matters such as the school economy, organisation, and leading the lower layers of the schooling system in the municipalities.

8.1.1   Superintendents

To the question '*How many municipal leadership groups are you presently a member of*?' – they may produce policy, action plans, administrative routines – the superintendents answer that they participate in several (for most, three to five) ad hoc municipal groups in order to produce policy papers, administrative routines, etc. Superintendents experience being part of the municipal leadership when they participate in these overarching coordinating meetings with leaders at several levels from several sectors.

In response to the question *What does your chair expect of you*? the superintendents' priorities are:

1. To take care of complaints
2. To give a professional description of issues to the committee and to prepare clear and worked-through descriptions for the committee agenda

3. To give a good orientation about what is going on in the district and to follow up on individual cases
4. To establish links between the politics and citizens' needs
5. To monitor schools
6. To work loyally to implement the political decisions in dialogue with the leaders of institutions.

The second and third priorities are important leadership tasks. This is where decisions are prepared, because the *premises* for decision-making are being constructed, indicating the field and the persons where political decisions can be made. The next priorities point to the *connection* phase of the decision-making processes: what is happening to decisions, and who is monitoring and leading these processes.

Seeing decision as a three-phase process (constructing premises, decision-making, and connecting), we can see that the superintendents assign themselves – or are assigned – very important functions in relation to policymaking (Moos 2009), much in line with the preparation for legislation and regulations made in formal and informal networks as described by superintendents.

8.1.2   Board Members and Chairs

Chairs and members of school boards find that many of them have recently acquired wider areas of responsibilities, as shown in the range of board titles (1): 66 % of the titles mentioned by chairs, and 78 % for members, have the word 'children' in the title of the school board. Forty-two per cent of the chairs and 45 % of members mention the title as 'something' with school or education. These are rather broad denominations, signalling that the *board in general covers the whole range of children's lives and education.*

There seems to be a political desire to have the board oversee the whole range of daycare and school life from years 1 to 18: children and family, daycare, leisure time, and secondary schooling. Preschool and primary school schooling activities are mentioned particularly, as might be expected because daycare and primary schools are part of the municipalities' responsibility.

8.2   *Mediating*

Lead Paragraph On the whole the superintendent sees his/her role predominantly as the manager of the municipal schooling system. The most important tasks are taking local initiatives, collaborating with the committee, and keeping track of the financial sides of the schooling system in order to optimise the financial situation.

The school leaders see themselves and their roles more as a mixture of manager and leader. It seems important that the school leaders can do both.

8.2.1   Superintendents

All the items were ranked very high – from 85 to 48 % – with very few differences in answer to the question '*What does the committee expect of you*?'. The answers were: to develop and implement local initiatives and reforms; to create conditions for collaboration between schools; to evaluate the results of local initiatives; to collaborate with the political committee; to guide school leaders in their educational leading; to create changes that give better financial outcomes; to create changes that produce better results in national tests; to create conditions for collaboration with other municipal institutions; to develop and implement national reforms; to evaluate the results of national reforms at local level; and to lead education (curriculum and teaching).

8.2.2   School Leaders

The following three questions are assessed by the school leaders on a Likert scale of 1–6. We focus on the two highest-scoring answers to the question '*How high do you find the demands made of you by the school board in the following fields*'? The school leaders answer: managing the school budget (99 %), implementing legislation (78 %), and leading the education in my school (76 %). The two highest scores focus on the formal roles of the school leader as the financial and judicial officer responsible for the school. That is in accordance with the trend in recent years for responsibility to be rolled out from the municipal administration to the school. The third issue mentioned by school leaders concerns the their role as the professional responsible for the content of the school, the instruction.

To the question '*How high do you experience the state*'*s expectations of you as being* as leader in the following fields?' the school leaders answer: implementing legislation (69 %), implementing revised curricula (78 %), and leading the education in my school (76 %). Not unsurprisingly, answers to this question emphasise formal issues because the distance (both physical and mental) between the particular school and the state is greater than that between the school and the committee or municipal administration with responsibility for oversight of the school leader. The interesting thing is, however, that as many as one-quarter of the answers stress the local pedagogical issue regardless of this distance.

To the question '*What work tasks do you yourself consider the most important* in your present position?' the school leaders answer: leading education in my school (99 %), developing the inner organisation of the school (93 %), and providing support for needy students (93 %). The highest- and lowest-ranked answers concern the school leader's role as leader of the content of the school and manager of student achievement of their goals, whereas the third question concerns their role as school

manager responsible for keeping the school's organisation in order. So the school leaders' expectations of themselves stress both their role as manager and that as leader of the school.

According to school leaders, what are expectations on their work?		
School leaders' expectation of themselves	School Board expectations of school leaders	State's expectations of school leaders
Leading the educational work in my school	Managing the school budget	Implementing new legislation on schools
99 %	99 %	83 %
Developing the inner work organisation to achieve higher effectiveness	Implementing new legislation on schools	Implementing revised curricula
93 %	78 %	74 %
Ensuring that students who are unable to achieve the goals are given adequate support	Leading the educational work in my school	Leading the educational work in my school
93 %	76 %	51 %

8.3   Important Tasks

8.3.1   Superintendents

Regarding the relative importance of tasks, the superintendents' responses to the question '*Research has identified five very important tasks that superintendents fulfil*' *are* quite similar to those in: The superintendents were asked to rank the statements on a scale from 1 to 6, with 1 as the most important. Weighted numbers were produced. The superintendents answered: 'Anchoring political expectations and make local results clear,' 'Implementing visions, tasks and goals in order to support their implementation by staff,' 'Entering into dialogue, forming and leading the professional staff actively,' 'Implementing changes in the organisation needed for staff to work effectively,' and 'Supporting others' performance by supplying material and resources.'

The priorities were very close, with no significant differences. But the items are also very close. The first stated priority concerns relations between the political and the professional level, whereas numbers 2–5 concern relations between the municipal administration and school level, or between superintendent and administration staff. All items received high scores.

8.3.2 Board Members and Chairs

Board members and board chairs answered the question: '*Which issues are the most important for the board for this office period*'? This was an open-ended question, which we have categorised into five groups:

1. *Quality and curriculum*: student learning, including learning environment and teaching (board members 33 %, board chairs 15 %).
2. *Structure and economy*: reforming the structure of schools and daycare institutions, economy (board members 27 %, chairs 34 %).
3. *Daycare and youth education*: bridging the transfer between institutions (board members 14 %, chairs 21 %).
4. *Inclusion* of all students in schools and institutions (board members 12 %, chairs 12 %).
5. *Special needs education*, *coherent politics* [attention to children age 3–18], *and ICT* (board members 14 %, chairs 20 %).

Board members stress quality and the curriculum twice as often 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 political boards were in the second election period, following the big municipal restructuring. Government has also cut funding to municipalities for recent years, so finances are a challenging issue for the political board. Therefore much detailed structuring and planning was needed at this level.

The quality reports are in general to a lesser extent a pretext for the school board to act in relation to the schools, even if board members score on average 4.1 on a scale from 0 to 6 and believe slightly more strongly than board chairs (score 3.9) that the quality reports do in fact lead to initiatives. That may be a sign that initiatives in relation to the schools are left with the superintendents. There is on the other hand broad *agreement about the valuable information content and clarity of the schools' quality reports*.

Comments on Type of Issues Delegated by Politicians

The superintendents' function can be seen as the implementers on the political boards' behalf: it is the superintendent's responsibility to see to it that political decisions are implemented at the operating level of the administration. Accordingly they function as a connection joint between the political level and the operative core of the municipal educational system, the schools themselves. It is thus their predominant role to have overall view of the administration and not be too involved with daily detail (which is the task of the school leaders). It does however seem important that school leaders can both handle the professional side of leading their schools and be able to cope with administrative and strategic tasks. The school leaders must be both managers and leaders of their schools. This can be seen as a recognition that

being effective in attaining the school's professional goals is no longer considered sufficient for a school leader. There is likewise a demand for the school leader to be efficient and streamline the school's organisation, so that it too can achieve economic efficiency.

8.4 Relations Between Control and Autonomy in the Chain

Lead Paragraph The superintendents see school leaders as having a rather direct connection with superintendents, and consequently *see* school leaders as having a rather large degree of autonomy. The board members believe that there are certain areas – in the development of the school – where they feel they have influence. On the other hand they feel that the state interferes too much in local matters, even if the school system is decentralised and the administration has sufficient competency. The school leaders feel moderately independent, but many think that others than themselves decide how they use their time.

8.4.1 Superintendents

Relations between superintendents and school leaders are direct, as only 7 % said there was an intermediate level of leadership between themselves and school leaders. It is worth noting here that in other recent research projects (Moos and Kofod 2009), school leaders in the new, larger municipalities complained that the ongoing direct communication between school leaders and local administration or superintendent had been replaced by written communication. They complained that they seldom had the chance to meet with superintendents because, with so many institutions to look after, superintendents were occupied producing documents on policies and principles.

To the question '*Give examples of the two most important leadership groups in your work*,' superintendents answer that the most important tasks in those networks are: strategy and development, coordination and collaboration, followed by operations and development, sparring and exchange of experience and, at the bottom end, development of learning and teaching.

To the question '*Give examples of the two most important leadership groups in relation to your work*,' superintendents answer that they see these meetings as important, along with meetings in the administration with peers and superiors.

When replying to the question: '*How do you perceive the degree of your autonomy*?' 83 % of the superintendents replied in the two top categories, indicating that they feel they have plenty of room for manoeuvre.

8.4.2 Board Members and Chairs

Answers to questions about their influence reflect that there is a widespread feeling among municipal politicians that *the state interferes too much in the decentralised public school*. In recent years the state level has centralised a number of issues at the expense of the municipal levels' influence, particularly regarding centralised tests, comparisons between schools through published examination results, and numerous alterations to the law of the comprehensive school – 18 within 10 years. These issues suggest that there are tensions between the state and the municipal level regarding educational issues.

Both chairs and members of the school board estimate that the school administration has sufficient competency to lead the development of the schools and that the superintendent is competent in directing the school leaders' school development work.

The only *issue where there seems to be some dissatisfaction* is that answers point to the assessment that school leaders do not create good conditions for high-performing students (4.4 for chairs and 4.2 for members on the 0–6 points scale). This situation may reflect the tradition of a very egalitarian Danish school system, where traditionally there has been much more focus on students with special needs than on those who perform at a high level.

It seems that owing to the decentralisation of responsibility to schools that is typical for Danish municipalities, chairs and members of the 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. In this model the school system is administratively run by a board of managers as the top administrative management, which conducts strategy, coordination and development. The responsibility for day-to-day business is delegated to the schools (Christoffersen and Klausen 2012).

The open-ended question *In which cases should the political board monitor the work of the superintendent*? gave the following picture. The number of statements within all categories are very, very close – for example, 26, 22, 21, 20, 18. The highest 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* were fourth. This fourth category reflects the fact that many 'new' municipalities closed down schools or restructured some of them into department schools located in several premises at some distance from one another as a consequence of the municipal reform in 2007. Fifth priority was occupational *environment* for teachers and students.

8.4.3 School Leader

To the question '*How do you experience the school leader's degree of independence in the following situations*?' the school leaders answer: decisions concerning the inner organisation of school (61 %), those concerning educational work (54 %), and

the prioritising of my work (47 %). The most astonishing finding is perhaps that almost half of the school leaders do not feel they are able to decide on their own prioritising of their work. They seem to feel steered from the outside rather than self-steered. The general image is that Danish schools are very autonomous, and these answers seem to contradict that image.

When prioritising statements on *leadership influences on student learning*, school leaders pointed to their influence on staff. When it comes to their direct impact on the students' professional progress, the school leaders apparently think that the impact of the teachers is more important than their own direct impact. School leaders' influence in this field is seen as indirect, by way of teachers.

Comments on the Relations Between Control and Autonomy in the Chain
The Danish school system is quite decentralised, which means that there is a lot of autonomy in the system. It is a widespread impression that the various layers of the system are able to act quite independently of one another, even if both boards/chairs and school leaders think that others interfere too much in their field and thus limit their (as they see it) autonomy.

8.5 To Whom Is the Superintendent Loyal?

Lead Paragraph The superintendents say that they are in charge of the educational system and therefore they are loyal to the administrative manager, and in some instances to the politicians on the school board. The board members and chiefs say that they are in a middle-manager position. That means that on the one side they are loyal to the politicians they represent, i.e. their loyalty is upwards, and on the other side they are loyal to the superintendents, with whom board chairs in particular frequently work closely. Most of the school leaders feel that their superior is the superintendent.

8.5.1 The Superintendents

Most of the superintendents have as their field of responsibility a broad field of education comprising childcare, adult education, culture and social affairs, and they are subordinate to other managers and to various political committees. The reason why relations to the political level are diverse is that some municipalities were restructured into management concerns or groups, with fewer political committees, fewer top managers, and more middle managers.

This means that nine out of ten superintendents have an administrative manager between themselves and the political committee. This is because one of the aims of the municipal restructuring was to give more power of decision to directors or superintendents, meaning that the political/administrative wish was to have 'strong leaders' who were not captured by the traditions, identities and cultures of the field

they were managing, but could fulfil their task with the entire municipality in view, as well as cooperation between institutions and employees, so as to profit municipal residents.

It is a clear tendency that most of those employed in the higher-level management posts are not educators by profession. These positions are gradually being taken over by professionals with an economic or legal background (Olsen 2008). The tendency can be seen as a case of homogenising public leadership – adding more management powers, and subtracting professional educational expertise.

The superintendents were asked to *indicate their perception of their own influence*: (1) I can also influence decisions outside my field, education; (2) I see myself as part of the overarching municipal administration; (3) My main task is to lead development of the quality of education; (4) My main task is to defend my field; (5) I see myself more as the representative of the ministry of education. The answers to these questions clearly show that superintendents see themselves as members of the municipal administrative leadership, with prior loyalties to the municipal education and administration.

The superintendents' answers to the question: '*Who is it important to consult when you make your decisions*?' can be categorised into three priority layers:

- *High priority*: the city council, the committee chair, school leaders, the mayor's administration, parent boards.
- *Middle layer*: parents, teachers, consultants, students, deputy committee chair, and local professional associations.
- *Low priority*: citizens, local lobbyists, local trade, and religious groups.

The priorities are clear: council, chair, school leaders, administration and parent boards – all of whom are in leading positions – are at the top.

Taken together, the image of superintendents that can be constructed is that they see themselves as policymakers, concerned not only with implementation ('implementation-responsible'), but also with autonomy, the expectations of the political chair, and the agencies or agents they find it important to consult. Here can see an image of civil servants who see themselves as much as policymakers as civil servants. They are centrally positioned when it comes to laying the foundations of decision-making, implementing decisions, and connecting practices to decisions. This finding may be surprising, given that only 11 % of superintendents are directly responsible to the political committee.

8.5.2   Chairs and Members

It is a general impression that the *chairs and members find they are governing at a middle level in the municipality*, with professionals located at intermediate stages between themselves and actors in schools and other institutions. This is a matter of economy, structures and priorities. At the same time, board chairs and members also occupy themselves with the welfare or well-being of the people they govern.

Although board chairs and members place great emphasis on *the superintendent's monitoring of the school leaders' work*, they themselves emphasise ad hoc questions over strategic questions. One interpretation could be that board chairs and members believe it is not 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 chairs believe this issue is a natural part of the superintendent's prerogatives and that they therefore should not interfere. Another interpretation could be that a majority of chairs and members think that in general there no problems concerning this issue.

Comments on Loyalty
It seems that the loyalty relations actually reflect the formal municipal school organisation. In other words, each layer in the school administration feels loyal to the next joint in the decision chain from their position.

8.6 Tendencies

It is no great surprise that Danish superintendents are hard to pin down for face-to-face meetings, for they have been assigned multiple titles and remits in the new municipal constructions, moving from clear, steep hierarchies with fixed positions, takes and relations to fluid networks with flexibility and mobility structures, positions, relations and tasks. Two reforms contributed to this development: the general drive towards efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector administration, and the structural reform since 2007. The municipalities were merged into larger units, with fewer institutions and more cross-area collaboration between educational institutions, daycare and leisure-time institutions, and cultural institutions. This was not only a consequence of the efficiency drive, but at the same time a trigger for intensifying the efficiency drive within municipalities. One effect of this tendency has been that superintendents are now more likely to be recruited from the field of general management than education.

The general governance structure is being transformed along New Public Management lines. Former chains of responsibility and governance from state to municipality to schools are being broken in the construction of a semi-autonomous sector governed through a number of mechanisms. Among these, 'management by objective' is an important feature; dividing administrations into principal units, producer units and consumer units (as in the Concern, Enterprise and Workplace model) with managerial relations is another; and transforming bureaucratic hierarchies to fluid networks is yet another. Following these trends there is also the tendency to replace human relations and communication with social technologies, for instance measuring by numbers. This tendency however has not completely penetrated the whole field of educational governance, because some of the technologies are governmental technologies intended to make the receiver take over full responsibility for his/her actions – the self-governance model that can be seen in governance

networks. This image is fluffy, because there are very many different structures and cultures in the field of municipal governance and management.

Superintendents are pulled or knit into various kinds of networks with superiors in the municipal administration, with politicians in the school board, with school leaders, and with peers. Superintendents tend to rate networks with institutional leaders as the most important. It is in these same networks with institutional leaders that they seem also to perform a major part of their tasks: to broker, bridge, mediate or translate political and administrative decisions to schools and institutions, and to ensure that these are accepted. As translation comprises its own interpretation and thus colours the message, superintendents have an important influence on school development and operation.

Many superintendents have experienced that they are now a rung lower on the ladder of the municipal hierarchy than previously by virtue of being subordinate to the director of section. They claim nevertheless to have influence on the school boards' political decisions, because they often write the agenda for the meetings and the background papers, and they provide professional information within the field to the board. These roles give them leeway for some level of interpretation, and thus influence.

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Chapter 3
Finnish Superintendents Are Striving with a Changing Operational Environment

Mika Risku, Pekka Kanervio, and Seppo Pulkkinen

Abstract When one considers Finland's education system through the 10-year curriculum reform cycle, slogans of trust and mild evaluation or results from international surveys on learning outcomes, one may think that Finnish superintendents' operational environment is placid and serene. The truth, however, is very different. For historical reasons, Finnish society is now undergoing many of the changes that, for example, the other Nordic countries already encountered decades ago. Of course, the same contemporary international trends which affect the other Nordic countries influence Finland as well, but because they do so in a nation that is in many ways in a different developmental phase, they often manifest themselves differently. This is what frequently makes Finland, and thus its superintendents, appear to be outliers.

Keywords Superintendent • Finland • Operational environment • Change • Relationship

1 Introduction

This examination of Finnish superintendents and their relationships with school boards and school leaders is based on a national research programme funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and conducted by the Institute of Educational Leadership at the University of Jyväskylä. The research programme started in 2008 and so far comprises five studies; those examining educational leadership in general education in Finnish municipalities as perceived by superintendents, school boards and school leaders are considered here. These three studies are also the first national studies outlining the institutions of superintendents, school boards and school leaders in Finland using the same research framework. In addition to fulfilling the national task, the studies are also part of the Nordic research programme exploring superintendents, school boards and school leaders, and share the same intentions

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and methodological designs as the studies conducted in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

The research programme is taking place at a time when Finnish society is experiencing radical changes that, for example, the other Nordic countries already encountered decades ago. Those changes, as well as their reasons and effects, will be discussed in the first part of this chapter. The second part will deal with superintendents as they perceive themselves and as they are seen by their school boards and school leaders. Particular emphasis will be given to superintendents' relationships with school boards and school leaders. The outline follows that of the chapters examining the same phenomena in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

For historical reasons, the operational environment and international trends in Finland appear to manifest themselves differently from the way in which they have developed in the other Nordic countries. Thus, this chapter places a lot of emphasis on the development of the operational environment. This approach, like the whole Finnish research programme, follows the framework of contingency theory, according to which, there is no best way to construct an organisation. The presumption is that different kinds of environments demand different kinds of solutions (Lawrence and Lorsch 1986; Mintzberg 1979; Morgan 1997). Therefore, in order to examine Finnish superintendency, one also has to examine Finnish society and its development.

2   Restructuring Municipalities and Local Education Provisions

Global trends affect both the overall development of society and the development of education systems, but according to contingency theory, the effects manifest themselves differently in various environments. Thus, it is necessary to first explore the overall Finnish context amongst the global trends, and then look at the local Finnish contexts within the national trends.

As part of the general development of society, education has been considered to have an essential role in the establishment of equality and the Nordic welfare state in Finland. Furthermore, equity in education has been regarded as the necessary prerequisite for education to succeed in its task. At times, the development of the education system has been at the core of social development, as in the 1960s and 1970s when the parallel education system was abolished and the comprehensive education system was implemented. On other occasions, different areas of public services have been at the forefront, as in the development of healthcare and social services over the past two decades.

It seems that the trend of the last two decades will continue in the near future. In terms of education, a major concern is the challenges created by the demographic and financial changes taking place in Finland. The population is aging and moving from the countryside into urban growth centres. Moreover, Finland has never really

recovered from the recession of the 1990s and is undergoing a massive structural change in its industrial life, with expectations of constantly tightening budgets. The number of schools and educational institutions has been and will be declining, and correspondingly, the unit sizes of schools and educational institutions are increasing in all forms of education from early childhood to higher education.

The recent developments are a result of Finland's earlier social development, which in contrast to the other Nordic countries, resembles that of many developing countries today in several ways, and lags decades behind the general Nordic development. The operational environment forms a significant basis for this lag. The evacuation of more than 400,000 people – about 10 % of the whole population – from the lost Province of Karelia after the Second World War made it impossible to have a similar demographic concentration in towns and cities as in the other Nordic countries in the 1940s and 1950s. That trend started much later in Finland, and the problems it has caused are still very much in focus in this country.

For a long time, Finland was ruled by other powers – Sweden from the twelveth century until 1809, and Russia from 1809 until 1917 (Jussila 2007; Lehtonen 2004). In the Swedish era, a well-organised and efficient state administration was established according to the Swedish model (Lappalainen 1991). On the other hand, during the Russian era, a strictly centralised state administration began to steer in a strict manner (Halila 1949; Sarjala 1982). The centralised state administration reached its peak in the 1970s, decades after Finland gained independence, which occurred in 1917 (Isosomppi 1996; Kivinen 1988; Sarjala 1982).

The last two decades have represented an era wherein the dismantling and restructuring of the state administration in Finland has been the dominating trend in the reshaping of its governance system. This process is far from complete, and various stakeholders are constantly trying to adjust themselves in relation to each other. In the dissolution process, the number of people working in the local educational administration in the 1990s decreased by 40 % (Hirvi 1996), and this trend is ongoing. The tasks of specifically local administration, however, have not diminished correspondingly. In fact, local authorities' tasks have been constantly expanding since the 1990s, and many municipalities have major difficulties managing their mandatory obligations due to their lack of personnel.

As in the other Nordic countries, in the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church laid the foundation for territorial, administrative and legislative structures, as well as for the education system in Finland (Kuikka 1992; Pihlajanniemi 2006). What is different about Finland is that unlike in the other Nordic countries, many of the territorial structures have still not changed much since this time. Changes which have been made in the other Nordic countries decades ago are now taking place in Finland for the first time. In Finland, the number of municipalities grew steadily until the mid-1940s, when there were 602 municipalities in total, of which 38 were towns, 27 were market towns and 537 were rural municipalities (Kuntaliitto 2009).

Concerning schools, the peak was reached in the 1950s and 1960s, when there were nearly 7000 basic education schools (Pohjonen 2013). The different kinds of municipalities experienced very different types of administration by the state until 1976, when both towns and urban municipalities were mandated with the same

rights, duties and tasks (Kuikka 1992; Pihlajanniemi 2006). It has been very challenging to change the municipal structures and school networks in Finland over the past few decades. In addition, the process is still very topical and arouses heated debates, in contrast to the other Nordic countries, where these changes took place decades ago. In Finland, the process is far from complete.

3 Transnational and National Developments and Trends

Three transnational developments and trends are particularly noteworthy concerning Finnish superintendents during the last three decades, namely democratic individualism, neo-liberalism and new public management (managerialism).

The European trend of democratic individualism in the 1990s had a significant influence on Finland's society and education system (Ryynänen 2004). Instead of using the term *democratic individualism*, one could also describe the trend as *decentralisation*, which is the term used in the other Nordic countries. Then again, Finland appears to be somewhat different from other countries, and the concept of democratic individualism seems to describe the Finnish case more explicitly than the simplistic concept of decentralisation. As Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) claim, Finland seems to represent a so-called *fourth way* which is not really a centralised or decentralised system, or even a compromise of the two approaches. Here, the education system is steered from the top, built from the bottom and both motivated and supported from the sides in novel ways.

With democratic individualism, Finland has radically moved away from state centralisation towards empowering municipalities and individuals to make decisions on issues which involve them (Ryynänen 2004). Finland totally rearranged the relationship between the state and municipalities in the 1990s, ensuring that municipalities would have constitutional autonomy and making them the main providers of public services. Municipalities can very freely decide how to organise themselves and the administration of their education provisions.

According to Ryynänen (2004), democratic individualism has radically changed how municipal administration is viewed in Finland. Rather than adopting one model of superintendency, for example, municipalities are expected to exercise creativity in repositioning the role of the superintendent to fit the needs of the operational environment. It is no wonder that it is almost impossible to find municipalities with identical modes of organisation, and that there are over 30 titles municipalities use for their superintendents, or directors of education as they prefer to be called in English (Kanervio and Risku 2009).

The 1991 legislation removed task lists for municipal education officials, including those for superintendents (Souri 2009). Moreover, the 1992 act completely removed the requirement for municipalities to have a separate office of the superintendent. According to Kanervio and Risku (2009), most municipalities have maintained their superintendents, but today, their roles are increasingly tailored to correspond to their operational environments, professional communities, funding

patterns and tasks. In 2008, 21 % of superintendents also served as school leaders. It seems that in the changing operational environment, the role of superintendents is shifting away from one of serving as municipal education managers, as stated in the 1945 and 1968 acts. Today, superintendents are becoming more integral parts of their municipalities' executive management teams.

Neo-liberalism has been involved in the public debate in Finland since the 1980s. In Finland, neo-liberalism is often regarded as a challenge to the welfare state (Rinne et al. 2002; Varjo 2007). This trend has influenced the municipal education provisions in several ways, such as in giving students the right to select their schools at all levels (Laitila 1999). In addition, how local education provisions and schools are funded and operate indicate strong influences of neo-liberalistic economic thinking. For example, more of the support services are outsourced either within or beyond the municipality. All of this has in part forced superintendents to function more as managers.

As a result of neo-liberalism in particular, the new public management perspective known as managerialism has increasingly determined public servants' roles in the past few decades. Municipalities have started to emphasise top-down decision making, strategic planning, data analysis and straightforward implementation, which often contradict local political processes. In the Finnish setting, managerialism can be seen as a result of the influences of both democratic individualism and neo-liberalism. One can also observe that managerialism may contradict the goals of democratic individualism in many ways, thereby creating tensions between the various actors. Finnish superintendents no doubt feel both the pressure to act as strong managers and the contradictions such pressures create in relation to democratic individualism.

3.1 Numbers/Indicators versus Political Decisions: Demography

Soon after the first superintendents started their work in the 1970s, Finnish society began to change in radical ways on a demographic, financial and ideological basis. All of these changes can be seen as global, but manifesting themselves nationally and locally in the Finnish setting. The changes have altered and continue to alter Finnish society, including the education system, municipal structures and local education provisions, as well as superintendency.

Concerning the demographic changes, one can conclude that the Finnish population is aging, like those in a great many countries. However, the pace of this shift is faster in Finland than in any other country in the European Union (Statistics Finland 2013a). The migration from the countryside to growth centres is a feature which Finland also shares with a lot of countries. Because of the resettlement of the Karelian people in the countryside after the Second World War, the urbanisation process started in Finland in the 1960s, which was much later than the same

phenomenon in the other Nordic countries, for example (Aro 2007; Ministry of Education 2007; Peltonen 2002; Statistics Finland 2007).

Demographic changes have created massive challenges how to maintain public services in the countryside and at the same time expand them in the urban growth centres. As one result of the demographic changes, the number of municipalities has finally started to decrease through municipal mergers with a view to establishing municipalities which are large enough to provide the necessary public services. Today, there are 320 municipalities (Local Finland 2013) and the state has made frequent attempts to further diminish the number (the latest HE 2013/31).

Another result of the demographic changes is that the number of schools has decreased radically, and this trend is ongoing. There are presently 2700 basic education schools, and municipalities are continuing to close their schools (Pohjonen 2013; Statistics Finland 2013b). In addition, the number of general upper secondary schools started to decrease in the last decade, presently numbering 400 (HE 2013/3; Honkasalo 2013; Statistics Finland 2013c). The government bill prepared by the Ministry of Education (2014) compelled all education providers of upper secondary education to apply for their licences by the end of October 2015. The criteria for these licenses were more demanding in these documents than the system presently in place, so it was anticipated that there would be far fewer but larger secondary schools in the near future. As an illustrative example of the turmoil in Finnish superintendents' operational environment, one can note that as one of its last decisions, the former Parliament decided to cancel the whole application process. Superintendents had thus worked in vain for almost a year to prepare an application process which was not implemented.

3.2 From Parliamentarianism (Political) towards a Market-Driven Structure (Market): The Economy

Concerning financial changes, in the 1990s, Finland experienced one of the most severe economic recessions since the Second World War. The recession was global, but manifested itself much more dramatically in Finland than in most other countries, and is still ongoing. As a result, education, health and social services have experienced major cuts (Aho et al. 2006; Peltonen 2002). Since the recession, Finland has struggled to return to its previous level of economic productivity, which has greatly affected the education system and society as a whole.

One of the effects of the economic problems is that the state has totally changed how municipal education providers are supported financially. At the time of the implementation of the comprehensive education system in the 1970s, the state paid 70–80 % of the actual operating costs of basic municipal education. The 1993 act shifted funding from actual operating costs to estimated, average per-pupil costs; schools are now funded based on the number of students they serve. At the moment, the state covers less than 30 % of the costs for comprehensive education and about

40 % of the costs for general upper secondary education. Municipalities are responsible for covering the disparity between state subsidies and the actual costs for the municipal education provisions. Further, the state subsidies are no longer earmarked for education; instead, municipalities can use them as they decide (Aho et al. 2006; National Board of Education 2013a; Souri 2009). According to Kanervio and Risku (2009), the decline in state subsidies has become a primary driving force for strategic planning and managerialism in municipalities to achieve greater efficiency.

The revised funding system for public services has forced superintendents to focus on acting as executive managers of their education provisions. In that role they have to obtain as much in the way of state subsidies as possible. In Kanervio and Risku's study (2009), the optimisation of the school network for that purpose became very clear. Furthermore, because the state subsidies are no longer earmarked and resources are scarce in all service areas, the competition for resources within municipalities is fierce. As a result, education, health and social services are all trying to adjust to the changes in their operational environments in order to provide optimal services, while at the same time fighting for the municipalities' resources. More of the support services in education are outsourced; this further complicates superintendents' work. Strategic planning and use of data to recognise ways of achieving greater operational efficiency have become central parts of superintendents' activities. Moreover, budget management seems to be their single most important task (Kanervio and Risku 2009).

3.3 De-Politicisation of School Strategy in Terms of Content and Resources: Not Really

In Finland, local schools have not been decoupled from municipal governance. A clear majority of schools providing primary or secondary education continues to be managed by local authorities. Furthermore, almost all (96.7 %) of the municipal education provisions function as profit-and-loss centres (Kanervio and Risku 2009). The superintendent has a central role in this operational environment.

The curriculum which was implemented in the comprehensive education system in the 1970s provided rigid instructions for its execution, stating meticulously what and how to teach; this had a devastating effect, turning not just superintendents, but also school leaders and teachers into blindly obeying civil servants. They were expected to confine themselves to implementing the national curriculum (norms), following instructions and reporting on how they carried out their duties (Hämäläinen et al. 2002; Isosomppi 1996; Nikki 2001; Sarjala 2008).

The curriculum reforms of 1994 and 2004 increased the superintendents' managerial role. They strengthened local decision making and enabled municipalities to respond more accurately to local needs, giving them freedom in terms of how to implement education programmes and supporting local management perspectives for the efficient planning, monitoring and reporting of student outcomes. All this

has also meant more work in relation to determining how to design, enact, evaluate and develop education at the local level. It has thus increased the managerial role of superintendents concerning education itself, too.

The state has not regulated the number of classes and class sizes in comprehensive schools since 1985 (Laukkanen 1998; Sarjala 2008; Souri 2009). The 1983 act abolished school inspections and pre-inspections of textbooks by the state (Kupiainen et al. 2009; Lyytinen and Lukkarinen 2010; Nikki 2001). Finns tend to argue that there is a lot of trust in the education system, but while there is a lot of evidence to support this argument, it is noteworthy that this trust is not blind – instead, an extensive systematic evaluation system was created by the Ministry of Education to evaluate how the education system is working. Education providers, and thus superintendents, are responsible for the local evaluation. Peculiar to the Finnish evaluation system is that it seems to focus on the system and processes using many-sided data, and to avoid simple comparisons and ranking. One can also suggest that the social technologies used for evaluation are milder in terms of an international comparison. The approach appears to be successful, as various international surveys have repeatedly indicated that the Finnish education system efficiently produces high-quality learning outcomes with little variation between schools.

3.4   The Changing Purpose of Schooling and Social Technologies

In the changing operational environment, Finns still tend to regard education as a key societal tool and have maintained and developed the Nordic welfare state with the help of education as a key goal. This was explicitly stated, for example, in the government programme for 2011–2015 (Valtioneuvosto 2011).

In order for education to successfully accomplish its task, learning in school and thus the provision of education in Finland must change radically, although the past PISA surveys have shown that the education provided in Finland is of a high quality. This necessity has its foundation in the demographic, financial and ideological changes taking place in Finland. In addition, new kind of knowledge and skills are required demanding schooling to be reformed as is made particularly clear in the 2016 comprehensive education national core curriculum reform.

Reforming learning at school and local education provisions has created an increasing need for superintendents to act as pedagogical leaders (Alava et al. 2012). The 2016 national curriculum reform processes, in connection with the strategic changes taking place in society and in the education system, require local education provisions and schools to change in ways which cannot be led by teachers or school leaders. Regional- and municipal-level change processes must take place wherein regions, local education provisions and schools have to reorganise themselves as communities learning novel ways to provide the education they are obligated to

deliver. The situation offers superintendents unique opportunities to create something new and sustainable, but also binds them to extensive challenges. As described in Sect. 3.3, this process is governed with mild social technologies seeking to avoid high-stakes external evaluation. The evaluation should provide diverse information and particularly guide the process of development.

According to Kanervio and Risku (2009), pedagogical leadership has an area in which Finnish superintendents have not done very much or even considered a core task, at least so far. Particularly, as the demands on superintendents to serve as general managers have increased and the numbers of municipal administrative personnel in education have decreased, superintendents have delegated a lot of their tasks to school leaders and teachers. Leading and managing student learning and school development seems to be at the top of those lists. Kanervio and Risku (2009), as well as Pont et al. (2008), argue that Finnish superintendents delegate pedagogical tasks to school leaders and teachers, thereby adding new dimensions to their work. This includes responsibility for managing school budgets, personnel and efficiency.

4 Municipalities: Their Composition, Positions and Relationship with the State Level

The relationship between the state and the municipalities, as it presently exists, was solidified in the 1995 Municipal Act (Pihlajanniemi 2006). It is fair to say that the repositioning of the relationship between the state and the municipalities in Finland has been so radical that the various actors are still struggling to learn how to deal with the new situation. In addition, the structures and processes are far from complete, but are in the process of establishing the correct forms and mutual balance.

As a result of the Municipal Act (Kuntalaki 1995/365), Finland is divided into municipalities whose autonomy is ensured in the Constitution. The primary task of municipalities is to enhance the welfare of their inhabitants and ensure their sustainable progress. Municipalities bear the responsibility to fulfil the tasks mandated by legislation mandates, but they can autonomously determine how to carry out the tasks.

Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) described the contemporary relationship between the state and the municipalities in terms of the Finnish education system as the fourth way. Here, the education system is steered from the top, built from the bottom and both motivated and supported from the sides. The government, the Ministry and the National Board of Education represent the steering from the top. They set the national goals and guidelines, based on which the constitutionally autonomous municipalities and schools design the local frameworks and provide the mandated education services building from the bottom. Municipalities and schools are motivated and supported both internally and externally, for example, by their staff and students, national and local evaluation and the research and training provided by

universities and other research and training institutions. Decision making is based on a constant dialogue between the various actors and includes a lot of autonomy at the various levels. Thus, the state cannot determine how the municipalities fulfil their legislative tasks as such.

At the moment, there are 320 municipalities in Finland. Although there have been a large number of municipal mergers over the years, the majority of Finnish municipalities are still very small and have difficulties completing the tasks mandated to them by law. Moreover, the demographic and financial changes of the past few decades have made it increasingly difficult to provide the legislated public services. Ideological changes, on the other hand, have radically altered the relationship between the state and the municipalities. Today, municipalities are the main providers of public services, particularly concerning education.

This shift has not been, nor is it now, unproblematic. The state still has the central role in societal guidance, development and decision making (Kanervio and Risku 2009; Laitila 1999). How the state manages its role in supporting municipalities is often given criticised, particularly in terms of the state's alleged custom of basing education policies and their set goals on theoretically ideal starting points rather than on the actual situations of municipalities and schools (Hannus et al. 2010).

Concerning the size of municipalities, Table 3.1 clearly shows how small the populations of most Finnish municipalities are, as well as the extensive variation between them. As the municipalities are the main providers of public services, their sizes matter when considering their capacity to provide their inhabitants with the expanding public services required by legislation. The solution the state has been suggesting in the last two decades has consistently been the same: Municipalities have to collaborate with each other more, and especially, merge with each other to be able to meet their legislative obligations.

The viewpoint of the municipalities concerning ensuring public services is consistent with that of the state. From the perspective of the municipalities, the state has been giving them more duties while providing them with fewer resources. Municipalities usually attempt to resist municipal mergers for as long as possible, but are prepared for equal collaboration with other municipalities, and especially to revise their own structures in search of the optimal organisation and greater efficiency. The basic municipal structure used to be similar to that presented in Fig. 3.1.

The basic municipal structure is quickly disappearing as municipalities rearrange their configurations and merge with one another. As municipalities have

Table 3.1 The size of municipalities (Local Finland 2013)

Population size	Number	Percentage
Less than 5000	139	43.4
5000–10,000	78	24.4
10,001–20,000	47	14.7
20,001–50,000	36	11.3
Over 50,000	20	6.3
Total	320	100.0

constitutional autonomy as to how to organise themselves and meet their legislative obligations, it is becoming more difficult to find municipalities with identical organisational charts. One thing that is clear is that municipal organisations are changing. Concerning municipal education provisions, in 2008, 94 % of superintendents thought that the way in which their municipalities provided education would radically change by the year 2015. The changes they anticipated included rearrangements in municipal structure, as well as collaboration and mergers with other municipalities (Kanervio and Risku 2009).

Developments which have occurred over the past few years have shown that the superintendents were accurate in their predictions. In practice, no municipality has been able to remain the same, and several kinds of change have taken place. A few observations can be made here. Both in terms of the municipalities and schools, one can note a continuous increase in size. The traditional functional organisation charts as presented in Fig. 3.1 will most likely soon be obsolete in many municipalities. Municipalities are being transformed into process organisations which are attempting to provide 'total service' to various age groups. Thus, for example, early childhood education has been removed from social to education services in legislation, and this was already done in practice prior to the legislative revision in most municipalities with a view to creating consistent growth and learning paths. Similarly, support services are knitted more tightly as part of education services to establish holistic processes for children and young people. This represents a lot of
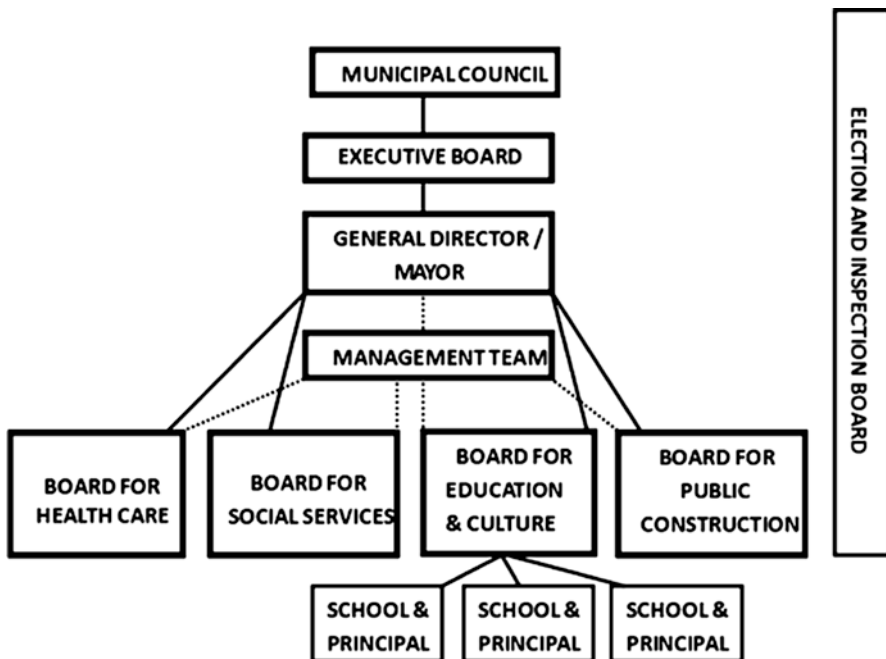

Fig. 3.1 A traditional basic municipality structure (Risku et al. 2014)

work for superintendents in reforming their local education provisions and leading and managing broader networks consisting of multi-professional units and teams. It is also likely that the status of the superintendent will change in the reforms and new networks. This change is explicitly illustrated by superintendents' views in 2008 when more than half of them either thought that their status would change in the future or could not form an opinion of it (Kanervio and Risku 2009).

5   Structures within Municipalities and Their Effects

Most Finnish municipalities are small, exhibiting two-level organisation structures where the superintendent serves the municipal school board without intermediaries and manages the local education provision as the direct subordinate of the municipal director and the immediate superior of the school leaders. The few larger cities have more complicated and often very fragmented organisation charts, with characteristics of a three-level governance model where intermediaries are present, particularly between the superintendents and school leaders.

Through municipal mergers, the size of municipalities is growing; thus, the need for intermediate levels in local educational provisions is also increasing. There still appears to be a strong fear of an increased number of administrators in Finland, which is a remnant of the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, it seems unlikely that the numbers of municipal education offices will be ramped up as such. Instead, levels of areal school leaders between the superintendents and school leaders can be found. The superintendent study of 2008 (Kanervio and Risku 2009) and school leaders study of 2013 (Kanervio et al. 2015b) clearly show this trend and progress. A similar development can be seen in schools: As their sizes increase, they are getting more assistant principals. In addition, the pressure to expand the qualifications for assistant and vice principals is growing (National Board of Education 2013b).

There is still a strong belief in local political decision making in Finland. Neither superintendents nor school board members anticipate that the status of municipal school boards will become weaker in future, nor do they think this will happen to the superintendents or school leaders. In addition, superintendents, school board members and school leaders all think that their work is appreciated and that they can influence decision making.

As most Finnish municipalities are small, superintendents generally have a very broad remit. Most likely, this will not change in the future, although the size of municipalities will grow. Transferring early childhood education to education services from social services and transforming functional organisations into process ones will in part guarantee this.

In Finland, legislation very explicitly refers to the obligations of education providers rather than directly mentioning the school leaders or teachers (see Souri 2009). Thus, in future, school leaders and teachers will also be serving the municipalities and not the state; thus, the superintendent will continue to be their superior.

Managerialism has had the strong effect that schools are increasingly acting as profit centres and school leaders are more accountable for their schools. Finland has had and still has one of the smallest variations between learning outcomes amongst its schools. The latest PISA results, however, indicated that this variation was increasing. There are already state interventions to reverse this trend through legislation, information and earmarked funding. How well the interventions will reach the municipalities and how the municipalities will react to them are still open questions. Likewise, the belief in the welfare state and how Finland attempts to maintain and develop it represent a test to be faced now and in the near future.

6 The Superintendent's Position, Function and Networks

When the Nordic research on superintendency began, the superintendent was defined as the one responsible for the whole local education provision (Johansson et al. 2011). According to this definition, the superintendent first appeared in Finland in connection with the implementation of the comprehensive education system in the 1970s, when local authorities first took over responsibility for the whole local provision of education. As part of that process, the 1968 Act on the Foundations of the Education System (Laki kunnan opetustoimen hallinnosta 1968/467) obligated all local governments to establish the office of the superintendent. The superintendent's position and main function was to act as the secretary of the local school board and as the manager of the local provision of education.

The follow-up 1969 Decree on the Directors and Secretaries of the Local Provision of Education (Asetus koulutoimen johtajista ja sihteereistä 1969/798) determined the qualifications for superintendents and increased their tasks. The qualifications consisted of several possibilities, but still included some common denominators. All superintendents were expected to have teaching qualifications, training in pedagogy and advanced training in educational administration, as well as administrative experience. The expanded task list comprised 16 main items which ranged from developing schools' parental collaboration to managing bureaucratic obligations provided by the national Board of Schooling as the National Board was called at the time.

The requirement for the office of the superintendent to be part of the local administration ended with the 1992 Act on Municipal Administration in Education (Laki kunnan opetustoimen hallinnosta 1992/706). This act did not make the office of superintendency redundant in municipalities or make local authorities disregard it. Rather, as stated above, almost all Finnish municipalities still have superintendents and although one can claim that their positions and functions still bear resemblances to those determined in the 1968 and 1969 legislation, a lot has also changed and continues to do so.

7 Who Are the Superintendents, School Board Members and School Leaders?

There has been little research on superintendents and school boards in Finland. Further, national studies on school leaders are not abundant. The first Finnish national studies focussing on superintendency (Kanervio and Risku 2009) and school boards (Kanervio et al. 2015a) were conducted by the Institute of Educational Leadership at the University of Jyväskylä and funded by the Ministry of Education. These two studies will serve as the basis for the examination of the characteristics of superintendents and school board members. Concerning school leaders, the examination relies on the studies by Risku and Kanervio (2011) and Kanervio et al. (2015b).

7.1 Characteristics of Superintendents

Lead Paragraph The average Finnish superintendent is as likely to be a man as a woman, is in his/her fifties and holds the title Director of Education and Culture. He/she is in his/her first job as a superintendent and has a written job description with a broad area of responsibility. He/she is a qualified teacher, holds a master's degree in education and often also has experience in principalship.

According to Kanervio and Risku (2009), the average Finnish superintendent is 51 years old and is as often a woman as a man in practice. However, it seems highly likely that the number of female superintendents will exceed that of male in the future. Male superintendents typically serve towns, while females serve rural municipalities. Because female superintendents serve smaller municipalities, their salaries also seem to be lower than those of male superintendents. The overall age distribution is 27–67. Over half of the superintendents are older than 50, and only a few are younger than 30. There are no significant differences between the genders.

The Finnish superintendent is most often called the Director of Education and Culture (65 %) or the Director of Education (24 %), and he/she has a permanent work agreement (84 %) and a written job description (90 %) determined by the municipal council. The job description almost always states that the superintendent is in charge of the local provision of general education as a whole, and is appointed by the municipal council (57 %) or executive board (33 %).

Most Finnish superintendents have a broad range of tasks. In addition to education services, many of them (65 %) are also in charge of cultural, youth, sport and leisure activities. The 2011–2015 government transferred early childhood education from social to education services, although in practice, many municipalities had already implemented this shift (see Haliseva-Lahtinen 2011), and this has expanded superintendents' task lists further. As a result of the constantly changing operational environment and scarce human and other resources, the work tends to include a lot

of uncertainty, disjointed tasks, problematic situations and haste. Due to such challenging goals and demands, many superintendents feel stressed at work.

Similar to the task definition of the 1945 and 1968 legislation, superintendents today most often serve the municipal school board and act as the manager of the local education provision. In the latter role, the superintendent acts as the superior of the municipal school office, school leaders and teachers. Amongst the administrative staff of the municipality hall, he/she is the direct subordinate of the municipal director and a member of the municipal management team. As municipalities grow in size, a middle layer of areal principals between the superintendent and school leaders can be seen to form.

Finnish superintendents are well educated. Most of them have a master's degree (81 %) and almost all are qualified teachers. Their majors vary, but because of the high number of primary schools, most school leaders have class teacher training, and thus majored in education. Over 80 % have worked as teachers and more than half have experience in acting as school leaders.

7.2 Characteristics of Municipal School Board Members

Lead Paragraph The average school board member is somewhat more frequently a woman and in her forties. She has children at school and serves on the board while they attend school. She works in the public sector and is better educated than the average inhabitant of her municipality. She is elected by the municipal council and because most Finnish municipalities are rural and small, she often represents the Centre Party. She is satisfied with her status as a board member and believes that she can influence local decision making on education.

Like superintendents, most municipalities seem to have their own municipal school boards and the boards seem to have a wide range of tasks, particularly in rural municipalities (Kanervio and Risku 2009).

Of the respondents of the school board survey, 58 % were women and 42 % were men. It seems that many join the school boards when their own children are at school and remain on the board while their children are attending school, that is, for 2 or 3 4-year terms. The most typical age category is 30–49 years. In addition, school board membership tends to be more common after retirement than at an early age. These results are in line with the information published by Tilastokeskus (2009) concerning the municipal elections in 2008.

Concerning school board members' occupational background, one can note a bias towards the public sector. In the 2012 sample, 43 % worked in the public sector and 38 % in the private sector. The figures do not correspond well with the statistics on people's employment (EVA fakta 2011), according to which 75 % of individuals work in the private sector and 25 % in the public sector. In the public sector, most school board members seemed to perform occupational tasks; the portion of respondents responsible for management tasks was significantly smaller. In the private

sector, the picture was more balanced. The overall percentage of private entrepreneurs on school boards (17 %) was somewhat higher than the overall share in the Finnish population (13 %), which may be due to the number of small rural municipalities with private entrepreneurs in agriculture in Finland.

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 % worked in industry and 8 % in trade.

Like Finnish superintendents, school board members seem to be fairly well educated. Of the 2012 sample, only 7 % had basic education as their highest education. Meanwhile, 30 % had completed either general or vocational upper secondary education, 36 % had an undergraduate degree, 22 % had a master's degree and 2 % had a postgraduate researcher's degree.

One can conclude that superintendents serve municipal school boards which have similar broad remits to their own. The boards comprise people who represent the various local parties, often have their own children at school, are quite well educated, like the superintendents, and tend to have public service experience rather than coming from the private sector.

7.3   Characteristics of School Leaders

Lead Paragraph The average school leader is almost as often a man as a woman, manages one school, calls him-/herself a principal and works in primary education. He/she is in her late forties, has a master's degree, and as the legislation requires, a teacher's qualification for his/her school form (comprehensive education, upper secondary general or vocational education).

There is an almost even gender distribution amongst school leaders, with a slight majority of women. According to the Finnish legislation, every school has to have a principal responsible for the operations of the school (Souri 2009). Most Finnish school leaders (80 %) are responsible for one school, but responsibility for two (14 %) or even more (6 %) schools is becoming more common.

Most respondents (79 %) refer to themselves as *principals*, which is also the term used in the legislation. However, nearly 16 % prefer the title *school director*, which is most often used by primary education school leaders of small schools. The rest are miscellaneous titles ranging from *responsible teacher* to *superintendent-principal*. Similar to superintendents, most school leaders (88 %) have a permanent work agreement. Most respondents of the school leader survey worked in primary education (55 %) followed by general upper secondary (19 %), unified comprehensive (16 %), lower secondary (15 %) and early childhood education (10 %). Most served municipalities (96 %), while only a few worked for private associations (3 %), municipal consortia (0.7 %) or the state (0.3 %).

The average age of school leaders is 46 years, which is significantly lower than that of superintendents. Most are between 40 and 60 (70 %). The range is between 27 and 68. Principals' qualifications include a master's degree, teaching qualifications for the relevant school form and sufficient work experience as a teacher. There are no detailed criteria for work experience, but most frequently, school leaders are recruited from amongst teachers with quite a lot of experience (Taipale 2012).

The leadership and management qualifications can be obtained in three different ways. Individuals may have the 25-ECTS university degree in educational leadership and administration, the 15-ECTS National Board of Education certificate in educational administration or merely be evaluated by the education provider having the necessary capacity for principalship (Asetus opetustoimen henkilöstön kelpoisuusvaatimuksista 1998/986).

Like superintendents, school leaders seem to be well-educated, with 79 % having a master's degree and 2 % a postgraduate researcher's degree. As a remnant of the pre–comprehensive education period, 20 % still have the undergraduate degree or class teacher's degree. As most schools are primary schools, education is the most common major (57 %). The majors of school leaders varied quite a bit in the survey, with history (9 %), home economics (6 %), the native language (5 %) and mathematics (4 %) at the top. Slightly over 17 % had the 25-ECTS university degree in educational leadership and administration. The most common principal training was the National Board of Education certificate in educational administration in its present (42 %) or older (47 %) form. Very few (4 %) had no training in educational administration.

The school leader is usually appointed by the municipal school board (77 %), but the appointer can also be the municipal executive board (9 %), superintendent (7 %) or municipal council (5 %; Kanervio and Risku 2009). The process is usually based on an open general application process (88 %).

One can conclude that in many ways, superintendents seem to lead school leaders whose demographic characteristics and education are not very different from their own.

8 Networks

As stated above, the Finnish education system, municipal education provisions and schools are all increasingly based on structures and processes which can be described as *networking*. Concerning the education system, the fourth way as defined by Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) presupposes that networking will facilitate steering from the top, building from the bottom and support and motivation from the sides. In addition, the rearrangement of the relationship between the state and municipalities cannot operate without well-functioning networks.

The national core curriculum reform processes for 2016 are illustrative examples of the necessity for all levels to do their part well and the need for networking. It appears that these requirements have been met well in regard of comprehensive

education, but not concerning general upper secondary education. Thus, superintendents have already been able to work constructively with the comprehensive education reform for a couple of years, but have a much more restricted opportunity to do so in general upper secondary education.

Regarding comprehensive education, the national framework for the 2016 national core curriculum process was determined in good time, providing the various stakeholders with plenty of time to network. Since 2012, the National Board of Education has made good use of this opportunity, arranging extensive training, systematic piloting and wide-ranging dialogue between the various national and local stakeholders. At the regional level, the prepared municipal mergers force municipalities to create shared agreements so that the curriculum process does not have to be radically renewed if unseen municipal mergers occur. In particular, the focus of the regional negotiations includes the distribution of lesson hours for the various subjects and revisions of school networks. Regarding schools, the holistic approach to curriculum reform and development of school missions compels various actors amongst the multi-professional staffs to engage in dialogue. Legislation and steering documents guaranteeing parents and students a voice in decision making presupposes a consistent dialogue with these groups as well. Finally, the municipal school board, executive board and council have the final say in local decision making, which must also be taken into consideration in the process.

Concerning general upper secondary education, there were high expectations for the radical reform of the distribution of lesson hours, and consequently, for the whole scope of upper secondary education. However, the proposed distribution turned out to be too radical; as a result, politicians were not able to agree on it. Without the distribution of lesson hours, the National Board of Education was unable to implement the curriculum reform in the same way as was accomplished for comprehensive education. The fact that the new distribution of lesson hours for general upper secondary education was determined more than 2 years after that for comprehensive education and with merely minimal changes meant that there was very little time for networking, particularly in terms of dialogue between the national and the local level. One can claim that there are not high hopes for similar changes in learning at school in the general upper secondary education reform as in comprehensive education.

8.1 Municipal Networks

Lead Paragraph Municipalities and local education provisions form the most fundamental networks for Finnish superintendents. Like school leaders and teachers, superintendents do not serve the state, but are instead accountable to local authorities, which try to provide education as the state requires in its legislation.

Municipalities and their local education provisions form very different operational environments for superintendents. For example, their sizes vary greatly, as do

their geographical, demographic and financial opportunities and challenges. The repositioning of the relationship between the state and the municipalities has given local authorities a lot of responsibilities, but also a lot of freedom concerning how to organise their municipal networks, whether in the structures and processes of the organisation itself, the service production models, school networks or collaboration within and outside the municipality.

It seems that municipalities are using their freedom to reorganise themselves and their services. One can also claim that there is continuous pressure by the state related to such reorganisation, along with an attempt to steer the development. The views of the municipalities and the state do not always coincide. Concerning the local education provision, the superintendent is at the heart of the change process, as he/she is responsible for presenting educational issues to local decision makers and managing local provisions. When the operational environment is changing radically and the process needs to be enacted through networking, the networks represent a fundamental part of the superintendent's work.

Concerning the national decision making process in education, the superintendent is the actor taking part in the dialogue. As regional collaboration is increasing through preparations related to regional cooperation and municipal mergers, the superintendent must also have a central role in those networks. According to Kanervio and Risku (2009), in this work the superintendent is especially steered by the decisions of the local decision makers, which attempt to take the state's decisions into consideration. A particular focus is trying to anticipate the future obligations and changes in funding instruments and their impacts on the changing local environment, whose alterations also have to be outlined.

Regarding local decision making, the superintendent acts as the official presenter of educational matters to the municipal council, executive board and particularly the municipal school board. The superintendent also appears as an invited expert at municipal council and executive board meetings when necessary. In terms of the school board, the superintendent acts as the most central informant and the most common compiler of the agenda; thus, he/she has a lot of power in the selection of matters to be dealt with, although it is formally the chair of the board that decides on the agenda at the end.

As a member of the municipal staff, the superintendent normally belongs to the municipal hall management team; his/her superior is the municipal director, who is also the most common evaluator of his/her work (65 %; Kanervio and Risku 2009). The superintendent manages the local provision of education, and thus acts as the superior of the staff at the municipal school office and of school leaders, teachers and other staff.

In principle, expectations of superintendents by the actors in the network are in line with each other. However, as the superintendent is at the centre of various actors in the networks, the actual expectations may not coincide or may even be contradictory. According to Kanervio and Risku (2009), school board members particularly expect superintendents to manage general and financial administration, as well as to develop education at the municipal level. School leaders' expectations

of superintendents especially include the ability to collaborate and to exhibit good leadership and management skills (Kanervio et al. 2014).

8.2 School Boards as Networks

Lead Paragraph When networking with the municipal school board and its members, superintendents have to take into consideration the networks of the boards and their members.

According to Kanervio and Risku (2009) almost all superintendents serve a municipal school board. The board members' municipal networks comprise the municipal council which elected them. In addition, half of the school board members are also members of the municipal council. Furthermore, it seems to be common for school board members to belong to other boards or various directorates in municipalities' different associate partners.

When compiling the agenda for the school board, superintendents must take into consideration that it is formally the board chair who decides on the agenda. They must also be aware that on average, board members spend a bit more than 2 h preparing for the meeting. Of that time, they spend 35 min in discussion with their own factions, and must also take this conversation into consideration.

Superintendents bear a lot of responsibility towards the school board because they seem to be the single most important actors for the board members. As described above, the superintendent is regarded as the most central informant and the main compiler of the agenda. He/she also has an important role in the board members' decision making. In terms of obtaining information and making decisions, school leaders and municipal school offices are also important for board members. Board members do not normally represent individual schools, nor do they appear to give a lot of value for parents and students as important sources of information. The same can be said about their relationships with the media and trade unions.

Regarding the strategic development of the local education provision from the point of view of the school board, superintendents have to know how the board members position various views through their own networks. The factors which seem to affect the board members most are the strategic decisions by the municipal council and executive board, followed by those by the state. More than half of board members think that there are tensions between the state and the municipalities. The main reason for such tension is tight finances.

One could possibly argue that superintendents have been able to serve their boards well, as most board members appear to be quite satisfied with their work and contributions. In general, board members seem to have a good status in their own networks, and feel that they are able to affect and improve issues in their local provisions for education. On the other hand, they also seem to trust and appreciate the professionalism and expertise of the people working inside the local provision.

8.3 School Leaders in Networks

Lead Paragraph According to the Finnish legislation, every school must have a principal; this individual is responsible for the operations of the school (Souri 2009). Thus, school leaders are unavoidable and essential members of superintendents' networks. When leading school leaders, superintendents must be able to identify the networks in which their school leaders work.

Superintendents particularly have to recognise school leaders' own schools as their primary networks. For most school leaders (80 %), the network includes only one school; however, there seems to be a trend of network expansion to comprise two (14 %) or even more (6 %) schools. Most Finnish school leaders manage small schools. In Peltonen and Wilen's (2014) study 46 % of the 2024 primary schools that participated in the survey had five or fewer teaching groups. Moreover, in the survey by Kanervio et al. (2015b), it was found that the average primary school size was 254 students and 21 members of staff. Similar to the size variation of superintendents' provisions, female school leaders are more often responsible for smaller schools than male school leaders.

Superintendents have to take into consideration the small sizes of school leaders' schools when determining school leaders' job descriptions and support resources. As most of the schools are small, school leaders do not have a lot of support staff to manage the budget, facilities, information and communication technology (ICT) or health care and social services. Usually, there is no one to provide these services or only part-time support staff. Only the largest schools can afford to have full-time support staff. Because many of the municipalities and local education provisions are small, the deficit in support resources does not only relate to the school, but also the municipality as a whole. Concerning student health care and social services, the state noticed this dilemma and significantly increased obligations for local authorities in 2014. Not only financial, but also operational factors are forcing superintendents to propose local authorities to increase school sizes.

An increase of school size may also cause challenges for superintendents, as larger units are more demanding for school leaders to manage. As a result of the increasing school sizes, school leaders have to manage larger and more multi-professional staffs. Almost all schools already have their own student care work groups. In addition, school-based management teams and team-based school structures are increasingly common. In order for the school leaders to be able to manage and lead their schools more efficiently, assistant principals are employed to support their work. As noted above, teachers in general are being delegated a growing number administrative obligations (Kanervio and Risku 2009; Pont et al. 2008). These trends have not been unnoticed by the National Board of Education, which recommended in its 2013 report that all teachers should have leadership and management training as part of their pre-service teacher education, that in-service modules in leadership and management should be designed to support teachers' expanding job descriptions and that assistant and vice principals should have similar

qualifications to those of principals. This development also has to be prepared and managed by superintendents.

Concerning school leaders' networks outside their school buildings, superintendents have to be able to provide school leaders with the time and means to engage in networking. The two most essential networks for school leaders are those networks comprising municipal decision makers and staff on the one hand, and parents and students on the other. As regional collaboration is increasingly in demand, one cannot forget networking with colleagues either, both inside and outside one's own municipality, which occurs frequently. Regarding networking amongst municipal decision makers, municipal school board members place a rather high value on the opinions of school leaders, although not as high as those of the superintendent. The management of school care services and facilities already requires school leaders to network with various people inside their municipalities. As most of the services are part-time and located elsewhere, the need for networking further increases. In the same way as for the municipal school board and the school leaders, the superintendent is the most important actor in the school's external network. According to school leaders, teachers and superintendents have the most influence on their decision making. What school leaders expect most from their superintendents is mental support and trust, as well as support in everyday matters concerning school staff, juridical issues and financing.

Like with school board members, superintendents seem to succeed quite well in their attempts to support school leaders' networking. School leaders appear to feel that they are appreciated in their networks and that they can make a difference through their work. School leaders think that both the municipal school boards and superintendents especially want them to keep to the budget, lead and develop the pedagogical work of the school and help those students who have challenges when it comes to meeting the criteria. On the other hand, teachers particularly want to have school leaders who can make the everyday school operations function smoothly, ensure resource availability and create occupational welfare. For school leaders, leading and developing the pedagogical work of the school, as well as being able to help those students who need support and maintaining the budget seem to be the most important issues.

9   What Are the Superintendents' Motivational Forces?

Lead Paragraph According to superintendents, what keeps them going is the opportunity to be able to use their knowledge and skills, the possibility to develop the education system, the freedom to make their own decisions and enact plans as they wish, experiences of succeeding and the chance to serve others. In addition, as a prerequisite for occupational welfare, superintendents most frequently refer to mastering their own work time. Most superintendents (83 %) are also of the opinion that they succeed very well or well in their work in general.

Regarding their five most central tasks, superintendents identify management of finance (16 % of mentions), management of educational services (14 %), general administration (13 %), supervision and evaluation (12 %) and staff management (10 %). However, the list of most central tasks does not perfectly match what superintendents spend their time doing. In that list, staff management (22 %) is mentioned as the most time-consuming task, followed by management of finance (14 %), general administration (12 %), networking (8 %), management of support services (8 %) and working with the school board (8 %).

In relation to the radical changes taking place in Finnish society, the lists include some surprises. Strategic planning and leadership do not seem to be amongst the most central tasks (6 % of mentions) or to take much time (8 %). The same can be said about pedagogical leadership (4 %) and time spent on it (2 %).

Matters that seem to decrease motivation include disjointedness of work, problematic tasks and haste, which are caused by the high number of non-essential tasks and remits, as well as by the inadequacy of resources. More than half of superintendents (64 %) consider their work to include a lot or a fair amount of stress.

9.1 How Do Superintendents Bridge the National and Local Levels?

Lead Paragraph By definition (Johansson et al. 2011), superintendents are the foremost education officials in Finnish municipalities. In this position, they serve the local authorities in their efforts to provide the education services mandated by legislation to municipalities. The general framework of the superintendent, like that of the whole local administration, is set by the state through legislation, as determined in the 1995 Municipal Act. This also becomes very explicit when examining the basis of strategic development using superintendents and municipal school board members as informants.

Besides legislation, the state also tries to steer local strategic development through guidance, government subsidies, education, core curricula, projects and evaluation. This is an extensive task, because in the 1990s, the relationship between the state and the municipalities was radically reformed and the process has not yet led to sustainable structures and processes, or to a well-functioning balance between the various stakeholders. As more than half of the school board members in the study by Kanervio et al. (2015a) reported, there is tension between the state and the municipalities. The main reason for this tension is of course that the change has been so radical and had such a great effect that the process is only half-finished at the moment. In addition, the tension is heightened by the demographic and financial challenges which Finnish society is presently facing.

Regarding the local education provision, the superintendent is at the centre of the tension described above. On one hand, the superintendent must ensure that the educational services the municipality provides meet the obligations set out in the

legislation. On the other hand, he/she has to ensure that educational services are provided in accordance with the strategic decisions made by the municipal council, executive board and school board.

The state develops society as whole, as well as the education system, through a continuous dialogue with the various stakeholders. There are ample examples to demonstrate that the various stakeholders can also have a genuine voice in the dialogue. In this way, the superintendent can try to influence national-level decision making, both as an individual and as a member of the various networks engaged in dialogue with the state.

At the local level, the superintendent acts as an expert in educational issues for the municipal council, executive board and school board, as well as serving as a member of the municipal management team led by the municipal director. The superintendent often has a high status among the local decision makers, and can thus also have a strong voice in the local dialogue. In addition, he/she can interpret what state-level decisions mean and require in the local setting, provide information which decision makers can use to anticipate changes in the operational environment and create optional scenarios on the basis of which local decision makers can develop sustainable solutions.

In the above process, the superintendent can also mediate the information obtained from his/her staff, students and parents. Research by Kanervio and Risku (2009) has shown that local decision makers aim to come up with genuinely democratic decisions which both try to anticipate future changes and their effect, and look for solutions in terms of how to best develop the local structures and processes to meet such changes. To accomplish these aims, school board members consider superintendents' views along with those of the municipal council to be the most valuable.

As manager of the local provision, the superintendent is the superior of the staff in the municipal school office and schools. The superintendent can take advantage of this position in two main ways. First, he/she can use the staff's expertise to influence both national and local decision making, as described in the previous paragraph. Second, the superintendent has a lot of freedom to decide how decisions by local decision makers will be realised in the local education provision. Furthermore, the superintendent is the pedagogical leader of his/her staff and can develop staff through that role. As stated above, however, this approach seems to be one which Finnish superintendents do not use very much.

9.2   What Do the Superintendents Prioritise?

Lead Paragraph According to Kanervio and Risku (2009), superintendents give top priority to finance management, management of educational services, general administration, supervision and evaluation, and staff management. The list corresponds well with the status of the operational environment in Finland. Budget issues

and trying to accomplish everyday tasks so that the legislated services can be provided dominate the scene.

When examining how superintendents' time is really spent, a somewhat different picture emerges. This time, the significance of staff management in the production of the mandated services receives top priority. This is followed by management of finances and general administration. The third greatest amount of time is spent on networking, which matches well with superintendents' function in trying to bridge the national and local levels. Over the past few years, the development of various support services has been topical in the Finnish education system. Such work also takes up a lot of superintendents' time. On one hand, there have been attempts to develop the support services to improve their quality and make them better able to cover and meet various individual needs. On the other, there are continuous efforts to cut down the costs of these services, particularly concerning school buildings, school transport and catering. It is reassuring that the superintendents' top-five list also includes working with the municipal school board. This may indicate a genuine aim to serve the board so that it can make sustainable decisions.

Regarding superintendents' priorities, pedagogical leadership still appears to be neglected as a core leadership domain. As described in the previous sections, despite the good rankings in international surveys on learning outcomes, the Finnish education systems needs to undergo pedagogical reforms in order to meet future requirements. The national core curriculum reform process for 2016 cannot be enacted successfully without extensive regional and municipal collaboration. This work must facilitate regional- and municipal-level structural changes, and thus, the processes cannot be led by school leaders or teachers. This required change presupposes the pedagogical leadership of the superintendents.

9.3 How Do Superintendents Obtain Information?

Lead Paragraph The Finnish education system is constructed so that it cannot work or be led without successful collaboration amongst various stakeholders (see Alava et al. 2012; Risku et al. 2012). Thus, the short answer to the question of how superintendents obtain information is through collaboration involving networking and dialogue. With whom the superintendents network and engage in dialogue are the natural follow-up questions.

From the point of view of theoretical models, one can say following Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) that the superintendent has to obtain information from those who steer at the top, from those who construct at the bottom and from those who support and motivate from the sides. In addition, in accordance with Alava et al. (2012), the flow of information cannot only occur in one direction, but instead has to be dynamic, thereby forming a dialogue.

Concerning the national level, superintendents seem to gather their information through various channels which the state and other national actors use to distribute

their information. Concerning the state, various interactive platforms, many-sided forms of guidance, projects and core curricula, as well as legislation, constitute the core. The various formal and informal national networks seem to supplement the supply of information. In particular, information from the state seems to construct a general framework in which the local decision making reaches its final form.

It is noteworthy that superintendents also listen to the views of other superintendents. This observation highlights the importance of both regional and collegial networking. At the municipal level, school leaders seem to have the largest impact, followed by municipal central administration and teachers. Concerning other actors, school board members' and parents' views both appear to be the most influential. In addition, students' and local inhabitants' voices seem to be noteworthy to the superintendents. What is most essential is that superintendents' final decision making appears to be based on the framework created together at the municipal level.

10 Accountability/Responsibility

Lead Paragraph Finns tend to have problems with the concept of *accountability*, although they know what it means as a term. When one replaces this term with *responsibility*, everybody seems to know what is being discussed. One can claim that there is quite a lot of responsibility built on trust in the Finnish education system. This trust is not blind, as is often imagined, and is supported with an extensive evaluation system whose framework has been designed by the Ministry of Education. This framework comprises the transnational, national, regional and local levels. The local level is the primary concern of the superintendent.

Concerning the transnational framework, Finland is attempting to take on a proactive role, so evaluations should also take the Finnish setting into consideration. Methods focussing on completely different aspects from those emphasised in the Finnish education system would not provide valid results. At the national level, the evaluation system is mostly based on sample testing, but has been designed so that a topically valid and reliable picture is continuously obtained at the systematic level. The system is very economical, and seems to provide the kind of information needed. For example, a couple of years prior to the decline in the latest PISA scores, everybody in Finland already knew that the country would not be doing that well.

The focus of the national evaluation system is not primarily on the assessment of learning outcomes, but rather on how the education system works. The same can be said about the regional and local evaluation systems. This approach is very natural for Finland, where the failure of the student or the teacher is not followed by labelling that person, but instead focussing on what is wrong with the system so that the individual can be better supported. In this work, direct communication between the stakeholders and quality management appear to be the key tools for combining responsibility, support and development.

Regarding Finnish society as a whole, as well as the education system, the development of the evaluation system is only half-finished. The change in thinking has been so radical that it will take time for a sustainable system to develop. The state is often criticised for an inability to sufficiently take the changes in society and the everyday challenges of schools into consideration. Education policies and their goal settings tend to be based on theoretically ideal starting points which do not correspond to schools' actual situations (Hannus et al. 2010). In addition, local authorities appear to have major problems connecting evaluation with the development of their educational services (see Löfström et al. 2005; Rajanen 2000). Evaluation information on education does not always realise itself in the best possible way as development in the local level (see Lapiolahti 2007; Svedlin 2003).

10.1 Issues Politicians Delegate to the Superintendent

Lead Paragraph Finnish superintendents have repeated time after time that in the Finnish governance system, superintendents serve the local political actors who are responsible for making the decisions. The trust and respect superintendents tend to receive from their school boards indicate that the board members have understood their role as the ultimate decision makers well. However, as has been stated many times, the radical repositioning of the relationship between the state and the municipalities in Finland is far from complete, and the various actors are still trying to find their appropriate roles and ways of collaborating.

According to superintendents, financial issues are the most difficult for the municipal school board members to tackle, followed by the expectations of local inhabitants. These matters usually go hand in hand. On the one hand, local inhabitants would like to preserve a village school, while on the other hand, abolishing the school could make it possible to keep to the budget set by the municipal council. It is not uncommon that in a situation like this for the board to question the general strategic goals determined by the municipal council. Thus, the school board will ask for permission to exceed the budget. The request will be followed by a dialogue between the school board and the executive board and/or council. In this dialogue, the superintendent acts as an expert, and will usually be advised by the municipal management team and other involved stakeholders as well.

Research on strategic development in the Finnish setting says that it is impossible to develop at the local level without collaborating with the decision makers (e.g., Strandman 2009). The same research notes that involving decision makers always creates a risk at the same time because politicians' interests are aligned in unpredictable ways. The example above, for instance, can well end with the municipal council or executive board allowing the budget to be overrun. Another possibility is that the school board will receive backing to make the economically sustainable decision and close down the school. There have also been instances where permission was not granted to exceed the budget, but closing down the school was also forbidden.

In cases such as this, it may be up to the superintendent to find a new way to resolve the situation so that the budget is maintained and the school stays open.

10.2 Mediating

Lead Paragraph In society and in the education system where governance is based on dialogue, superintendents, school board members and school leaders can be seen as mediators (see Risku et al. 2012). Among these three mediators, the superintendent is the one keeping the whole network consistent.

The superintendent's role is to serve the local authorities and to manage the local education provision. The superintendent prepares matters for political decision makers to decide on with his/her networks, and then ensures that the decisions are enacted as intended. The superintendent also has the primary responsibility for networking with stakeholders outside the municipality, as described above. The holistic role of the superintendent is also well illustrated by the description of the stakeholders, who act as superintendents' essential information sources and influence superintendents' decision making.

The fundamental role of school board members is to act as mediators amongst political decision makers, that is, with members of the municipal council, executive board and other boards. Depending on the situation, board members may also express the critical views of local inhabitants in the municipal decision-making process, for example, when there is a plan to close down a village school.

In the Finnish setting, the school leader's main responsibility concerns the school for whose operations he/she is responsible. It is noteworthy that the Finnish legislation does not make the school leader accountable as such, but instead puts the responsibility on the education provider, which in the case of local authorities is ultimately the municipal council. Thus, for example, the Finnish Principals' Association recommends that school leaders should take their grievances to the municipal council if they think they do not have the necessary resources to manage their school according to legislation (Souri 2009). In an operational environment like this, the school leader is to mediate the situation of his/her school to decision makers via the superintendent to ensure the successful management of the school, exactly as the teachers expect him/her to do. Concerning the decisions made by the local decision makers, on the other hand, the school leader is to mediate the decisions so that they are enacted successfully in the school, as superintendents and school board members expect.

10.3 Important Tasks

The top-five list of superintendents' important tasks reported in their responses consists of financial management, management of educational services, general administration, supervision and evaluation and staff management. When comparing this

list with what superintendents spend most of their time doing, new dimensions arise. It turns out that in order to be able to handle the top-five list, superintendents particularly have to commit time to people, networking and dialogue. This is also how both school board members and school leaders appear to expect superintendents to act.

The above lines of action can also be identified regarding municipal school board members and school leaders. In their own settings and roles, they try to ensure that the schools work well and develop themselves to meet the demands of the changing operational environments, and attempt to do that in collaboration with the other people involved through networking and dialogue. Finnish legislation explicitly expects involved stakeholders to be given agency, support and trust.

10.4   Relations Between Control and Autonomy in the Chain

Lead Paragraph   In the Finnish setting, the purpose of evaluation is mainly to locate and remove the defects of the system so that different actors can be supported in the optimal way. This principle also strongly directs the way in which control and autonomy are perceived.

Returning to Hargreaves and Shirley's (2009) model of the fourth way, one can observe the superintendent, municipal school board and school leader in all the three roles of the model. They all have the role of the steerer at the top, builder at the bottom and supporter and motivator from the sides in various settings. The framework corresponds well with the views of Spillane (e.g., 2006) and even more so to the conclusion of the meta-analysis by Tian et al. (2015) on distributed leadership. According to the latter, leadership should be seen as 'a process that comprises both organizational and individual scopes; the former regards leadership as a resource and the latter as an agency. Both resource and agency should be considered to emerge and exist at all levels of organization.'

In the above framework, everybody in the chain sometimes acts as the one being controlled and sometimes as the one controlling. In the Finnish setting, this control process seems to include both formal and informal evaluation, but whatever the form, evaluation mostly manifests itself through dialogue. Thus, it does not aim to find the guilty party, but instead to identify ways of developing the system. This is also what Finnish superintendents, school board members and school leaders most often say when asked who evaluates and controls them.

To understand the Finnish context, it is essential to examine the relationship between autonomy and independence/freedom. For Finns, autonomy appears to mean that one creates a framework in which to work in collaboration with one's networks. One does not have total freedom, but instead must respect the framework and agreements made. Inside the framework, however, one has a lot freedom to act as one sees best. It seems that Finnish superintendents, school board members and school leaders feel that they have a lot of agency and autonomy in their work. They also are satisfied with their status in this regard.

10.5   To Whom Is the Superintendent Loyal?

In Finland, superintendents serve the local authorities in their efforts to provide the education services mandated by legislation. Thus, one can claim that the superintendents' prime loyalty is to the local authorities. This is also how superintendents as a rule perceive their loyalty. As the local education provisions are being developed into more holistic and inclusive service centres, superintendent's loyalty in serving local authorities also seems to become more explicit.

As the manager of the local education provision, the superintendent's loyalty is being extended significantly. In order for the local education provision and schools to fulfil the obligations set for local authorities in legislation, the superintendent has to protect the rights of students and parents, as well as those of school leaders and teachers. For that aim in particular, superintendents also have to know and be loyal to the legislative responsibilities set by the state, and thus maintain loyalty to the state.

The various loyalties and their presenters form a network with the superintendent at the centre. Moreover, to manage and act in the network, the superintendent also has to be loyal to him-/herself. What Lehkonen (2009) has stated concerning school leaders also applies to superintendents: One 'becomes a survivor via experiencing that even in contradictory circumstances it is possible to pilot the school towards what is seen as its most valuable goal: realizing the pupil's benefit by using means that will not, subjectively thinking, be of higher value than the goal itself" (pp. 9–10).

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Chapter 4
Norwegian Superintendents Are Mediators in the Governance Chain

Jan Merok Paulsen and Hans Christian Høyer

Abstract Transnational bodies such as OECD have had great influence in the national educational debate in Norway since the first PISA study was made public in 2001. A range of social technologies, such as participation in international rank-based tests, national standardized tests and various teacher and student surveys, have been implemented stepwise in order to more tightly monitor the work of schoolteachers. These trends have been institutionalized towards a consistent regulative system by means of two structural elements. The national quality assurance system was established in 2005 to tighten the links between national policies and classroom practice. The semi-independent National Directorate of Education and Training was established and radically up-scaled (in terms of staffing) at the same time, to lead reform initiatives for municipalities and schools and to manage the national quality system. This also put superintendents in a normative and cultural crossfire between the longstanding norms of the teaching profession and traditional policy cultures in education, on one hand, and the reform agendas and the instruments influenced by the OECD, on the other. The results of surveys of superintendents, school board members and school leaders illustrate aspects of the new situation for superintendents in the midst of governance chains and networks. The main inference taken from the data is that superintendents have to operate multiple arenas within and beyond the municipality organization, which puts them in a crossfire of conflicting expectations and demands.

Keywords De-politicalization • School strategy • Mediation • Leadership expectations

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1   Trans-national and National Developments and Trends

Since the first PISA study in 2001 placed Norway just at the mean of the participating OECD countries (Kjærnsli 2007; Kjærnsli et al. 2004) – a position in the OECD's ranking system that has been perceived as mediocre at best – the media and politicians have put their primary focus on how to raise student achievement in basic subjects such as literacy, mathematics and science. Notably, educational researchers have been concerned by the significant amount of within-class and within-school variation in student learning that has been consistently demonstrated by the PISA studies– a pattern that was also visible in earlier evaluations of Norwegian primary education (Haug and Bachmann 2007; Nordahl 2010). Alongside the shift in media exposure and educational policy agenda towards performance indicators, a stable but low completion rate for upper secondary education, in which more than one out of four students drops out of school, has also been consistently demonstrated. Specifically, within vocational training the dropout-rate at a national level has varied from 35 to 40 % of a cohort (Markussen et al. 2011). The mass, scale and range of educational performance indicators targeting primary and secondary education in Norway has changed the educational policy debate significantly during the last decade, towards an emphasis on spotlighting numbers and rank positions in national and international competitions (Sjøberg 2014). This major shift in the educational debate in Norway should in theory join superintendents, local school politicians and school leaders together in a different manner than before the "PISA shock" in 2001, due to the accountability and quality assurance discourse. As a function of the changes in the structural forms of school governance, new network relationships between superintendents, school leaders and local politicians can be formed, and other relationships can be altered.

1.1   *Numbers and Performance Indicators Instead of Political Decisions*

Against the backdrop of the mediocre rankings in the PISA studies undertaken in 2000 and 2003, the Norwegian government launched a curriculum reform in 2006 known as the "Knowledge Promotion" (K-06), and the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training was established in the same year in order to strengthen the state's grip on the implementation process. This semi-independent state directorate has been responsible for managing the bulk of the standardized measurement instruments such as national achievement tests, student assessment surveys and teacher assessment surveys, as well as centralized designed training programs for teachers and school leaders. In a similar vein, the National Quality Assurance System (NQAS) was launched in 2005 in order to improve the national standard of student achievement, and one of the mandatory procedures is an annual quality report by each of the 428 municipalities[1] (Skedsmo 2009).

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[1] Norwegian term: Tilstandsrapport.

The quality report provides the national authorities with a control instrument to ensure that the municipalities are acting with a minimum of engagement in school matters. The quality report (which follows a national template in content) was also conducted in order to mobilize local politicians, school principals and professionals in school improvement issues (Johansson et al. 2013). These measures increase the focus on educational outcomes in terms of student performance in achievement tests, indicating new modes of school governing (Helgøy and Homme 2006). An important element related to the increased focus on evaluation and measurement is the need to make key actors such as superintendents, principals and teachers accountable. In this context, accountability often means when an actor, by virtue of contractual obligations, has the right to hold another actor responsible to a set of standards, to judge whether the standards have been met, and to intervene or impose sanctions if the standards are deemed unfulfilled (Johansson et al. 2013). Compared to the inspection-driven systems found in many other Western democracies, this approach does not imply direct control of educational quality in terms of teaching and learning in schools. The state supervision follows a system revision approach and aims to expose cases where legal regulations are not followed (Sivesind 2009). So far, state supervision has focused on areas such as the right to special education and adapted teaching, to secure a safe school environment and the extent to which the municipalities have established a system for quality assurance (Paulsen and Skedsmo 2014).

Although Norway has not implemented a national inspection system as in Sweden and other western democracies, the bulk of policy tools implemented by the government round 2005 can uniformly be seen as a wave of centralization in school governance. As in many other European countries, however, Norwegian policy-makers have been heavily influenced by the OECD PISA studies which have become the epicenter of educational policy (Meyer and Benavot 2013), and Norwegian policy-makers have thus adapted these comparative measures as the overall "benchmark" of educational quality in Norwegian compulsory education. For example, when the PISA measures in 2012 exposed a decline in math and science for 15 year old Norwegian students (OECD 2013), a series of policy initiatives was launched in order to solve the "national math problem".

1.2   From Political towards Market-Driven Steering of Schools?

The traditional model of administrative and political governing in the Norwegian public sector is labeled by Johan P. Olsen 'the sovereign rationality-bounded state model' (Olsen 1978, 1988), meaning that there is a centralized state with a large public sector in which standardization and equality are prominent values. This model has been established as a norm of political and administrative governance in Norway for a long time, emphasizing the collective and integrative features of the political-administrative system and the role of the citizen (March and Olsen 1989). According to this state model, change and reform processes are hierarchical and

dominated by political and administrative leaders, implying that processes are closed and involve an exclusive group of participants (Christensen and Lægreid 2001c). Executive power is based on political bodies, and the executive has at its disposal a neutral civil service with a wealth of professional expertise, which prepares and implements policies, however, the traditional model has been supplemented by a variety of others.

Olsen (1988) calls one alternative model of political-administrative control "the supermarket state", or "fragmented state" model (Tranøy and Østerud 2001). This model presumes that the government and the state in general have a service-providing role, with an emphasis on efficiency and quality. People are mainly seen as consumers or clients, and the hierarchy, in one sense, is turned "upside down". Public administration is thus increasingly seen as a service-provider, a holding company for citizens, redefined as clients or consumers. In the market-oriented ideal model of NPM (Hood 1991), rather than the state controlling society on the basis of a democratic mandate, society controls the state directly through market mechanisms. Public reform processes are primarily a result of changes in markets and user demand, and hence partly environmental-deterministic in nature.

The power and capacity to make collective decisions is spread among a variety of actors in complex networks. With its emphasis on employability and the many intersections between political and economic actors, a slight shift towards Ove K. Pedersen's notion of "the competitive state model" (Pedersen 2011), has been observable – however *not* entirely and not dramatically in terms of the pace and scope of implemented changes. Rather Norway has been characterized as a "slow learner" (Olsen and Peters 1996) and reluctant implementer (Christensen et al. 2000) of NPM ideas into practice, which must be seen against the backdrop of the solid state funding. Norway is evidently affected by transnational policy trends, while at the same time norms of decentralism and local democracy are still observable in this policy field (Møller and Skedsmo 2013). Municipalities, schools, teachers and pupils are subjected to external evaluation and assessment. Furthermore, accountability is strengthened through the results of national tests and evaluations available on special websites, paired with the formation of central control agencies, where the streams of reports, assessments and performance data are assembled (Koritzinsky 2001).

1.3   De-Political School Strategy in Content and Resources

There has been recent discussion of whether or not, or to what extent, political party conflicts play a role in educational decision-making processes in the municipalities (Nihlfors et al. 2014). Research suggests that internal party conflicts in the municipalities only play a modest role in the decision-making process, despite the fact that political distribution in the municipal councils is fairly convergent with the situation in parliament. A pattern of tension in educational politics between the state and the municipalities is visible in Norway, as in the other Nordic countries, and most

typically manifest in local perceptions of state interference in local school matters embedded in an asymmetric power relationship that the municipality members do not find entirely satisfying (Kofod et al. 2014).

As Anne Homme (2008) showed in her study of municipal school ownership in Norway, a series of school specialism issues have been transferred from the school board's domain to the municipal school administration over the last two decades. We see this pattern as a consistent trend of "bureaucratization" and "professionalization" in local school politics, however, this pattern does not necessarily mean that the school board's agenda is empty, but that the number of issues and processes that the school board takes up is fewer than before. More importantly, the issues Anne Homme considered in her study of Norwegian school boards were typically strategic ones, with implications for entire municipalities 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) were typically assimilated into a broader field populated by multiple players: leadership and boards of multiple institutions (such as child care and culture), the municipality's top manager (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 (Paulsen and Strand 2014).

1.4 Changing the Purpose of Schooling and Social Technologies

Over the last 15 years in Norway there has also been a shift from traditional government structures towards a more complex school governance model, known as 'soft governance', one that emphasizes indirect steering through the use of educational outcomes through standardized performance indicators in national and international rankings (Moos 2009). Performance indicators have also been coupled to more definable juridical rights that can be monitored by state supervision, and in the final event also brought to trial (Sivesind 2009; Sivesind and Bachmann 2008). The extensive use of performance indicators represents a policy shift characterized by the use of social technologies. The institutionalized pattern of state supervision, where municipalities are targeted for monitoring linked to school results on a broad basis, represents a regulatory and normative basis for the enhanced control of municipal school administrators, local politicians and school professionals.

The use of social technologies represents de-politicalization, as noted: "The international comparisons like the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), TIMSS and PISA have made huge impacts on political decisions and on educational practice. The ranking of educational systems has made it 'natural' that everybody takes the basis for the ranking for granted and tries to perform according to the tests and comparisons" (Moos 2009, p. 410). This shift, as noted by many scholars, can be seen as a case of cultural-cognitive change in the public school institution in Norway. Although the Norwegian quality assurance system, with its

extensive use of social technologies, is regarded as "softer" than the British and Swedish state inspection systems, it evidently represents a case of institutional pressures towards using numbers and indicators as the dominant criteria of the purpose of schooling. This briefly described trend can be seen in the owner policy documents of Norwegian schools, where performance indicators and standard-based pedagogy are used as "benchmarks" for professional schooling methods. This potentially creates tension between school politicians and school superintendents, and between superintendents and school principals.

1.5 Policy Cultures in Norwegian Education

Scandinavian reform research has demonstrated that when transnational policies and international reform trends meet the national context, they are filtered through national policy cultures (Christensen and Lægreid 2001a, b, c). On a general basis, the central dimensions of a policy culture in education are the values of openness, decentralism, rationalism, egalitarianism (equity), efficiency, quality and choice (Louis and Van Velzen 2012). The dominant values in Norway have traditionally been equality and equity in terms of inclusive schooling (Telhaug et al. 2004, 2006), paired with a substantial level of decentralism, in terms of local autonomy for municipalities to counterbalance the state's power (Bukve and Hagen 1994; Karlsen 1993). These values form important parts of the cultural-cognitive pillar of the Norwegian school institution, which also significantly influences the normative set-up (Lauglo 1990). The latter theoretical point means that policy cultures also influence the normative basis of, for example, what is to be taught in teacher education and the professional training of school leaders and teachers. Free choice and rationalism are either absent or minor cultural elements in Norway. Evidently, the strong wave of quality standardization, in terms of PISA results, national tests, standardized student surveys, teacher surveys and so forth, has shifted focus towards measurable quality in the national discourse, and challenged the basic features of the traditional school institution. It might thus enhance tensions at the local level between school principals and superintendents, and also create a climate of mistrust between school politicians at the local level and principals, simply because the standardization waves represent incompatible demands when they meet the normative and ideological basis for local schooling (e.g., Nihlfors and Johansson 2013).

2 Municipalities, Their Composition and Relationship with the State Level

Due to the great variation in municipality size and the scattered population pattern, the Norwegian welfare state model is, per se, embedded in a decentralized structure. The 428 Norwegian municipalities range in size from Oslo, with 634,433

inhabitants to Utsira with 211.[2] Half the municipalities have fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, and only 12 have more than 50,000 inhabitants. Between 2004 and 2014 there was a clear tendency that municipalities with 40,000 inhabitants or more enjoyed success in increasing their populations, whereas the opposite trend was the case in the smallest rural municipalities. As a function of the diversity in the municipal landscape, a large number of Norwegian municipalities do not have a school board. Instead school matters are dealt with by the municipal council, and many superintendents have only a small number of schools under their authority. Contrary to current development in Finland and the municipality structure in Denmark, the Norwegian municipality structure has been more or less stable since the mid-1960s. The current conservative government, which took office in late 2013, however, has launched a municipality reform with the purpose of merging municipalities. The implementation strategy is being conducted in two steps. In the first phase, municipalities are expected to search and find their merging partners on a voluntary basis – for obvious reasons most typically in the neighborhood – in order to scale up the number of inhabitants served by the municipality.[3] In the second phase, the government has explicitly launched a national merging agenda, where parliament decides the merging process. The ideal size of a municipality, will be as a unit of service-delivery for least 30,000 inhabitants, which in practical terms will reduce the number of municipalities to approximately 100.

3 Structures Within Municipalities and Its Effects

3.1 Levels of Governance

After the millennium shift, a series of organizational reforms were launched, directed at the administrative design of Norwegian municipalities. A common theme in these redesign efforts was to deflate the administrative structure towards a so-called "two-level model" where schools, daycare institutions and elderly care institutions became more self-managed. The purpose was to establish a more lean and cost-efficient model, with only one level, within the civil service administration. In parallel, significant authorities and responsibilities were delegated directly to the school principal. In this re-organization wave, traditional sector administration was reduced and even dismantled. Reorganization initiatives were typically combined with the introduction of contract management and financial incentives towards service units, paired with leadership and management models found in the corporate sector (Christensen and Lægreid 2001a; Pedersen 2009). In 2004, 40.7 % of Norwegian municipalities reported that they had implemented a two-layer structure

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[2] Pr. 1. January 2014. Source: Statistic Norway. Download: http://www.ssb.no/190435/folkemengd-og-areal-etter-kommune-sa-57.

[3] See the white paper on the municipality reform: http://www.regjeringen.no/pages/38649362/Meldingsdel_kommunereform_og_vedlegg.pdf.

in their administrative organization (Hovik and Stigen 2004). Several Norwegian municipalities removed their central school office, and also the superintendent position, in combination with the decentralization of formal authorities to the school principals. This organizational deflating trend in Norwegian municipalities emerged partly from local initiatives, however, it can also be interpreted as part of an international "pandemic" diffusion of reform ideas (T. H. Pedersen 2009). Most reform initiatives involving administrative and political design culminated round 2005, however (Hovik and Stigen 2008). A major reason for this development of "reversal" was the implementation of the K06 systemic reform. Powers and authorities were decentralized from the state to the Norwegian municipalities with the purpose of steering schools more effectively and to pursue implementation of the curriculum standards. The municipalities were required to establish a system for quality assurance comprised of evaluating, documenting and following up the results of the schools. This situation calls for a municipal school office and administrative leader that can integrate and coordinate the tasks and responsibilities that the national quality system requires.

3.2 Restructuring Municipalities

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, although they have separate functions. The 19 counties are responsible for upper secondary education, academic schooling and vocational training, along with some responsibilities for industrial R&D and innovation at the regional level. The main objectives of the 428 primary municipalities are to provide their inhabitants with primary and lower secondary education, basic healthcare services, elderly care and technical infrastructure. Within the cultural and church sector, municipalities organize the provision of services in close collaboration with other stakeholders from the local civic community. About 40 % of the national budget goes to the municipalities, which in turn provide public services comprising compulsory education, health care and social services. In educational policy documents published after 2004, the municipalities are defined as "school owners" (Møller et al. 2009) Their main responsibilities within the area of education are adapting the national curriculum to local needs, managing in-service training for teachers and school leaders, and ensuring the quality of primary and lower secondary schooling within their area of jurisdiction.

In Norway, the municipalities act as a mediating level between the state and schools, which in theory means that 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. The degree of freedom to decide political and administrative design in the municipalities was a function of the Local Government Act of 1992, inspired by a so-called "free commune" experiment in the late 1980s, where a number of municipalities were allowed to govern themselves

more in accordance with local priorities and decoupled from a range of state directives (Baldersheim and Ståhlberg 1994). Notably, Norwegian municipalities utilized this opportunity only to a small extent throughout the 1990s, yet around the turn of the millennium, a series of redesign initiatives took place, where the common trend was deflating the administrative hierarchy and dismantling political specialist committees such as the school boards (Pedersen 2009). In consequence, a large group of municipalities removed the superintendent position and the school board from their organizational chart, and delegated the power and authority to school principals in the early 2000s. Due to the obligations inherent in the national quality assurance system implemented from 2006, however, there was a "rediscovery" of both superintendents and school boards around 2010, but with significant variation in formal titles and areas of responsibility (Paulsen and Skedsmo 2014; Paulsen and Strand 2014). At the micro-level, the schools are considered self-governing units that report to the municipalities and to the state, and they are led by a school principal. There is a trend for a single principal as the headteacher of more than one school, and on similar lines, for smaller municipalities to merge schools and day-care institutions under the management of the school principals. Taken together, and seen from the perspective of superintendents, school board members and school leaders, their roles and functions have been significantly altered due to change in the national governance system and waves of redesign in the municipalities.

3.3 Summary and Implications

As laid out in the sections above, a range of social technologies, such as extended participation in international rank-based tests through OECD, national standardized tests and various teacher and student surveys, was implemented in steps in order to monitor schoolteachers work more tightly, and to inspect the relationship between classroom processes and student achievements more closely. These trends have been institutionalized towards a consistent regulative system by means of two structural elements. The national quality assurance system was established in 2005 with the purpose of tightening the connections between national policies and classroom practices. The semi-independent National Directorate of Education and Training[4] was established and radically scaled up (in terms of staffing) at the same time, in order to lead reform initiatives for municipalities and schools and to manage the national quality system. More specifically, whereas inclusive schooling has been the most longstanding and dominant norm in the Norwegian compulsory school system for decades, there has been a visible shift towards quality of outcomes, measurable student achievement, as the benchmark for success and progression over the last decade.

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[4] Norwegian term: Utdanningsdirektoratet (UDIR).

The Directorate, by means of control over a range of financial resources on which schools and municipalities depend, is in a unique position to exert ideological influence on schools. This form of ideological, or cultural-cognitive in W.R. Scott's terminology (Scott 1995), steering of schools is made possible by deciding what kind of school projects will be funded by the Directorate. The Directorate has also conducted a national school principal training program, and a range of training programs for teachers, that involve the use of social technologies and the national agenda obviously inspired by the OECD. Since the Directorate is in a position to control both the content (e.g., national curriculum of school principal training) and the funding of the programs, superintendents, principals and teachers naturally bow with some compliance to the ideological scripts on which these programs are built. Through this grip, the normative and cultural-cognitive steering of schools has been strengthened significantly since the turn of the millennium (Engeland and Langfeldt 2009).

This change also puts the superintendent in normative and cultural crossfire between the longstanding norms of the teacher profession and traditional policy cultures in education, on the one hand, and the reform agendas and the instruments in use derived from the OECD influence, on the other. The superintendent will also continuously be the target of a national control regime demanding monitoring of school results and holding the school principal accountable for the results. This may also threaten the basis of trust, on which the relationship between superintendents and principals relies. The Norwegian municipalities, and thereby the work context of the school superintendent, is also to some extent influenced by NPM trends that have been visible in public governance in Norway for some years. Despite the fact that Norwegian policy makers have been relatively restrictive with free-schools, the current conservative government has launched proposals to open a more diverse group of independent schools within primary education. Shifting to the day-care sector, which is often included in a superintendent's area of responsibility, a large group of commercial institutions operate under the same area of jurisdiction as the municipal ones. Taken together, it is fair to assume that a slightly growing marketization (i.e., independent providers of day-care and schooling) will also add to the complexity of the superintendent's work role.

Anther major school reform strategy in Norway has been to transfer responsibilities for governing and managing primary education to the municipalities. In 2004 the municipality sector, through its umbrella organization NALRA,[5] was given the formal authority over tariff agreements with teachers. In 2006 the new national curriculum delegated responsibilities for local curriculum and reform implementation to the municipality sector, and 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 a meeting ground for different local interests formulated and prioritized by local politicians. This means by implication that the municipalities are required to establish local routines upwards and downwards that are matched with the national sys-

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[5] National Association of Local and Regional Authorities (NALRA). Norwegian akronym: KS.

tem for quality assurance (NQAS) insofar as evaluating, documenting and following up the results of the schools. On the other hand, there is in theory space for maneuver shaped by local politicians within the municipalities, in terms of municipal decision-making that can support and affect the schools. Specifically, the K-06 national curriculum presumes that 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.

4 The Superintendent, the School Board and the School Leaders

This section presents short accounts of superintendents as they describe themselves, and of the two major groups with whom superintendents collaborate: the school board and school leaders. As noted, there are 428 municipalities in Norway, and each is a school district. In the majority of the municipalities the municipality council has appointed a school board to which policy issues of primary education has been delegated. In a minority of municipalities, 60, the municipal council operates similar functions. 291 out of 428 municipalities reported that they have a civil servant who can be conceived as a school superintendent. The school boards had a range of different names for the political committee responsible for primary education within the municipality, and this was also the case for the superintendents. We found approximately 30 different titles in use for this civil servant.

4.1 Characteristics of Superintendents

Lead Paragraph The average superintendent is male, in their mid-fifties, has been in this function for 3–5 years, and has typically been superintendent in only one municipality. They are typically an educator: their professional background in teacher education is supplemented by post-training in a school-related academic subject. They have typically worked in the educational sector for most of their career. They have not taken part in management and leadership training.

Gender: 60 % male – 40 % female
Age: in their mid-50s (<50 years: 27 % | 51–60 years: 46 % | >60 years: 27 %),
Professional seniority: 60 % of the superintendents have been in the post 1–5 years, whereas 20 % have served 6–10 years and 20 % more than 10 years.
Professional background: The background of the superintendents is clear and in many ways predictable: 82 % of the superintendents were recruited from the educational sector.

Academic background: professional background corresponds with academic back-ground: 89 % were educated as teachers, most with post-education in teacher-related subjects. Very few have a master's degree in management or leadership.

School district criteria for superintendent positions: when asked what kind of quali-fications school districts should look for in future superintendent applications, seen from the superintendent perspective, the most highly ranked categories were pedagogical education, general experience in leadership, administrative education and skills in human resource management.

Appointment procedures: Superintendents are in most cases appointed by a special administrative committee in the municipality or by the municipal council. They are seldom appointed directly by the board, and their appointment is a tenure position.

Superintendent titles: The restructuring of the municipalities after the millennium has found a wide range of job titles attached to superintendents. Only in 9 % of the municipalities participating in the study was the explicit term "superinten-dent" used.

Next-in-line chief: About 60 % of the respondents fit all the conceptual criteria of a superintendent used in the survey: 'Being directly subordinate to a political com-mittee (60 %) and being in charge of all municipal education (98 %)', while 81 % reported that they were directly subordinate to the CEO of the municipality, and 71 % were permanent members of the CEO's leadership team. Seventy-seven percent were the immediate superior to the school principal. The field of responsibility for most was the broad field of education, including childcare, and adult education. They were, however, all in charge of municipal education (98 %).

4.2 Characteristics of School Board Members

Lead Paragraph The average school board member is male and has an education above the average of the Norwegian population. They have a lower level degree from university, and work in the public sector butt typically *not* in the education system. They are experienced local politicians who are also members of the munici-pal council. They are a member of either the Labor Party or the Conservative Party. School board members in Norway are not elected by the voters but appointed by the municipal council at the beginning of the election period of 4 years.

Gender: The distribution of members is 55 % male and 45 % female

Age: Distribution is widespread but with a concentration of members in their mid-50s.

Political-seniority: A majority of the board members had been active politicians for 8–12 years. Eighty-three percent are members of the municipal council, and 17 % are members of the municipal board.

Employment: Only 18 % of the board members work in the educational sector, which is modest compared with the traditional role of the school board as a forum of specialism. There is also a high proportion of board members working in the private business sector, a total of approximately 40 %, which on average is significantly higher than the case in municipal boards and municipal councils.

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 % of the board members have tertiary educational degrees. Another 25 % of the members have completed upper secondary education and a craftsman certificate as their highest educational level, and only 2 % (20 members) have a primary education as their highest level.

Political representation: Members of the political board are politically appointed by the municipality council and therefore we should expect the composition of the political board to reflect the election result, but there are two exceptions: (1) 15 % of the board members belong to the Center Party, which is significantly higher than the results of the 2007 local election; and (2) compared with the total result for the 2007 local electorate,[6] the Liberal-Progressive Party on the right wing is under-represented in the sample.

Why 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 expressed a clear motivation 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 said that, "I have children in school myself, so it is important to engage in this policy field"; (2) A minority of the remaining minority responded "my party asked me" or "my position was part of the distribution of posts between the political parties in the municipal council".

4.3 Characteristics of School Leaders

Lead Paragraph The average school leader is female and in their 50 years. They have typically worked as a school leader about 5 years, and the average school leader has a job as the principal of a primary school (level 1–7). Their immediate superior is the municipal superintendent.

Age: Most of the school leaders are more than 50 years of age (41–50 years: 30 % | 51–60 years: 38 % | >60 years: 23 %).

Gender: 44 % were men and 56 % female.

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

Leadership seniority: The number of very experienced school leaders is low, while there are many experienced and novice groups (1–5 years: 37 % | 6–10 years: 25 % |11–15 years: 17 % >15 years: 20 %).

Education: All the school leaders are educated teachers.

Position: 58 % of the respondents were leading primary schools (1–7); 18 % lower secondary schools (8–10), and 19 % combined schools (1–10). The rest leads combined day-care and primary schooling institutions.

Next -in-line chief: area leader: 43 %, superintendent: 32 % municipal manager, 13 % CEO and 11 % "other leader".

Comments on the Relationships Between the Actors

It seems fair to assume that communications between superintendents and school leaders will be easy because they share a common professional education and socialization in their work path. This assumption is further supported by the fact that superintendents are mainly recruited from the same occupation as school leaders – that is professional teaching. Further, superintendents have only to a small extent take part in management training programs in business and public administration – and emerge basically as educators (Bjørk and Kowalski 2005). School leaders are increasingly subjected to national training programs, which are also influenced by more generalist leadership frames, but in the current study it is fair to say that they share common ground. In a theoretical sense, they share a common basis of identity, or 'normative and cultural-collaborative ground' in Scott's terminology. School board members, on the other hand, come to local school governance from a range of occupations, and less than one out of five works in the educational sector. In contrast, 40 % of the board members work in the private sector, and 12 % run their own businesses. Despite the fact that school board members express clear motivation for taking part in school matters, the discrepancy in background might create a cultural distance between school leaders and superintendents on the one hand, and board members on the other. Collaboration and tight partnerships between superintendents and leaders should therefore be fairly easily set up and maintained because they share the same cultural capital (Bordieu 1993). Inherent bindings and commitments to the normative and cultural-cognitive basis of the Norwegian unified school institution – as a function of their professional background – should support network formation and communication. A larger number of the school board members belong to other occupations and professions, which brings diversity to the governance line.

5   Networks

Lead Paragraph   Superintendent responses indicate that they give primary priority to the actors in the vertical governance line: municipal top managers (and top management team) and school principals, and that they also use network ties to other superintendents actively in order to seek consultations. They also engage in

project groups within municipality organizations, which again increases the number of ties in their work and also gives access to a greater pool of knowledge and information.

5.1   Superintendents in Networks

5.1.1   Municipal Networks

Lead Paragraph The field of work for superintendents is being enlarged to cover primary education, adult education and day-care institutions, which suggests that they will gain access to coordination and strategic decision making beyond education. Superintendents are in most cases connected to the municipal top manager (CEO) through personal ties and membership in the CEO's leadership team at the top of the hierarchy. Superintendents also engage in informal collaborations with other middle level managers in the municipal hierarchy.

The superintendents were asked to assess their upwards relationships to the top management team and the municipal top manager. For example, the survey asks the superintendents to report their perceptions of the frequency in which their immediate supervisor manager, which in most cases is the municipal top manager, assesses their work. The most frequent category is once a year, described by 51 % of the sample. It is noteworthy that more than one out of three, 34 %, perceive that their immediate superior in the line of command assesses their work seldom or never. To capture the specific relationship between the superintendent and the top apex in more detail we asked about the availability and the propensity to which their superior engages in professional dialogue with the superintendent. The data shows that the superintendents perceive a fairly strong availability of their superior manager (when needed) and specifically for consultations about problems. On the other hand, the same immediate supervisors (municipal top managers) play a more passive role in educational engagement in their relationship with their superintendents. The content of the relationships is, thus, more of a general nature. The superintendent data also indicates a perceived influence on other sectors in the municipality through engagement in the senior leadership team. Eighty-six percent of the sample perceived themselves "as a part of the municipality's top management", and 72 % perceived influence on decision making processes beyond the school sector.

Ninety percent of the respondents were assessed by their superiors, annually (51 %) or every half year (14 %). It is noteworthy that 26 % were assessed infrequently. When asked about the reasons for the assessments, the responses were, in ranked sequence: (1) Identification of areas for improvement; (2) To compare objectives with results; (3) To develop relevant objectives for primary schools; (4) To contribute to my professional development; and (5) To monitor my work as a school superintendent. Superintendents explained that they can influence decision-making outside the educational part of the municipality organization. They reported that

they see themselves as a part of the overarching municipality organization, at the same time as they are leaders of primary schooling from the municipal perspective. In the assessment of their loyalty, they express a balancing act of defending primary education at the same time as they having loyalty to the municipality's political and administrative system.

Comments on Relationships Between Superintendent and Their Superiors
Superintendents collaborate and meet regularly with their superiors in formal meetings, and on individual person-to-person basis. They perceive that this context offers opportunities to take part in decision-making processes beyond the educational boundaries. They feel that their superior is available for consultation for them, but this dialogue is of a general nature and seldom about educational matters.

5.2   Networking Horizontally in Municipal Projects

Lead Paragraph School superintendents are also active players beyond the sole school territory through participation in project groups within their municipality organization. The typical pattern is participation in three project groups.

The data collection captures the extent to which superintendents in the sample engage in projects within the municipality organization. Sixty percent of the sample reported that they participate in three or less than three project groups. Forty percent reported participation in more than three project groups in the municipality organization. The data is silent about the content of the collaboration, for example in terms of agendas and issues that superintendents collaborate on across the municipality boundaries, which limits its descriptive power. In a similar vein, the processes in which project group members take part are not described in the data.

Comment on Municipal Networks in Projects
It is fair to assume that a superintendent's engagement in internal project groups offers opportunities to take part in coordination and developmental issues, with basically the whole municipality as target.

5.3   Horizontal Networks with Peers

Lead Paragraph Superintendents are active players in external networks with peers. They meet frequently with colleagues in other municipalities, and they also collaborate on a range of issues. They take part in multiple collegial networks.

The data also captures the extent to which superintendents in the sample engage in social networks with peers. The questions about social network engagement also provided fairly strong scores for professional ties to colleagues in external environments.

For example, 74 % of the respondents reported that they had frequent contact with other school superintendents, and 71 % also said that they participated in many school-based networks. Sixty-five percent of the superintendents reported that they collaborated with other superintendents in a range of cases.

Comment on Networking with Peers
Despite limitations in the data about the agendas and content of this form of network engagement, it seems evident that superintendents cross municipality boundaries frequently in their work, seeking contact with peers. Some also perceive themselves as central actors in these networks. Taken together, the data justifies the assumption that engagement in professional networks is a significant part of a superintendent's work.

5.4 School Boards as Networks

5.4.1 Relationships Between Politicians and Superintendents

Lead Paragraph School boards are frequently connected to the superintendent and the school office, related specifically to agenda setting and preparation for the board's meetings.

Agenda setting in a board is mostly made by the superintendent, the school administration and the chair: 68 % answered that the superintendent decided on the agenda together with the chair of the board, whereas 16 % answered that the chair of the board decided on the agenda. Only 3 % answered that the agenda was created by suggestions from the board members, while 8 % reported that the agenda was set up in previous meetings. A similar pattern was visible 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 % answered "official reports on issues", 53 % answered "information from the principals" and 40 % specified "impressions from school visits". The category "information from my political party" was only specified by 40 % of the school board members. These answers give the impression that the administrative core of the municipality is the prime source of information for the board members.

Comment on the Board's Relationship with Superintendents
The data reports on a common relationship between school boards and superintendents, where the latter actor is in charge of agenda setting in most cases. Superintendents are therefore active players in the policy process, together with the board members.

5.4.2 Perceptions of Influence on the Board's Decisions

Lead Paragraph School board members perceive that the school administration exerts strong influence on the decisions made by the board. The municipal board and the superintendent also exert significant influence.

School board members are asked to assess the level of influence from various stakeholders described to them as a board in decision-making. Not surprisingly the two highest-scoring actors, when it comes to the perceived strength of their influence on the decisions made by the board, were the school administration (74 % of the board members) followed by the superintendent (58 %). Principals scored only 28 % and municipal boards 40 %.

Comment on Stakeholder Influence
There are evidently strong ties between the school administration and the board, which confirms that the administrative staff and the superintendent are not separated from the policy process but active players. Not surprisingly, there is an image of an asymmetric relationship, where superintendents exert stronger influence on school boards than the other way around.

5.4.3 Perception of External Influence

Lead Paragraph School board members perceive significant influence on the municipality's decisions in school policy issues and school strategy issues. They also perceive that the board's work is important for general school development. When it comes to downwards relations to schools, the level of perceived influence decreases significantly.

When asked about their perception of the school board's political influence in municipal governance, the members felt that they were influential and particularly influential in the municipal council and board's strategic decisions and prioritization. For example, 76 % perceived that "the school board has the ability to affect the municipal council in school policy issues". Seventy-two percent perceived that "the municipal board takes the school board's viewpoints into account in school policy issues"; and 66 % "feel that the school board can exert influence on the prioritizations of the municipality". Finally, 68 % perceived that "the work of the school board makes a difference for school development within our municipality".

When it comes to a down-wards influence in terms of agenda setting at the school level, however, the perception of influence among school board members decreases significantly. For example, 36 % feels "that the school board is empowered to set the agenda for the schools' prioritizations". Of note, when board members were asked about their perception of being empowered to make "decisions about local curriculum development", only 20 % responded as agreeing and strongly agreeing. There were also very few examples of direct links between the school board and the schools within the municipality. As noted, there were only infrequent contacts

between school board members and schools, and the board members perceive that they have at best only meager influence on professional school work. The way that school board members may exert influence on schools follows two main avenues; first, through the strategic non-pedagogical decisions made in the municipal council, which in some cases also affects schools directly; and, secondly, through dialogue with the superintendent and the school administration.

Comments on External Influence
Taken together school board members, through their double membership of municipal councils, perceive that they exert significant influence on the municipality's decisions in strategic matters, but in a similar vein, school board members perceive only weak influence on the decisions made by schools and also financial prioritizations for schools. The latter is also a function of the centralized regulations of resource allocations to schools.

5.4.4 The School Board's Processes and Preferences

Lead Paragraph The most important process in school board meetings is, as expected, related to budgeting and financial control of the educational sector. Following up school accomplishments regarding policy goals is also ranked as important, followed by raising student achievements. Finance and budgeting is still the most common subject in meetings, followed by dissemination of information from the administration.

When the school board members were asked about the importance of policy issues in the board's meetings, "budgeting and finance" was consistently considered of most importance (91 %) accompanied by "follow up the school's accomplishment of policy goals" (84 %) and "leading the school" (75 %). "Raising the level of student achievements in national tests" was ranked as important by 58 % of the board members, and the category "local curriculum development" scored similarly at 51 %. We asked how often the various issues were on the agenda of board meetings. "Budgeting and finance" was reported as "often" by 81 % of the members, followed by "information from the school administration" (62 %) and "school quality issues" (51 %). "Student results" is scored as often processed only by 38 % of the members.

Comments on the Board's Processes
As expected, finance and budget control is ranked as both important and time-consuming in the meetings. It is also evident that informational and reporting issues consume significant amounts of time of the meetings. Notably, half the board members ranked local curriculum development as important, but they did not see themselves as influential in such processes, as noted earlier. The board also members saw it as important to improve student results, but they did not spend much time in discussing how to succeed in the matter.

5.5 School Leaders in Networks with Superintendents

Lead Paragraph Superintendents report that the most important actors to them in the municipal governance are school leaders. Collaboration and social connections between superintendents and school leaders follow a formal pattern in meetings, where school leaders meet the superintendents in a regular municipal school leader group. Superintendents and school leaders also meet regularly during daily contact, person-to-person. Seen from the superintendent's perspective, the main purpose of the collaboration is to facilitate and support school leaders in their school development endeavors. From the school leader perspective, it seems that the superintendents are fairly successful in creating a trusting interpersonal relationship and a fairly learning-oriented climate in the school leader group settings.

In Norway it is prescribed by the national regulations that all schools shall be managed and lead by a school principal. In the vast majority of cases, Norwegian school leaders are educated teachers with a long practice of teaching. School leaders have the overall responsibility for the development of school practice, to follow up on state and local priorities, and to follow up on educational outcomes achieved. A common pattern is also that school leaders meet in municipal school leader forums headed by the superintendent. Due to the many small municipalities and schools in Norway, a typical pattern (except for the largest towns) is 2–3 school leaders in each primary school.

5.5.1 Superintendent Dialogue with the School Leaders

Lead Paragraph Superintendents report that the most frequent issues in their regular dialogue with school leaders are financial management and school development. Despite the fact that superintendents are key players in the municipal part of the national quality assurance system, such issues are only modestly represented in their discussions with school leaders. The data, as such, gives rise to an assumption that mediation, in terms of translation and buffering, is an important part of the network, embracing superintendents and their respective school leaders.

We asked superintendents to rank in their own words their three most important tasks in relation to their school principals. 249 out of 291 responded to this open question, and we categorized the responses. Quality management is only modestly represented in the descriptive data about their ranked tasks, accounting for 89 out of 747 (multiple) responses or 11 %. Also within this theme, we can see a tendency in the rhetoric to avoid aspects of control in favor of the "softer" terms 'quality development' and 'quality system development'. The wider point is that quality management was self-reported at low frequency. Second, other administrative themes such as human resource management, financial management and coordination accounted for 344 responses or about 46 % of the total. Third, pedagogical leadership and school development tasks reported accounted for 238 responses or 31 % of the total,

which represents a strong orientation towards the professional domain of the sector. Fourth, tasks related to the "end product" of schooling, pupil achievement, school climate, special needs and learning environment, were only modestly represented in the bulk of self-reported categories: 49 responses or 6 %. The responses do not reflect a strong focus on student learning in the daily priority tasks, according to the dialogue with school principals. Finally, externally oriented tasks or strategic tasks were only weakly associated with superintendent school leadership.

Comments on the Dialogue Between School Leaders and Superintendents
School superintendents report their main focus areas as a combination of administrative tasks and school development orientation in dialogue with the school principals. The focus on quality management is weak, and so is also the focus on student achievement. The data supports the notion that mediation is a central leadership and management function as expressed by school superintendents. Superintendents are uniquely positioned to buffer, translate priorities and change the structure of preferences according to what they view as most important. Whereas the national agenda is relatively "infused" with strong quality rhetoric, this agenda is almost absent when superintendents rank their tasks and the issues they see as important in the daily leadership dialogue with their school principals.

5.5.2   Participation in Municipal School Leader Groups

Lead Paragraph School leaders regularly participate in municipal school leader groups normally headed by the superintendent. School leaders assess this participation in a fairly positive manner in terms of learning and supportive climate.

As noted, superintendents meet school leaders within the municipality through formal settings such as regular school leader groups. From a theoretical stance, this group setting constitutes an important avenue for superintendents to exert leadership. This forum may be tailored in order to adapt national and municipal policy initiatives to the realities of schools, and thus a potential forum for collective sensemaking. It emerges from a theoretical perspective that for this purpose to be fulfilled it is important that school leaders feel a supportive climate in the group, in terms of the school leader group being a "risk-free" zone for taking up difficult issues, problems and even their own failures. These issues are measured by the school leader's assessment of the learning climate, as they have experienced it in the municipal school leader group.

Eighty four percent reported that it was easy to "ask other colleagues in the school leader group about help", and 69 % said that it was possible to bring up "tough issues and problems when we meet" in the school leader group in the municipality. Finally, 64 % said that "it is room for coming up with new ideas in the school leader group of the municipality, even though it deviates from municipal plans". For the school leader group to work as a forum of collective sensemaking, it is crucial that the school leaders feel that they incrementally learn something of value from their participation, so that the groups can be described as an important forum for

dialogue and learning. For example, 74 % of the school leaders support the statement that "the work in the school leader group of the municipality has contributed to an increase in my leadership competence". Sixty-seven percent felt that through the participation in the school leader group they have "gained new knowledge that is relevant for my work".

Comment on the School Leader Group
The formal network embracing the superintendent and the school leader seems to add experiential work-related knowledge to the school leaders. They perceive the learning climate as positive, and it seems fair to link these two observations, which is in agreement with a range of studies into learning conditions in groups (e.g., Edmondson 1999; Garvin et al. 2008).

5.5.3   Trust Between School Leaders and Superintendents

Lead Paragraph   School leaders assessed their level of vertical trust of the superintendents, and the response pattern indicates a fairly trustworthy relationship between these two actors in the governance line.

In interpersonal and intra-organizational 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). An important element in a trusting relationship is the perception of integrity between the actors (Schoorman et al. 2007). For a vertical relationship to be characterized as trusting, especially in an asymmetric relationship within an organizational hierarchy, it would be necessary for the weakest part to perceive the strongest as benevolent and also see them as someone with integrity. In this actual setting, a trusting relationship will then be characterized by school leaders' strong propensity to give their superintendent full information about work-related issues even though it might damage their future career. For example, 89 % say that they have "no problems with informing my immediate superior about problems in my job as school leader, even if it might harm my professional reputation". Similar statements on vertical trust score very highly; for example 92 % say "if I make mistakes in my work as a school leader, I have no problem in informing my immediate superior". Over and above this, the school leader data supports the notion of a fairly trusting relationship with superintendents, which also corresponds with the image from the data on the climate in school leader groups.

Comment on Trust
In four questions that measure vertical trust shown by principals towards their superintendents, the frequency of strong answers varies from 86 to 94 %, which taken together indicate a strong trustworthy relationship. It should however be noted in warning that the school leader data was harvested 4 years after the superintendent survey, so there is no a statistical correspondence between the sets.

5.5.4   School Leader Support Services

Leading Paragraph School leaders report that they mostly receive administrative office support, followed by support of the healthcare nurse and technical services related to the school building. Notably, only a minority of the school leaders feels that they are supported in budgeting and financial management.

When the school leaders are asked about the support services they receive from the municipality, 91 % specified administrative secretary support, 84 % specified a healthcare nurse and 82 % technical service personnel. Notably, only 44 % reported that they received support in tasks related to budgeting, accounting and financial management. This seems paradoxical, given the fact that 96 % of the school leaders say they perceive that the municipality strongly expects them to keep the budget and manage the school well in financial terms. In terms of their own role expectations, 91 % of the school leaders also rank the financial and budgeting tasks as important.

Comment on Support Services
As noted briefly above, there is a slight mismatch between role expectations and support structure when it comes to budgeting and financial management. This must be seen as noteworthy given that financial management is a rather specialized and narrow field of expertise.

5.6   School Leader Assessment of Municipal Support and Competence

Leading Paragraph School leaders assessed the general competence of the school office and their school owner as variable and partly mediocre in a range of important domains, such as law issues, leadership development and curriculum development. The school leaders seem more satisfied with the support they receive in leadership. It is noteworthy that the majority do not perceive work with the quality report as very useful.

In accordance with similar surveys of superintendents and school board members, the investigation also captured school leader assessments of competence (in critical domains) in the municipality administration to which they are subordinated. Only 56 % of the sample assessed the competence of their municipality as satisfying in "educational policies", which must be regarded as a rather mediocre score, taking into account the central role municipalities are given in the Norwegian school governing chain. In a similar vein, 55 % of the school principals in the sample assessed their municipality as competent in "law issues", which is surprisingly low. Third, and similarly noteworthy, among the principals in the sample, the municipalities were assessed as below mediocre when it comes to "competence in leadership development" (47 %), "local curriculum development" (45 %) and "evaluation"

(39 %). The assessment indicates a modest capacity for pedagogical and leadership skills throughout the municipality sector, and, large internal variation across the municipalities that are represented in the study.

The school leaders also assessed the general leadership support from their school office or school owner in a series of critical domains, such as school development endeavors, supervision and involvement in school development at the municipality level. Sixty-four percent of the principals stated that "the quality work of their municipality helps them in school development", whereas 58 % stated that "the supervision and follow-up activities by the school administration are supportive for school development". When asked explicitly about the value of "the work with the yearly quality report", only 40 % assess it positively.

Comment on Support and Competence
The findings presented above regarding assessments of competence in the school administrative apparatus in municipalities, paint a different picture to that of the data from the school board members and school superintendents. Bearing in mind that the data sets were collected at different points in time, they display a less satisfying image from the school leader perspective.

5.7   Is there a Slight Element of Mistrust in the Governance Chain?

Leading Paragraph The school board data displays a tendency towards low levels of trust regarding school leader capacity and loyalty in important domains. They ranked the superintendent higher in terms of competence.

When 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" and their capacity of "mobilization for school improvement and school development", the results indicate only modest levels (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 was observable. For example, only 32 % of the members in the sample saw their school principals as "fairly good in leading school development". When the board members were asked to express their perceptions of school principal loyalty (with conflicting interests about student learning), only 41 % of the board members trusted that "their school principals would side with the interests of the students".

Comment on Indications of Mistrust
The findings presented above indicate that the level of trust and loyalty (towards students) and capacity of school leaders, as seen from the policy sphere, is

only modest. This finding contrasts with their assessment of competence held by the school office, which they see as remarkably high, and it is fair to interpret this as a slight element of mistrust in the governance chain.

6   What Are the Superintendent's Motivational Forces?

6.1   Task Preferences

Lead Paragraph The task preferences of Norwegian superintendents show that, firstly, the administrative tasks attached to municipal leadership are the most preferable. Not surprisingly, budgeting and financial management are high-scorers in the ranking of important and time-consuming tasks. Planning and goal formulation also scored highly, and this group of tasks is attached to the superintendent's function as a municipal organizational manager. Pedagogical and educationalist tasks are also high in the preferences, however, both in terms of interest and importance, but the data supports the assumption that pedagogical tasks lose in the daily competition for the superintendent's time and attention. It is also noteworthy that policy implementation is time-consuming, because it can be interpreted as one of the many tasks derived from the quality assurance system.

We asked the superintendents in the sample to rank the five most important tasks in their job, the five most time-consuming tasks and finally the five tasks they found most interesting. Rankings were collected from multiple-response questions based on predefined response categories. The latter point might be noteworthy since the number of alternative choices is restricted by the stock of available categories. The five most important tasks ranked were: planning and goal formulation, financial management, change processes, pedagogical leadership and policy implementation. The picture is modestly altered in the following task-structure for the most time-consuming tasks: financial management, policy implementation, change processes, planning and pedagogical leadership. When the superintendents were asked to rank the most interesting tasks in their job, the list was as follows: change processes, planning, pedagogical leadership, financial management and competence management. The different rankings are illustrated in Fig. 4.1 below.

When the superintendents were asked to assess a number of pre-defined categories of leadership tasks in relation to their subordinated school principals, the pattern of assessments cluster around a set of transformative practices. For example, 92 % of the superintendents reported that they work frequently towards the clarification of the municipality's goals for primary education in relation to school principals. In a similar vein, 92 % of the superintendents reported that they worked frequently to stimulate the school leaders in their municipality to collaborate. Notably, these items do not self-report actual practices performed by the superintendents, but is rather a ranking list of leadership tasks the members of the sample see as important for a superintendent to carry out via a direct relationship with their principals.
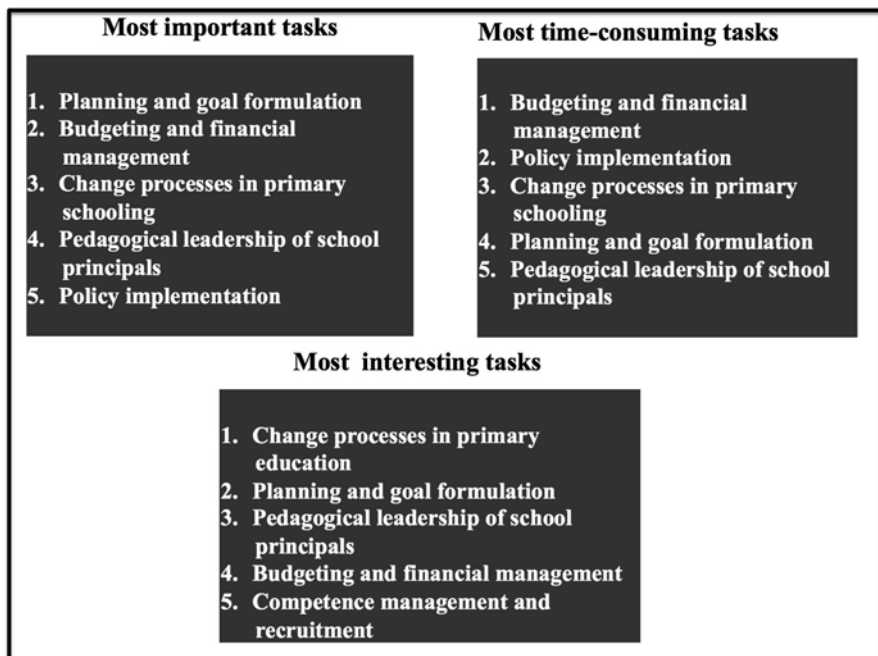
Fig. 4.1 Task preferences of superintendents

Comments on Importance, Time Consumed and Degree of Interest Ascribed by Superintendents

The figure above shows how *political and administrative issues* are ranked as of greater priority when it comes to importance and time allocation – in contrast to tasks of special interest. Notably, policy implementation scores highly on time consumption, low on interest and low on importance. Pedagogical leadership also scores only modestly in the rankings. These examples from the three ranking lists indicate that superintendents work particularly with more general, long term and strategic issues rather than day-to-day issues. They simultaneously indicate a kind of tension related to budgeting and financial management.

6.2 Motivational Drivers of Superintendents

Lead Paragraph Superintendents reported that their main motivation clusters around a sense of self-efficacy in perceiving their work as meaningful and important for the school owner, and around self-belief in their own capacity to develop school leaders in a positive direction. Superintendents see themselves mainly as implementation and change agents for schools and school leaders.

The superintendents were asked about the motivational elements of their work, and the answers clustered around a fairly strong sense of self-efficacy, manifesting, for example, in 96 % reporting explicitly that they see their work as meaningful and 96 % that they see the superintendent as "important for the municipality's role as school owner". Further, 79 % of the superintendents perceive that they can "develop school leaders in a positive direction". In a similar vein, 82 % feel that their "work makes a difference for primary education within their municipality", and, finally, 93 % hold that they can exert influence on primary education within their municipality. The superintendents evidently see themselves as fairly influential change and implementation agents in the governance of schools. Seventy-five percent report that they can impose decisions on school principals in accordance with their own assessments, and a similar number (75 %) recognized their own authority to assess the work of principals. When reporting their ability to motivate the principals directly to implement political decisions made by the municipality, the frequency falls, but not dramatically, to about 60 %.

Comment on Motivation
The responses portray a sense of meaningfulness in the job, paired with a self-belief of efficacy related to mastering the tasks – even if the workload increases further. Superintendents also feel high self-efficacy in schools and with principals, which is supported by the fact that they share the same cultural capital in terms of professional knowledge, documented in the background of superintendents as educationalists.

7 How to Bridge the National and Local Levels?

Lead Paragraph Among the different national reform elements currently running through, the superintendents most frequently point out the work with the quality assurance system. The Norwegian Quality Assurance System was introduced in 2005 with an emphasis on the yearly municipal quality report. It seems that the superintendents bridge the national and "street level" by using translation and mediation devices in addition to employment of the routine elements of the quality system.

In terms of national expectations, superintendents are formal parts of the national quality assurance system. As the key actor (in the information-production) of the municipal yearly quality report, the superintendent holds a premium position for gaining insight into national demands and expectations. Superintendents are also the in target for supervision and inspection carried out by the regional governor of education. When a municipality is selected for state supervision, the governor's staff approaches the superintendent of the municipality in question to organize the supervision, including the schools to be selected for inspection (called "visits") and so forth. In that respect, in the Norwegian system, the superintendent is the personal hub for information about national demands. Superintendents also receive informa-

tion about national expectations from a range of formal systems, in which their work is situated; specifically they report that their work is affected by these sources: "national test results" (57 %), "evaluation and quality reports" (52 %) and "national evaluations" (52 %).

We asked school principals to assess the value of the municipal quality assurance procedures, and as noted, only 40 % of the school principals see the yearly municipal quality report as supporting their local school development work. Regarding the state supervision procedures, carried out by the municipal school administration, 58 % of school principals perceive that the supervision procedures and the follow-up activities by the school administration "provides me with support valuable for the developmental work of the school". When we asked about the quality work of the municipality in general, 64 % of the principals saw it as helpful "for facilitating school development work". In a similar vein 56 % reported that the superintendent "monitors and is strongly involved in the implementation of school reforms".

Comment on the Bridging Function of Superintendents
The data supports, at least to some extent, the notion that superintendents translate national and municipal policies by utilizing mediator devices such as gatekeeper functions in terms of selecting the kind of issues that are set in the agenda with school principals. Needless to say, such opportunities probably do not apply towards the top of the governance hierarchy. Superintendents as educational specialists may also be a source of influence on politicians. Support for this notion is found in the school board data that portrays the superintendent as the most influential actor in the board's agenda setting, decision making and information acquisition processes.

8   How Do Superintendents Obtain Information?

The general picture is that superintendents utilize several opportunities to access relevant information and knowledge for their various functions in the job. The free form answers described a work role attached to both formal and informal sources of information embedded in the municipal hierarchy of authority. First, superintendents acquire a lot of information through their membership of the central management team of the CEO. They also describe this engagement as useful for their work. They gain information about the situation of school professionals, such as principals and schoolteachers, in the regular meetings with school principals within the municipality. Thus, mutual engagement in dialogue with school principals about school development emerges as a potent source of information about real life in schools. The same is the case for their joint discussions of municipal goals for education as an important source of information. In a similar vein, superintendents put only meager emphasis on the discussion of school results and national tests in the same forums.

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 % answered "official reports on issues", 53 % answered "information from the principals" and 40 % specified "impressions from school visits". The category "information from my political party" was only specified by 40 % of the school board members, in addition to "information from the teachers" (36 %) and "information from the teacher trade unions" (23 %). These answers give the impression that the administrative core of the municipality is a prime source of information for the board members.

9   Accountability and Responsibility

Lead Paragraph   There is a pattern that the closer we come to a school's core business of schooling, the more the professional issues come to the forefront. Whereas school board members and superintendents have to put significant emphasis on financial and organizational issues, along with the implementation of policy goals, school leaders see the professional issues as most crucial – for example their own capacity to lead the school's pedagogical enterprise in a positive direction.

9.1   Issues Politicians Delegate to the Superintendent

Lead Paragraph   School boards perceive that superintendents are responsible for quality assurance in primary education along with financial management of the sector. Superintendents then perceive responsibility for implementation of local political decisions and ensuring a satisfying level of student outcomes. Superintendents possess the authority to assess a school leader's work through their position as immediate superior, and they enact policy implementation in schools together with school leaders.

9.1.1   Superintendents

When superintendent are asked about the *external demands imposed on them from stakeholder*s, they ranked demand from local politicians at the top (64 %). At second rank is found national test achievements (57 %), which indicates that their work is closely connected to the political power-center of the municipality and to the national quality system of which the superintendent is an important target actor. Seventy-five percent of the superintendents stated that they possess the authority to assess the principal's work, and further, that they are positioned to implement decisions involving the school leaders in accordance with their own assessments. The data also indicates that this implementation cycle is contingent on the school

leaders' motivation base, which supports the notion of a joint enactment in setting out policy decisions in practice.

9.1.2   School Boards

Superintendents are directly engaged in policy processes through their work with the school boards, bearing in mind that only 60 % of the superintendents in the sample were subordinated to a political committee. As reported earlier, prioritized tasks for which the board feels the superintendents should be held responsible for are, for example:

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

Not surprisingly, a large proportion of the superintendents (78 %) reported that politicians in the municipalities influence their work, and 58 % of the politicians in the municipality also pay attention to school matters. The evidence from both superintendents and board members also confirms that superintendents are expected to take responsibility for the whole "value-chain" of education, from day-care and preschool to level 10 lower secondary schooling.

Comment on Delegation and Accountability
Both the expectations of the board and the superintendent's own perceptions of external demands cluster round responsibility for student outcomes and satisfactory financial management. Although the superintendents were formally positioned to assess and instruct school leaders, they also acknowledge their dependency on their motivational basis and their capacity to implement action among the leaders.

9.2   Mediating

Lead Paragraph Superintendents see themselves as predominantly the managers of the municipal primary school system, and they are uniquely positioned to take initiatives towards school leaders, and thereby to translate and transform local school policies. School leaders see themselves and their roles as a trade-off between pedagogical leadership, small-scale organizational management and facilitation of learning conditions for students – in particular those with special needs.

9.2.1 Superintendents

Superintendents were asked to rank the three most important tasks in their job involving their relationship with school leaders. These responses were grouped into seven main broad categories: quality management, human resource management, administration and coordination, financial management, pedagogical leadership and school improvement, student learning and strategic leadership. Superintendent responses initially showed that quality management plays a relatively minor role in their agendas with school principals (11 %). We can also see a tendency within this theme in the rhetoric to avoid aspects of control and a greater tendency to use softer terms such as "quality development" and "quality system development." Administrative themes, including human resource management (19 %), financial management (16 %), administration and coordination (9 %), make up 46 % of the responses, displaying a relatively strong administrative work profile among the superintendents in the sample. Pedagogical leadership and school development tasks account for 31 % of the total tasks representing superintendent interactions with school principals, indicating a strong orientation towards the professional domain. The fourth theme involved tasks related to the "end product" of schooling, namely, student achievement, school climate, special needs and learning environment.

The data supports the notion that superintendents in the implementation of local and national policies perform their work as active translators and mediators of policy initiatives. For example, whereas 52 % of the superintendents perceive strong demands from parents, parental issues are seldom on the agenda in the regular dialogues between superintendents and school leaders. In a similar vein, quality assurance issues are translated into a softer rhetoric when superintendents meet school leaders. The self-reported data also reveals a gap between policy make' preferences and superintendent task preferences when it comes to managerial accountability (e.g., inspection, quality assurance, follow up of student achievement data).

9.2.2 School Leaders

School leaders are asked about the demands imposed on them by important role stakeholders and themselves. We focused on the two highest scores in each question 'How high are the demands of the municipality makes of you in the following fields'? The school leaders answered: to manage the school's budget (99 %), to ensure that students who face difficulties in attaining educational goals receive "adequate support" (99 %), and that the teachers' work is anchored in "professional and research-based knowledge" (97 %). Turning to the school leader perceptions of the demands, imposed on them by the state, they were asked 'how high are the expectations that the state has of you as leader in the following fields? The first ranking was "to implement legislation" (80 %), "to implement the new curricula (78 %), and finally that the teachers' work is anchored in "professional and research-based knowledge" (78 %).

Table 4.1 School leader perceptions of expectations of their work

According to school leaders, what are expectations of their work?		
School leader expectation of themselves	Municipality expectations of school leaders	State's expectation of school leaders
Lead the educational work in my school 99 %	Manage the school's budget 97 %	To implement new legislation in schools 80 %
Ensure that students, who are unable to achieve the goals, are given adequate support 99 %	Lead the educational work in my school 83 %	Implement revised curricula 78 %
Ensure that the teachers' work is anchored in professional and research-based knowledge 97 %	Implement new legislation in schools 76 %	Ensure that students, who are unable to achieve the goals, are given adequate support 78 %

When it comes to school leader self-expectations of their work role, the ranking was: "lead the educational work in my school" (99 %); "to ensure that students who face difficulties in attaining educational goals receive adequate support (99 %) and finally "to ensure that the teachers' work is anchored in "professional and research-based knowledge" (97 %). The school leader perceptions of the expectations are shown in Table 4.1 above.

Comment on Mediation
Superintendents are active mediators in the implementation cycle of national policies and local decisions made by the municipality organization. The findings concur with a consistent body of published work reporting that implementation is seldom a straightforward linear process. School leaders have a different interpretation of the expectations of state and municipality and they rank pedagogical issues highest themselves.

9.3   Control and Autonomy in the Chain

Lead Paragraph Superintendents perceive a fairly high level of autonomy in their work, and so do the school leaders. School board members see their policy processes as tightly connected to the municipal council, and in that manner, they see themselves as empowered to effect the municipal council in school policy issues.

The superintendents report a fairly high level of autonomy in three critical domains. First, 81 % feel that to a large extent they have control over their daily work. Second, 92 % perceive that they enjoy degrees of freedom, to make decisions related to their daily work as school superintendents. Finally, 67 % report that to a large extent they can conduct their own planning in the job as a superintendent.

Regarding the school leaders, 88 % of the sample perceive that they have autonomy in terms of how to decide the internal organization of their school. Seventy-six percent feel that they are autonomous in deciding the people who are hired to work in their school. Another 83 % report that they enjoy significant autonomy in pedagogical decision-making. School board members, on the other hand, feel that they are empowered to exert influence on the municipal council in school policy issues. More specific, 76 % state that the board has the ability to affect the municipality council in school policy issues, whereas only 36 % of the board members see themselves as empowered to set the agenda for the school's prioritizations.

Comments on Autonomy
Despite bearing in mind that data is collected at different points of time, an initial question is *how* three interdependent actors in the same governance chain can all be autonomous in decision making processes. One intuitive explanation is that they perceive autonomy in different domains of decision-making and that some of these elements can be fairly loosely connected to each other. For example, it is possible for a superintendent to enjoy autonomy in daily planning at the same time as the school principals enjoy autonomy in hiring teachers. These two areas do not conflict with each other.

9.4 To Whom Is the Superintendent Loyal?

Lead Paragraph Superintendents are hierarchically positioned at the intermediate level between the top level of the municipality and the school leaders, which could create conflicts of loyalty. It seems that the superintendents perform a balancing act that encompasses their identity as both educators and civil servants.

The superintendents see themselves as a part of the upper administrative leadership of the municipality (87 %). Conflicts of the superintendents' loyalty were tested through statements which indicated that the superintendents feel stronger loyalty to the school leaders and to other superintendents than to the municipality organization. The responses indicate a balancing act between connections to the municipal hierarchy and to the school profession. For example, 74 % disagree that they feel stronger loyalty to superintendents in other municipalities than to other administrative leaders in my own municipality. Similarly, 52 % reject the idea that they feel stronger loyalty to the school leaders than to the top management of the municipality, and 61 % reject the idea that they face difficulties in motivating school leaders to implement political decisions made by the municipality.

We also asked the superintendent in the sample in their own words (in terms of free-form answers) to reflect upon their work-role and its attached functions. In the smallest municipalities some superintendents reported that they have a combined role, where they also lead a school as a principal. In a situation with a growing number of tasks and responsibilities associated with the quality assurance system, the superintendents report about increasing work pressures. The changes in the gover-

nance system, with an increasing amount of performance data assembling, reporting, state supervision and school result appraisals – the increased work load also takes place independent of the size of the municipality. Even the smallest municipalities need to carry out the same tasks (related to quality assurance) as the larger ones – which evidently increases the workload of the superintendent. The descriptive data from the small-municipality superintendents also reports a lack of professional environment and also a lack of formal authority in the job: "*The role is challenging because it requires strong competence and legitimacy among the principals. This is also because there is a lack of formal authority attached to the superintendent role in our small municipality*".

Comments on Loyalty

The data gives rise to an assumption that the superintendents are capable of mastering a dual identity as civil servant and leading educator, but, superintendents in smaller municipalities have a stronger perception of dependency on their school leaders.

10   Tendencies

10.1   Further Integration of Education into Broader Fields

When the school leaders in 2013 were asked about their immediate superior in the municipal hierarchy, we saw a slightly nuanced picture compared with the main picture of the superintendent survey in 2009. Only 42 % of the school leaders reported in 2013 that they were subordinate to a superintendent who conforms to the conceptual definition, but, as many as 32 % reported that they were directly subordinate to a "municipal manager".[7] This specific civil servant role is more closely connected to the municipal top manager (CEO). A municipal manager most often is responsible for a broader field of responsibility, which can include cultural services, "child care"[8] (a part of the social services but for children and families with special needs) in addition to pre-schooling, day-care, adult education – and primary education. We therefore interpret this trend, slightly visible in the data from 2013, as a move away from a specialized school governance chain led by a school superintendent.

As noted, Homme (2008) also detected a tendency to integrate school policy issues into a broader field of actors when the municipal agenda was involved. She interpreted this to mean that when school policy issues were on the agenda there was a tendency for school boards to lose part of their sovereign position as a committee of specialism.

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[7] Norwegian term: "Kommunalsjef".

[8] Norwegian term: "Barnevern".

10.2   Standard Based Pedagogy, Social Technologies and External Control

The increased use of performance indicators, assessment data and the monitoring of results represent new ways of coordinating the education system and a shift in curriculum understanding from input categories to output control. Performance indicators have also been connected to more definable juridical rights that can be monitored by state supervision and in the final event also brought to trial (Sivesind 2009; Sivesind and Bachmann 2008). In a wider sense, the increased use of standardized performance indicators in primary education, paired with a clear monitoring strategy in terms of making test results publicly available in real-time, can be seen as a move towards an external control strategy employed by the state. In his extensive policy review, Brian Rowan (1990) found that in the external control model of school reform, policy makers and administrators utilized three main tools, curriculum alignment, behavioral control and normative control, imposed on schools, principals and teachers from the top of the hierarchy.

Curriculum alignment in Rowan's terminology 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). These input and output control mechanisms are reinforced through the second main component, behavioral control of teachers and school leaders: streamlining in-service workshops for teachers, uniform approaches to teaching and uniform supervisory practices, paired with standardization of policy goals. Behavioral control and normative control also work in tandem and are often manifest in the form of standardized training programs for teachers, administrators and school leaders and in clear preferences for the kind of projects and developmental activities that will gain support from the governance system. In the Norwegian system, the National Directorate of Education and Training was established in 2006 in order to support curriculum implementation. Over the years, this state directorate has initiated national training programs for school principals, daycare leaders, leaders of special education and a tailored program for teachers who are candidates to apply for school leadership positions. Above all, 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).

Although the Norwegian quality assurance system, with its extensive use of social technologies, is regarded as "softer" than the British and the Swedish state inspection, it evidently represents a case of institutional pressure to use numbers and indicators as the dominant criteria of the purpose of schooling. This briefly described trend can be seen in Norwegian school owner policy documents, where performance indicators and a standard-based pedagogy (e.g., Hattie 2009) are used as "benchmarks" for professional schooling. Taken together, the waves of standardizing pedagogy will expand the feeling of being caught in the crossfire for superintendents and school leaders.

11 Summary and Conclusion

In general, Norwegian superintendents seem to fit the conceptual definition of a superintendent, as presented in the research literature, fairly well (Johansson et al. 2011; Paulsen 2015). When taking the demographical and socio-economic context, in which the superintendent role is situated, into account, however, the Norwegian case is first and foremost characterized by large internal variation (due to the large number of small municipalities). The actual functions and work carried out by superintendents may therefore vary much more than is captured by the conceptual definition and the data presented. Notably, some superintendents have only one school under their authority, and many of these are also school principals in a combined position. The impact of the socio-economic context was described in the free-form responses by the superintendents from smaller municipalities, where they describe heavy work-loads, accelerated by quality assurance issues, time pressure and a perception of lack of authority.

School superintendents in Norway are typically educators with a task preference structure anchored in a professional educational discourse. The data supports the notion that mediation is a central leadership and management function as described by school superintendents. The superintendents are also active network players, and members of the municipality's senior leadership team. They are, thus, uniquely positioned to buffer, translate priorities and change the structure of preferences according to what they view to be most important. Whereas the national agenda is relatively "infused" with strong quality rhetoric, this agenda is nearly absent when superintendents rank their tasks and issues that they see as important in the daily leadership dialogues with their school principals.

Superintendents are closely connected to the national agenda through the national quality system, where they operate at the interface between state supervision (state governor staff) and the schools targeted for inspection. There also seems to be close connections between the superintendent and the political core of the municipality in overarching strategy matters. Municipalities have furthermore delegated authority to the superintendents to implement educational change with school principals, and the superintendents describe some degree of autonomy in micro-political implementation. At the same time, it seems that the superintendents are well aware of their dependency on school leaders when enacting school policy as practical implementation. In this process, superintendents act as mediators, in terms of buffering school leaders from certain tasks, changing priorities and translating and synthesizing policy goals into a rhetoric that helps school leaders to make sense of the reform agendas. The data indicates that the superintendents express loyalty to both the municipal hierarchy and the school principals, to whom they are immediate superiors. The data indicates high level of vertical trust and a fairly good collaborative climate between superintendents and their school principals. In theory, this pattern could be interpreted as manifestations of mutual loyalty and commitment between these two groups of actors in the governance chain.

Superintendents are experienced educationalists, as are school principals. School board members are also experienced local politicians with close connections to the municipal council and board and thereby to the power center of their municipality. Collaboration and close connections between superintendents and principals should therefore be fairly easily set up and maintained because they share the same cultural capital (Bordieu 1993). Inherent ties and commitments to the normative and cultural-cognitive basis of the Norwegian unified school institution – as a function of their professional background – should support network formation and communication. Most school board members belong to other occupations and professions, which brings diversity to the governance line, but their motivational basis for engaging in school matters, as expressed uniformly in the data, should in theory enable the actors to establish trusting relationships.

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Chapter 5
Superintendents in Sweden: Structures, Cultural Relations and Leadership

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Abstract This chapter looks at who superintendents in Sweden are – what roles they have, what they do, whom they contact, what positions they hold and their everyday work. We have gathered all of this information through many years of data collection from various surveys sent out to superintendents, school leaders, and chairs and members of school boards. Superintendents' roles differ both within Sweden as well as across borders with our neighboring Nordic countries. Superintendents as a group seem enthusiastic about educational matters, the development of schools and the educational sector, but they sometimes feel distracted by budgets and financial matters, as well as by political issues with their superiors and boards.

Keywords Policy trends • Organization • Responsibility • Characteristics of school leaders • Political school boards • Bypass

1   Restructuring Municipalities and Educational Agencies

The starting point for a Swedish research program[1] in 2009 was that the superintendent, a previously powerful position in the municipality, had lost some of the authority linked to the position, insofar as it was given authority by descriptions in school laws. The change in the superintendent position from being a state civil servant to a municipally chosen civil servant was the focus of our interest. It happened in a time when a range of decisions was made concerning education in both the international and national arenas. The main question in relation to the ongoing changes in policy

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and government is "What happens when national policies meet local structures?" The main focus of this chapter is the municipality as the main school owner.

1.1 Division of Responsibility and Power

Educational reform agendas and policies are global, although they are sometimes locally developed and promulgated by teachers and school leaders. Competing interest groups have been the driving forces behind recent educational reform initiatives to advance political, social and economic goals. In the Swedish case, even if reforms are sometimes asked for at the local level, they are more likely to come from the national government in response to pressure from the global society and the business and industrial communities. There is also pressure from within the politics of each country, as it is unacceptable to have low international rankings in the education sector; this fact has been a driving force for Swedish school politicians on the national level more than on the local level (Höög et al. 2006).

The concept of "reform" means different things to various educational actors and stakeholders, such as politicians, superintendents, school leaders and professional educators, nonprofit organizations and unions, on the national, municipal and school levels. It is of interest to study different understandings of "reform" among the actors and the implications they may have in practice as well as the different roles that actors think they play in changing processes to meet the goals of different reform initiatives. Decisions on educational reforms at the national level can be looked upon as democratic decision-making. Decisions by the Parliament and government on the national level are expected to be implemented at lower levels in the governing system: counties and municipalities. But how do different actors act to understand, reformulate and enact the national decisions into a reform agenda for the local level?

Over the last two decades, the Swedish Parliament has decided upon a whole range of reforms in all fields of education, some of which overlap each other when it comes to practice. Many of the reforms involve deregulation, decentralization and liberalization, and at the same time, strengthening the national inspections and expanding the testing system. The rhetoric has, for a long time, been focusing on nonfunctioning municipalities and a lack of competence in the system, in parallel with bad results on measurable subjects. Special efforts have been made at the national level with in-service training to, as they call it, "lift" both teachers and school leaders, combined with detailed advice on didactic issues from the National Agency for Education. The Swedish National Inspectorate makes reports on what is not functioning from the Educational Act in different schools. These are some examples of what has created frustration, uncertainty and stress among teachers and school leaders. We find in our data a lack of confidence between different actors and that feedback on work that is functioning well is rare for teachers and school leaders.

In the global context, countries compare their education systems and school results in different subjects between children from the same age group. These comparisons seem to create frustration, especially on the national political level, when the results are not in line with or improved by the different educational reforms that the politicians in power have enacted. Bad results can also give politicians the tool they need when they want to propose special changes. However, when the comparisons show that the variation in student performance is found in as much within as between schools, it makes it difficult for decision makers to find solutions. Politicians often have high expectations that political decisions – laws, regulations and resources – will change educational practices, allowing schools to achieve better results in the next round of tests, both nationally and internationally. The experience is that change takes time: between 5 and 7 years or more, depending on the change needed (Sannerstedt 2000). Sometimes, actors adjust the new laws and regulations to their local context in a slow enactment process (Ball et al. 2012), and it is therefore difficult to say when a reform has been adopted by the schools (SOU 2013:30; SOU 2014:5).

Internationally, declines in schools' results most often provoke a discussion of who is responsible. The political debate in Sweden is interesting, as the critiques and assignment of responsibility by opposition parties are usually directed towards the Minister of Education and very seldom to individual municipality/local authorities or to individual schools with much lower results than expected. One effect of this is that words like "accountability" are seldom used for what is happening, neither in relation to the National Agencies, at the local school owner level or school boards, nor to school leaders and teachers. Despite the focus on comparisons with international results, accountability has not been a central approach to school improvement in the Swedish education system. In a review of one of the international knowledge measurements, the National Agency for Education showed that Swedish school leaders devote comparatively little time to monitoring pupils' progress toward objectives (National Agency for Education 2014; SOU 2015:22).

School leaders are seldom seen in the debate as being responsible for results if the school performs poorly. Instead, the Swedish system, with critiques from the Swedish National School Inspectorate, builds upon the principle that the school owner should be given the critiques. In practice, then, the critiques are given to the school board for independent schools and to the boards in the municipalities for public schools. This method of indirectly critiquing single schools through the school owner, i.e., the municipality, can be seen as a way of "protecting" the activity at the school level and giving the school owner the blame for low results or lapses in accountability. This forces the local authorities to form central office organizations for school improvement and effectiveness in the school district.

These organizations in Swedish municipalities can take the form of assistant superintendents, a middle-layer position responsible for school effectiveness and improvement in the entire public school district; but in many cases, assistant superintendents are also responsible for seven to ten schools and instruct school leaders

in their leadership. They also report back to the superintendent on the school leaders' performance. This middle layer of assistant superintendents is one example of how the municipality organization develops in contradiction of the Education Act, in which the state defines and gives the school leader the discretion to act in relation to the school activities described in the school law; however, this is not backed up in full by the municipalities' organizations. The municipalities argue that the schools are part of their organization and, as such, have to follow rules for hiring and firing staff. Introducing these layers of decision makers between the school leader and the superintendents has the same effect on the school leaders: their discretion is amended.

Conclusions If we simplify, we can say that the division of responsibility for education is divided between the central government, which is responsible for ensuring the overall quality of education, and the local authorities, who are responsible for providing education. However, the last several years of reforms seem to have resulted "… in a mismatch between official responsibilities and the actual powers of the various stakeholders" (Blanchenay et al. 2014, p. 9). Sweden has a multi-layered governance structure with many different actors that interact in a rather complicated way.

2   Municipalities' Composition, Positions and Relations to the National Level

Sweden has a population of 9.6 million people in a land area of 450,000 m^2, making it a sparsely populated country. There are 290 municipalities, many small towns and few large cities. Of all of the towns, 50 % have fewer than 20,000 inhabitants. Their populations range from several thousand to around 800,000 inhabitants. Larger, more densely populated cities are generally associated with higher labor productivity than that of smaller, less densely populated towns. About one-third of the population lives in the three major cities in Sweden, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö.

The democratic system is built upon three political levels: national, counties or regions and municipalities. All of the levels have their own self-governing local authorities with a wide range of responsibilities. Elections take place every fourth year for each of these three authorities. A majority of the politicians are not full-time; they have ordinary jobs alongside their political work.

Local government has a long tradition in Sweden. In the mid-1800s, the municipalities were tasked with running the recently established elementary schools. After World War II, a great deal of the responsibility for public services was placed there as well. The municipalities' self-governance has been written into the Constitution since 1974. The three political levels all decide on their own tax rates. However, activities are also funded to some extent by government grants. Sweden has a system of local government financial equalization that enables all municipalities to provide welfare on equal terms to all of their inhabitants.

The relationship between the municipality and the national level has been continuously debated, especially when it comes to the economy. When it comes to education, the state and municipality finance around half of it each, but there is no earmarked money. During difficult economic times at the national or the municipality level due to rising costs of unemployment, elderly care or social affairs, for example, the division between the national and local levels is questioned.

2.1 Organizing the Responsibility for Education

The Swedish schooling system is built around compulsory for grades 1–9 (elementary, grades 1–6 and lower secondary education, grades 7–9) for all children aged 7–15. Preschool (for children younger than 6 years of age) is voluntary as an optional 1-year class that prepares children for primary school. Upper secondary school (16–18) is not compulsory, but close to 99 % of students attend it.

Parliament has the legislative power, and the government gives the National Agency for Education or some other national agency the task of implementing Parliament's decisions. The Education Act regulates the national goals, demands and tasks for school owners – municipalities or independent organizations – in relation to childcare, pre-school and operations for all school pupils as well as curricula and syllabi. The Education Act also defines the quality of these operations, such as staff competence for teachers, principals and preschool leaders, as well as learning outcomes. The municipalities and independent organizers are responsible for setting educational objectives and assignments for all children, young people and adults, as described in the Education Act. There are also rights and responsibilities for students and parents, such as compulsory school attendance and the right to education, as described in the Education Act, which also apply to free/independent schools. All curricula are in the form of regulations and contain the comprehensive objectives and guidelines of the various operations. The curricula also describe the fundamental values and tasks of each operation.

The government determines curricula for preschools (Lpfö 1998/2010); compulsory schools, including for preschool classes and the recreation center, Sami schools, special schools and schools for students with intellectual disabilities (Lpo 1994/Lgr 2011); upper secondary schools, including upper secondary schools for students with intellectual disabilities and adult education (Lpf 1994/2011).

All municipalities are governed by a municipal assembly with a municipal executive committee. Most have a number of specialist committees for different areas, such as education. In the beginning of the 1990s, the municipalities received the right to organize their work themselves. Several (around 30) have an alternative organization with a sort of drafting body for the municipal assembly. Another model in larger cities is a district committee responsible for all operations in that district, including schools. Smaller municipalities can create joint committees that are responsible for issues across municipal boundaries, such as upper secondary school.

Also, boards of education can differ, ranging from those handling all school forms (from preschool to adult education) to different boards for preschool, compulsory school, upper secondary school and adult education. Preschool and compulsory school may be grouped together in one board, with upper secondary school and adult education administered by another board. In some municipalities, only upper secondary schools and adult education are handled by a board at the municipality level, while the other schools are divided into several different municipal district councils.

The central municipal administration is also in charge for issues where the assembly and executive committee are both responsible. The municipal chief executive is often, but not always, manager of the heads of the different departments in the municipality.

The Swedish School Inspectorate inspects a large number of schools every year, and one factor that is scrutinized at every school is both the systematic work for improving the quality schools should do according to the school act but also the day to day quality of their work. This is also assessed by the National Agency for Education; however, it does national follow-ups and evaluation studies, not inspections of different schools.

Conclusion Who is actually in charge of mandatory education in the municipality? Is it the municipal assembly (a political board responsible for education) or the school leaders (a mandatory position that is directed by the Education Act as responsible for education)? One position that is not mentioned in any regulation is the superintendent or the head of the administration, which was mentioned in the old Education Act as a guarantor of equal education.

2.2   A Changing System

The governing system was built up over a long period of time. With the passing of time, this system came to be expanded through such things as timetables, weekly periods, teaching loads, number of teachers per teacher student and government contributions per student group in different subjects and activities from 1958 up to 1990. By means of these different regulations, the government could influence such things as the content, organization and economic side of these activities. Control was built into the actual structure of the regulations, whereas evaluations were expected to be built into the different levels. Decentralization efforts in Swedish society can be seen from at least the middle of 1970. After 4 years, a Public Committee on the Inner Work of Schools (SIA) proposed several changes to strengthen schools' self-governance, such as another resource allocating system and stronger influence for pupils and parents. An experimental period followed with different types of local boards. From 1981 onwards, changes were made, such as in the employment system of superintendents. They started by changing the employer from the state to the local municipality board, followed by a change in the Education

Act, establishing different functions of a superintendent, which ended in 1991 when there no longer was a stated need for a superintendent. This is an example of how the state slowly changed the regulations. In parallel, a public committee worked on steering schools, and there was increasing interest in a more output-oriented education policy. At the shift in 1989/1990, with a difficult economic situation on the national level, the decision was made to move full responsibility for teachers and school leaders to the municipality. At the same time, the county councils for schools disappeared. The main discussion was about the principals: who should make decisions about the inner organization of schools? The disagreement between the government and the teachers' unions was major, but the economic factors in a time of financial crises were significant.

Interestingly, the Ministry of Education said at the time that the guarantee for an equivalent school can be achieved through, for example, curriculum, assessment and evaluation, teacher education and training, competent teachers and specially allocated government grants. The money specially allocated to schools was changed in 1991–1993 to a standard government grant combined with a tax freeze. The state seldom intervenes in the self-regulated municipalities on taxes. After 1993, the state money was allocated through financial equalization for local governments (Nihlfors 2003).

The teachers were officially employed by municipalities both before and after this reform, called "municipalization," but wages were negotiated with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) instead of the state, which had some consequences:

> Teaching staffs' professional status was thus already circumscribed when municipalization began to be discussed. The reform should not be seen as the triggering factor for teachers' deprofessionalization, but as an additional step towards equalizing the working conditions, wages and the status of the former historically different teacher groups. (Ringarp 2011, p. 190)

Soon after this deregulation, SALAR and the two teachers' unions reached two 5-year agreements starting in 1995 and 2000. In the agreements, several changes were made to teachers' work hours and pay systems. The demands for school development were connected to an individualized salary system. These agreements were drawn up within the framework given by national laws and ordinances. How these agreements have affected the relations between different actors is an empirical question.

The use of the concept of professionalism and how this is negotiated and given meaning has been studied, with focus on the Swedish teachers' unions. Lilja's study (2014) is based on two educational reforms: the certification of teachers and the reformation of teacher education. Lilja finds that the two teachers' unions are actively using arguments from the neo-liberal restructuring agenda, such as creating "a competitive knowledge society," and from the OECD about the importance of creating effective teachers if nations are to be able to improve the results of their education systems in international tests and evaluations.

By using such arguments in order to acquire political legitimacy, the unions are contributing to a gradual reconfiguration of how teachers are understood and talked about within the context of contemporary education debates, highlighting the need for more research to be conducted in order to understand the details of such developments. (Ibid. 2014, p 120)

During 1991–2000, the government expressed its ambition to increase local influence and responsibility within all areas. Timetable, curricula, syllabi, criteria for marking results and demands regarding evaluation were still interwoven into the system, although in a somewhat different way than previously. Economic control was transformed into financial support, which was not meant to regulate activities. Evaluations "changed" to questions about quality and appeared as national inspectors, quality reports and international comparisons (Lundgren 2007). In parallel, a school choice reform was introduced in 1991/1992, both by facilitating the establishment of independent schools and by allowing parents and pupils to choose schools inside the municipality system.

Today, the government addresses school leaders and teachers directly via laws on education and curricula, as well as indirectly by means of regulations that are levelled at schools by municipal councils or independent school owners. The government addresses both the political and the professional arenas. We call this a bypass of policy from the national level to schools. Around and within these levels and actors, there are different interest groups that mediate and affect the processes. In turn, empowering the school leaders creates pressure from below on the school board in the Fig. 5.1 called "Under pressure". A majority of school leaders say that they have great autonomy in relation to decisions about their school's internal organization. Some of the "pedagogical tools" that school leaders have at their disposal to create an efficient internal organization are, among other things, linked to personnel and finance. Few school leaders rated these tools highly, but about half of them still believed that they have a high degree of autonomy when it comes to deciding
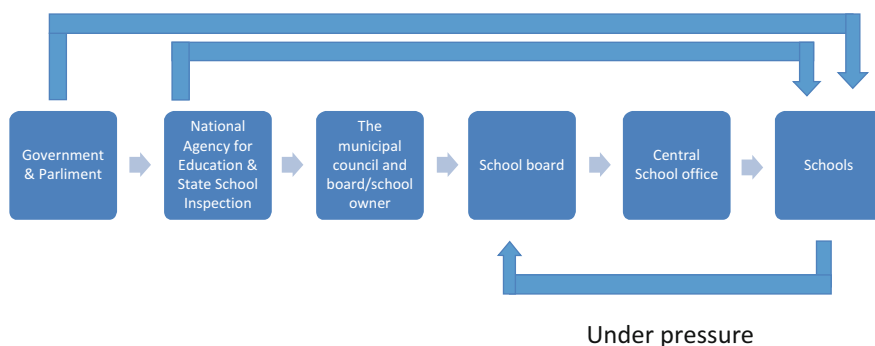
The governing chain with a by-pass government/agencies to school sand "under pressure" from schools to local political level/school board

Fig. 5.1 The governing chain in Sweden with a by-pass from government and agencies to schools and their principals and "under pressure" from school principals to the local political level, i.e. school boards

what staff will work at the unit and how to allocate available financial resources. That every second school leader does not think that he or she has control over these functions is an indication that the local authority has power over central educational tools.

Conclusions We find a hierarchical model (in which the state makes certain fundamental decisions) that is linked to a bureaucratic model (with national agencies and local administration at the local authority), and a large number of employees, children and young people who are expected to participate and exercise their participation in order to get a well-functioning organization. In addition, negotiations and conflicts go on within the system, as well as between different internal and external arenas (Nihlfors and Johansson 2013).

There are several different committees and several administrative structures for the education sector, most of which are under the same local education authority, but there are also independent school owners. The school level, with school leaders and teachers, has been joined by experiments with parent committees and student committees. It is unclear where these committees can be placed in the governing system, as they are elected internally within the group, rather than through open civil elections, and therefore do not come under political control. Instead, they are groups that can have some influence on school activities "from the outside" (Holmgren et al. 2012). Teachers' unions are at all levels and move between the professional and political fields. To what extent the reason for the reform era was to improve education and pupils' results is an empirical matter that cannot yet be analyzed. What we know is that the changes in the educational system have affected the balance between professional and political power at all levels in the system.

3   The Superintendent – A Civil Servant

The superintendent was regulated as a part of the governance system of the school sector between 1958, when the Educational Authority Act was agreed on and implemented, and 1990, when Parliament decided that the municipalities themselves should decide about their local organization. From 1991 onwards, the municipalities have made their own decisions regarding organization and administration. Through the years, there has been a balancing act between centralism and decentralism, between the central government and municipalities, which have, by law, an autonomy that is an important part of the Swedish democratic system.

In 1958, the superintendent was made a central position in the middle of the governing chain. Today, with the global governance of education, as well as at the national level, the superintendent (today with more than 30 different titles and different areas of responsibility) no longer has a position in a chain connected directly to the national level, but only indirectly if and when they work directly with the school leaders.

In the late 1990s, the superintendent usually worked directly under the supervision of a committee or board, and no other official level stood between them and the committee or school leaders. At the same time, in being employed by the municipality, the superintendent was subordinate to the municipal director. A shift took place in this decade, and a majority of the superintendents in our survey said that they were working directly under the municipality director, which constitutes a shift in the organizational system.

Another shift is that a large group, 36 %, of superintendents, has a group of assistant superintendents, middle managers, who are responsible for different parts of the organization. Middle managers can be categorized in three groups: one group relieves the superintendents in their work, others are in charge of a region, and the final group is in charge of a school type (pre-school, compulsory, etc.). The superintendents also said that the middle managers were their eyes out in schools. Thus, the superintendent, who earlier was the "state's eyes" in the municipality, now has a "municipality eye" in schools. At the same time, what matters most when it comes to decisions by political boards, which are in charge of education, is what the state inspection has reported – not what the superintendent has reported from the school leaders' quality reports. The superintendent is visible at the local arena, but the question is still what they do and what type of links they have to different actors.

Most superintendents work with politicians on the different boards who are well educated, dedicated and convinced that they can make a difference, but are not always familiar with the educational sector. Both groups report insecurity and sometimes mistrust between actors at different levels. It can be insecurity among both the politicians and the school leader about how the superintendents presented the situation at a local school. This can be due to a lack of knowledge or misuse or non-use of existing data. However, the insecurity can also be traced to the existing culture, both in the professional organization as well as in the meeting point between politicians and professionals.

The Education Act mandates a tight coupling between the national level and school leaders, including in the curricula. However, the superintendent has no direct relationship with the national level. Instead, this position is tightly coupled to the local authority. The data tell us that no superintendents see themselves as "just" policy implementers; they all thought they were policy makers, in some ways. The superintendents balanced government and municipal interests as well as political and professional responsibilities. They formulated their own tasks firmly with the chairperson (Holmgren et al. 2013).

The school leaders, both principals and preschool leaders, gained a strong position beginning on the 1st of July, 2011, when the Education Act came into effect. In it, the school leaders are mentioned extremely often, compared with the previous law. In this way, the law bypasses the municipal level. At the same time, the school leaders did not necessarily receive the power to decide about issues that are the municipalities' responsibility, such as deciding about different facilities and personnel issues. What is not visible in the Education Act is the professional part on the municipal level, which we call the superintendent in our work.

When it comes to the superintendents and their work with national reforms, almost half (42 %) of the superintendents agreed with the statement that they needed to spend more and more time implementing national reforms. Only 17 % of them agreed with the statement that the reforms have had the desired effect in "their" municipality, and 16 % said that their work on national reforms affected their work on other important tasks. An interesting subject is whether superintendents feel they have conflicts or dilemmas in their decision-making. When asked about the conflicts they may experience in their everyday work life, a small portion (13 %) said that the superintendent role means that they experience conflicts between their own values and their professional duties. Some (27 %) questioned the prevailing structures when faced with different ethical dilemmas. Some (38 %) said they had to bend the rules and procedures in order to perform a necessary task. On the whole, working with national issues did not seem to interfere with their work too much, nor did different views create conflicts on a larger scale.

Conclusions We see several parallel and somewhat contradictory means of governance. The rhetoric still talks about the municipality as the main actor responsible for education. At the same time, national regulation has been more rigorous, both in the school law and in the curricula. The Education Act gives the school leader the right and obligation to organize the "inner life" of the pre-school/school in the ways that suit the situation best. These results show that the conditions for the profession are highly variable. Some school leaders believe that they have control over their own organization, the focus of their educational work and activities for children in need of special support, and can make decisions about their own work. Yet, a large percentage of school leaders do not have these opportunities; thus, our conclusion is that a majority of school leaders do not have the degree of independence required to run their schools successfully.

4 Who Are the Superintendent, Members of the School Board and the School Leaders?

The superintendent has stemmed from the Swedish governing system, at the municipality level, from being appointed by the state and being a key player or link between the national and local levels, to thereafter becoming more or less invisible for more than a decade, due to the steering system. Today the superintendent is closely linked to the municipal governing system as a whole. The change has taken place during a transition from strong regulation from the national level to a sort of decentralization to the municipalities and back to a more state-driven school, where the national level bypasses the municipality and goes directly to the school level. This is visible in the creation of the State Inspectorate, which, together with the National Agency for Education, has a strong influence on the inner life of schools, such as in questions about how well the schools comply with the school law, allocate resources and decide how many career positions for teachers each municipality or

an independent school owner can have. What differs today is that the superintendent is one among several civil servants in the municipality. This is both recognized in their titles (which vary) and in who is the operating manager for the superintendent. However, it is also noticeable when we ask about their loyalty, which is to the municipality in the first place.

The school owner in a municipality is the municipal council, a political board in charge of the whole municipality. They create a lower political level in the municipality that is responsible for the whole school sector, or multiple boards responsible for different parts of the school sector. At most, there is only one school superintendent, but if there are multiple boards, there might also be more than one school superintendent. In that case, they all have different responsibilities. The three most common *areas of responsibility* for a board of education in a municipality are (1) all different school forms together; (2) pre-school, spare-time school and compulsory school together; or (3) a board for upper secondary school and adult education. There are also boards that combine education and culture in the municipality, or education and elderly care, to use some examples. However, in some larger municipalities, they can also be responsible for the whole school sector.

A large number of municipalities have middle managers; leaders in between the superintendents and the school leaders. Their roles are sometimes unclear. The school leaders' roles are defined by law, which grants them many rights and responsibilities. At the same time, they are hired by the municipality and, in their role, can be placed in a hierarchy and have different people above them who lead them. This is a rather new phenomenon, and we cannot today see all of the consequences of introducing this layer of civil servants.

4.1 Characteristics of Superintendents

Lead Paragraph   The average superintendent is a 56-year-old male who has had his position for 3–5 years. He has only worked as a superintendent in his current municipality and, before that, as a school leader.

- *Gender*: The majority are men (61 %, while 39 % are women).
- *Age*: The average age is 56.
- *Professional seniority*: When we asked them how long they have been in the municipality they are working in now, 25 % were rather new and had been there for up to a year and a half, 46 % had been at their present location for between 2 and 5 years and 27 % have been in the same position for between 6 and 20 years. Around 30 % had been superintendents in two to three different municipalities, but most of them have served in only one municipality (64 %).
- *Professional background*: The majority, 70 %, have served as superintendents for 3–5 years, but a small group of 6 % had served for more than 11 years.
- *Academic background*: Their backgrounds were traditional; they have been teachers and school leaders, after which they applied for the top position. Quite

a lot of the superintendents continued with their university studies after their first academic degree. Fewer than 10 % of the superintendents had a degree in any field of study other than education.

- *Appointment procedures*: The superintendents were appointed after a public advertisement, usually by the administrative manager in the municipality. The position was usually a permanent position with no end date.
- *Superintendents' titles*: What we call a superintendent has more than 30 different titles due to different types of organizations and responsibility areas. It is difficult to know who is responsible for what.
- *Next-in-line chief*: The superintendents were asked where they were positioned in the municipality structure. Fifteen percent answered that they were positioned directly under the political leaders of the municipality, 18 % answered that they were positioned under the board of education/ chair of the board of education. The majority of superintendents, 56 %, were subordinated to the administrative municipality manager. On another question, 76 % of the superintendents thought that they could act in the municipality independently and saw themselves as a part of the municipality's administrative management. The numbers of principals and preschool leaders differ between different superintendents. Most of the superintendents, 77 %, had up to 25 school leaders. At the same time, we found superintendents that had from 26 up to 150 school leaders in their command span.

4.2   Characteristics of School Board Members and Chairs

Lead Paragraph The average school board member is 51 years old. He or she has been a board member since the last election and typically work in the public sector. He or she became a member of the board because of his or her interest in school matters.

- *Gender*: Men and women, with close to a 50–50 split.
- *Age*: The average age was 51 years old. Twenty-five percent were younger than 40, and 25 % were older than 60.
- *Board seniority*: On average, 60 % of these respondents have been members of a school board for less than 4 years, and all members have a mean of 3 years on the board, which tells us that many of them are newcomers in politics. Eight percent have been active in school politics for more than 12 years. On average, our respondents have been active in politics for 8 years.
- *Employment*: Almost 30 % of them are employed in the public sector, with 13 % employed within the school sector.
- *Education*: More than 60 % have a post-upper secondary education, including higher education, while 31 % have upper secondary school as their highest formal education. School politicians in Sweden can be characterized as a well-qualified group.

- *Political representation*: The electoral system is proportional, which means that the proportion of seats that parties may have on the board is largely the same as the percentage of votes that the party received and the same proportion they have in the municipality board.
- *Reasons for joining the school board*: When we asked them about why they became members of the school board, 62 % said that they were engaged in school matters and 15 % said that they had an agenda for change and wanted to improve the schools. One other personal reason was that they had children in schools at the time. A majority of the members of school boards thought that the board could make strategic priorities for the school sector; 54 % answered 5 or 6 on a six-point scale.

4.3 Characteristics of School Leaders

Lead Paragraph The typical school leader is a female who is 53 years old. She has been a school leader for 6 years. Before she became a school leader, she was a teacher and had finished the compulsory school leader educational program.

- *Gender*: A majority are female (69 %, with 31 % being men).
- *Age*: The mean age is 53; 58 % are between 45 and 55 years old.
- *Leadership seniority*: The school leader is well experienced. They have, on average, been a school leader for 6 years (50 %).
- *Education*: The majority of Swedish school leaders have backgrounds as teachers or preschool teachers.
- *Position*: They work under very different circumstances. Seventy percent work in public schools of different sizes and also in municipalities with different financial strengths. The remaining 30 % work in different independent schools. Again, we find variations in size, ownership and financial strength.
- *Next-in-line chief*: We can also identify a change in organizational structure. Thirty percent do not have the school superintendent as their boss, but a person at a middle-level position between the superintendent and the school leader. Another example of the turbulence is that only 56 % of the school leaders reported that they were called principals. Other names include program principal, assistant principal and area principal.

Comments on the Relationships Between Superintendents, School Boards and School Leaders
Only 4 % of the school leaders believed that the administrative organization had very good skills in terms of leadership development. Nine percent "very much agree[d]" that the superintendent asks for their experiences on various issues, and 11 % agreed that the superintendent is working to create the conditions for school leaders to be the best possible. For the statement "My local authority ensures that I as a school leader receive enough skills so that I can implement national reforms,"

11 % of the school leaders believed that they had sufficient skills to be able to implement national reforms. Only 6 % clearly expressed that the reforms had the desired effect. When we put the top two options together, 30 % believe that the reforms have had the desired effect on their school.

We tried to capture the relationships between school leaders and superintendents with an open question in response to which *the school leaders were requested to indicate the three most important actions the superintendent did to facilitate their work*. A categorization was made based on their answers about support in administrative areas, work environment, facilities, personnel or finances. Assistance with difficult students and parental issues were highlighted, as were information and training. What school leaders appreciate most in relation to the superintendent is to receive support, feedback or coaching when they need it and to have issues delegated in combination with trust. It is also apparent that the superintendent is perceived to be the link between the school leader and politicians, as well as to the top management of the local authority. This applies in both directions. The superintendent's function emerges in these responses as a service function that, when it works at its best, is readily available and facilitates and supports the work. Words like "operate" and "develop" are rarer.

5 Networks

Superintendents *meet with the chair of their board for*, on average, 2–3 h a week outside board meetings. They actively participate in groups within their municipality to develop and make policy or perform other administrative tasks. They believe that they have a responsibility to lead their school leaders and the educational sector towards better quality in the municipality's education. This part of the chapter will discuss how the superintendent participates in and leads though networks.

5.1 Networks with Superintendents

Lead Paragraph The superintendents find their work to be very independent but also that their work is evaluated to a large extent. The superintendent is part of many different groups within the municipality: as many as 1–3 groups that will meet several times per month. They also think that they have great influence over decisions regarding education in the municipality.

The superintendents regard themselves *as a part of the municipalities' overall administrative management* – as many as 56 % agree completely with that statement. They also think, to a somewhat large extent, *that they have major influence over decisions concerning areas other than education*, although they do not believe to quite as large an extent that *their task as superintendent is to stand up for their*

sector's interests in the municipality. The majority of the respondents answered somewhere in between for this statement (25 % answered a three on the six-point scale). As a superintendent, it also appears very important to lead the work towards better quality in education. A vast majority of the respondents, 60 %, agreed in full to this statement and thus *think that it is very important for the superintendent to be in charge of leading the quality improvement*. However, the superintendents did not think that *their daily work was characteristic of being an administrative director for the administrative district*; 27 % did not concur at all with this statement.

The superintendent is also a part of many different municipal groups in order to make policy, action plans and other administrative tasks. The majority, 54 %, responded that they were active in 1–3 different groups. These groups met every second week or every fourth week. We asked about the superintendent's weekly contact with the school board chair, outside of the regular board meetings. The majority of the superintendents, 46 %, responded that they spent around 2–3 h a week in contact with the board chair, closely followed by 38 % who responded that they spend around 0–1 h a week in contact with the chair.

Eighty percent of the superintendents generally thought that their work was being evaluated, although 16 % stated that their work was not. The ones who stated that they were being evaluated said that it was done through evaluation discussions with their heads of administration around once a year, although some 8 % said they were never evaluated. Evaluations can also be done in discussions with the board chair; the superintendents stated that this happened once a year, very seldom or never in equal distributions.

The superintendents mentioned many different reasons why it was important for their work to be evaluated. Some of the more important reasons we found included striving to see results compared to the set goals, to identify areas of development and to be able to set their salaries for the next term.

When it comes to independence, *the superintendents found that they were very independent within the municipality*; the majority – around 76 % (who answered a 5 or a 6) – stated that their independence level was "very high," and only around 2 % stated very low independence or none at all.

5.2 School Boards as Networks

Lead Paragraph School boards and the chairs said that their most important tasks were grades, results and progress towards goals. The superintendents said that they had the ability to influence the boards' decisions on educational policy. The superintendents said that their board members were dedicated to their work and to developing the educational sector within the municipality without overstepping the boundaries of the boards' tasks and the school administration's tasks.

5.2.1 Board Members

When asked what *different areas of responsibility the members of the committee had*, their answers showed that they were widely spread throughout the education field. A majority of them, 85 %, were responsible for preschool and primary school, 70 % answered that they were responsible for upper secondary school, 58 % were responsible for adult education, 55 % were responsible for Swedish language for immigrants, 9 % for social services, 20 % for cultural studies/schools, 33 % for leisure activities, 71 % for special needs schools and 49 % for music schools, with 12 % answering "other."

We also asked *the members of the board what three areas they thought that the committee should be working on during the current term*. The overall majority of the respondents answered that grades, results and progress towards goals were by far the most important areas. Other areas, which around 3–6 % of the members mentioned as important, had to do with student health, economy, group sizes and support for students with special needs.

Different questions were up for discussion within the boards, and we asked the members how often different topics were being raised during their current term. Organization, personnel, special needs, information from the superintendent, information from the school administration, the economy, evaluations, students' results, quality, short-term decisions, long-term decisions, strategic discussions, school development and information from individual schools were all topics up for discussion; amongst these, *organization*, *information*, *economy* and *evaluation* were the areas that seemed to be most discussed. According to the members of the board, the most meaningful sources of information were visits to the organization (8 %), evaluations by the municipality (8 %) and information from the superintendent (6 %), the school leader (5 %) and the school administration (5 %).

5.2.2 Chair

Within *the areas of responsibility for the chairs of boards* were, for the most part, primary schools, secondary schools, upper secondary schools, adult education, special schools, music schools, language education (Swedish for immigrants) and, in some board areas, culture schools, social services and leisure activities.

Many types of questions were raised at the board meetings. Questions regarding information from the administration and the economy are discussed at almost every meeting. The questions that were being raised at every other meeting had to do with the school's organization, decisions regarding evaluations, general quality questions and students' results. Questions that were seldom or never raised in the board meetings included personnel questions, student questions and hearings for school leaders.

A majority of *the chairs stated what they saw as the goals for the board*: Results and increasing progress towards reaching the goals were the main goals for them, as well as further developing the board's working process and questions regarding the economy.

5.3 Influence

Lead Paragraph When we asked the superintendents to rate the *influence of some actors on the boards' decisions* the superintendents thought that the chair of the board, themselves and the municipality board were the top three actors with the greatest influence of the boards' decisions. Influence is something that comes across differently depending on your position in the governing chain. The superintendent feels a large influence over educational politics, and they feel rather secure in where the line between politicians' and superintendents' responsibilities is drawn. The superintendents don't, however, feel that the chair has the same amount of influence as they have as superintendents. The board members do feel that they have influence over decisions and, although to a lesser extent, have the ability to set the agenda for schools' priorities.

5.3.1 Board Members

The board members did feel that the board, to quite a large extent, had the ability to make strategic priorities within their area of responsibility. A majority of the respondents answered in the higher part of the scale in our survey.

They also thought that they, in their position as a board member, had the ability to influence the decisions being made on the board. To a lesser extent, they also thought that the board had the ability to set the agenda for the schools' priorities. The same went for the ability to make economic priorities that would have an impact on schools; the majority thought that they did have these abilities.

5.3.2 Superintendent

The superintendents thought that they, to a large extent, *had the ability to influence the form of the municipality's education politics*; the majority answered in the high end of the spectra – between four and six. However, they did not think that the chair of the municipality's board had the same power of influence, which they rated an average of around three. Regarding the politicians' interest in topics involving schools and education, the superintendents' answers show that they did think that the politicians had a rather high interest in questions related to education. They also thought that it was easy to motivate the members of the board about changes at the national level and that the chair was rather engaged in pushing questions dealing with realizing decisions about schools made on national level.

The boards also regularly made decisions regarding evaluations within the organization; although the majority of the superintendents answered in between the scale for this question, the general pattern shows that they were more positive on this then negative. They also showed a slightly more positive stance, when it came

to the fact that local quality reports and evaluations had an impact on the direction of the decisions that the board made in different questions. The superintendents did not agree with the statement *that the local politicians had too much involvement in their daily work as superintendents*; they stated that they have a rather clear conception of where the line is to be drawn between the politicians' responsibility areas and the superintendents'. A vast majority also indicated that they were satisfied with the work that the central school/education administration was doing in relation to the development of schools in the municipality.

5.3.3 School Leader

The school leaders feel that their leadership influences the teachers work with students positively, 74 % of the answers indicated a high satisfaction with the relation. They also state that the superintendent asks for their experience quite often. When it comes to their ability to influence the board's decision making, the majority answered a two or a three to this statement, which indicates a low experience influence. But the school leaders feel that their opinions and values are being listened to by the chairs of the board; 52 % answered five or six.

5.4 Board's Processes and Procedures

Lead Paragraph The chairs see themselves as influential in the board's decisions. The board members and the superintendent are close behind. The board members get most of their information from the superintendent.

5.4.1 The Chair

We asked the chairs of the school boards *what image they had of the boards' meetings*. A majority of the respondents, 76 %, answered that their board was often unified in their decisions. Around 18 % said that the decisions made were often based on the majority parties' vote.

When it comes to *influence on the boards' decisions*, 46 % of the chairs thought of themselves as having a great influence on the boards' decisions. The municipal commissioner does not have as much influence, according to the chairs, where only 8 % answered that they had a lot of influence. Instead, around 13 % answered that they had significantly small influence. The same went for the central administration in the municipality; the chairs did not think that they had great influence on the boards' decisions, with only around 8 % answering that they had major influence. The majority answered somewhere in the middle. The working committees within the boards, in contrast, were seen as having a very high influence on the boards'

decisions – over 30 % of the chairs agreed to a high extent with this statement. Also, the superintendents seemed to have a lot of influence, according to the chairs, where a majority agreed a lot or fully to this question. The same does *not*, however, go for the school leaders, where only 5 % of the chairs indicated that the school leaders had a lot of influence. The majority of the respondents answered that they had neither great nor small influence, but somewhere in between. The same went for teachers. The chairs did *not* think that they had much influence over the boards' decisions – only 2 % answered that they had a "very large influence." Parents and inhabitants in the municipality, religious groups, local business, consultants and local lobby organizations did not have specifically large influences, according to the chairs. The local unions had somewhat greater influence, but still not as much as the superintendents or the board committee.

5.4.2   The Board Members

The members of the board seemed, to a great extent, to not have any *contact politicians for schools* – 32 % stated this. At the same time, 21 % stated that they were the contact politician for one school, 12 % for two schools and 16 % for three schools. Fourteen percent stated that they were not the contact politician, but it did not rule out that someone else could be.

Forty-two percent of the board members stated that *they visited one of the municipality's schools* three times or more during the semester. Twenty percent visited schools twice, 25 % once and 7 % never visited during the semester.

The board members said that there were, for the most part, *unanimous decisions being taken on the board* – over 44 % agreed with this statement. Around 32 % thought that the decisions were being made by the majority party.

The members of the board stated that the most important sources of information were the superintendent (62 %), their own political party (38 %), visits to the organization (47 %), the school administration (42 %) and school leaders (35 %).

Comments on Superintendents' Relations with the School Board
There seems to be great trust between the superintendent and the chair. The members of the boards listed the superintendent as their top source of information concerning the schools and preschools. Both the board members and the superintendent thought that they had great influence over the boards' decisions.

5.5   *Networks: School Leaders*

Lead Paragraph Sixty percent of the superintendents did not have a management level between themselves and the school leaders. All of the superintendents stated that they had regular meetings with all of the school leaders in their area of

responsibility. About half of the school leaders met their board at least once a year. Most of the school leaders were also a part of their closest manager's management group.

5.5.1   Superintendent

When asked about the superintendents' contacts with the school leaders, 60 % of the superintendents stated that they did not have a management level in between themselves and the school leaders, while 36 % say that they did. The majority of the superintendents, 81 %, stated that they had regular meetings with all of the school leaders in their area of responsibility, while 17 % stated that they did not. The meetings seemed to be held once a month or more seldom. These meetings often consisted of information from and to the school administration, superintendents, individual school leaders, politicians and other external actors. Common grounds in different issues are discussed during the meetings, as are external orientation, discussions about national issues concerning education, individual students' results in the municipality, economic issues, pedagogical discussions and common pedagogical investments for better results and discussions regarding skill development for teachers and school leaders.

5.5.2   School Leaders

Fifty-two percent of the school leaders stated that they had meetings with their board at least one timein a year, while 41 % stated that they did not. Seventy-two percent of the school leaders said that their closest manager had a management group that they were a part of, while 21 % said that their manager did not have one of these groups in which they were a part. The school leaders stated that the superintendent called for different kinds of meetings during the semester, all to a different extent. The most common subject, which calls for the most meetings, was meetings regarding information. The general number of meetings seemed to be around 1–5 per semester, regardless of meeting type (information, education, quality development or competence development).

5.5.3   Board Members

When asked if they as board members visit one of the schools in the municipality 45 % of the board members answered that they make at least three school visits per semester. Twenty-one percent makes two visits per semester, 27 % answered that they makes one visit per semester and 7 % answered that they do not visit schools in the municipality. We also asked *the board members if they are the "contact politician" for one or more of the schools in the municipality*. One-third answered that they do not have an organization with contact politicians, 22 % answered that they are the contact politician for one school, 13 % are the contact politician for two

schools, 17 % are the contact politician for three schools and 14 % answered that they are not the contact politician for any school (although they have that organization).

Comments on Superintendents' Relations to School Leaders
The superintendents met regularly with the school leaders within in their area of responsibility. About half of the superintendents did not have a management level between themselves and their school leaders.

5.6 Network: Peers

Lead Paragraph The superintendents thought that they had more in common with other sector managers within their municipality than with other superintendents, with some exceptions.

A vast majority, 91 %, of the superintendents stated that *they were part of some kind of network that has to do with school/education questions*. The superintendents thought they had a somewhat close working relationship with other superintendents in a number of questions, as seen in our results, where the majority answered somewhere in the middle – a three or a four – on our scale. *The superintendents did contact other superintendents for assistance in many different questions*, although we see that the majority, again, answered somewhere in the middle of the scale. The superintendents said that their *other superintendent colleagues*, *to some extent*, *saw them as a central person for cooperation*, with 30 % answering a four. However, they did not think that their cooperation with other superintendents was more important than with other central figures in the municipality. The majority answered in the low end of the spectrum, with twos and threes.

Comments on Superintendents' Relations with Peers
The superintendents seemed to identify themselves more with other sector managers in their municipality than with other superintendents. One can speculate if this is because they saw themselves more as administrative managers/director rather than as managers in the educational sector.

6   What Are the Superintendents' Motivational Forces?

Lead Paragraph Superintendents are interested in working on the development of schools, towards set goals and with leadership. They found the most important issues to be budgeting and financing; their most time-consuming tasks were also budgeting and financing.

When asked about *their most important tasks*, the superintendents answered: to improve and develop schools and their results, to coach and guide school leaders in

Table 5.1 Task preference structure of the superintendents

Most important	Most time consuming	Most interesting
Budget and financing (84 %)	Budget and financing (89 %)	Development of schools (84 %)
Development of schools (80 %)	Political issues (62 %)	Planning and goal setting (69 %)
Planning and goal setting (68 %)	Development of schools (61 %)	Pedagogical leadership (68 %)
Pedagogical leadership (52 %)	Planning and goal setting (58 %)	Budget and financing (55 %)
Evaluating the students' results (47 %)	HR/personnel administration (44 %)	Evaluating the students' results (47 %)

their role as leaders, to keep the budget and to lead the organization towards common goals.

The superintendents were asked to *rank the tasks they thought were the most important*, *most time consuming and most interesting*. The results can be seen in Table 5.1.

Budgeting and financing, development of schools and planning and generating goals appear on all three lists; however, the order in which they are ranked varies between the lists. The superintendents ranked pedagogical leadership as both one of their most important and most interesting tasks, but it is not one of their most time-consuming tasks. The superintendents thought that their most important and time-consuming task was keeping the budget and financing, while their most interesting task was the development of schools.

Comments on Importance, Time Consumed and Degree on Interest Ascribed by Superintendents
The table shows that budget and financing issues were in the top as both the most time consuming and the most important tasks. They were fourth place in the list of most interesting tasks. According to the superintendents, their most interesting task was to develop schools, which they ranked their second most important task and their third most time-consuming task. Pedagogical leadership is only found on two of the lists – most important and most interesting. It is clearly a task the superintendents find important, although they do not prioritize spending time working with it.

In general, the tasks on all three of the lists are of a more general nature and focus on more long-term work and progress, rather than day-to-day decisions and focus.

6.1   How to Bridge the National with the Local Level

Lead Paragraph Almost two-thirds of the superintendents thought that they could influence the municipality's educational policy. In general, the superintendents thought they had their strongest a mandate, when it came to handling the finances

and the budget, but they also thought that they had a mandate to act in other matters as well.

Sixty-one percent[2] of the superintendents thought *that they could influence the municipality's educational policy*. Eighty-four percent of the superintendents strongly agreed with the claim that *the board expects me to make changes in the organization for better results on national tests of knowledge*. Eighty-five percent of the superintendents agreed with the claim that *the board expects me to make changes in the organization for better financial results*. Seven percent of the superintendents agreed with the claim *I find it hard to motivate the members of the board for changes that originated in national decisions*. One-third (34 %) of the superintendents agreed with the claim that *the chair of the board is proactive in issues concerning the realization of national policy within school policy*. One in four superintendents (25 %) agreed with the statement that *the national quality assessment's reports and valuations affect the direction of the board's decisions on various issues*.

Sixty-three percent, or around two-thirds of the superintendents, claimed that *their work was affected by the school's quality assessments*. As many superintendents stated that *their work was affected by the school administration/ municipal quality reports*. Seventy percent of the superintendents perceived *the state school inspectors' reports as affecting their work the most*. Thus, the superintendents' work was mostly affected by the state school inspections and their reports.

Comments on Wishes for Future Reforms
The Swedish superintendents thought that they could influence the educational policy decisions in their municipality. The superintendents thought even more strongly that they had a mandate to take action in order to improve the schools' results and the financial results.

The great impact on their work attributed to the state's school inspection was not unexpected but more of a confirmation of a trend in the Swedish educational sector, where the influence of state school inspections is increasing. A new policy has been presented, which means that the State School Inspectorate and the National Agency for Education shall cooperate in supporting school to overcome their shortcomings.

6.2   What Do the Superintendents Prioritize?

Lead Paragraph   The superintendents seem to be focusing more on general matters than on day-to-day issues in their work and expect the same from the board members and school leaders. There seems to be a desire for each player in the governance chain to focus on his or her responsibilities, rather than on others' responsibilities.

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[2]This percentage represents the respondents who answered a five or six on a six-point scale.

Table 5.2 The five most important tasks that superintendents do

Implement visions, tasks and goals of the organization in order to facilitate employees realizing them	64 %
To anchor political expectations and clarify the local achievement goals	53 %
Work to implement the organizational changes necessary for employees to be able to do their jobs effectively	50 %
Consult with, shape and actively lead the professional staff	23 %
Support others in performing their work by providing them with the necessary materials and resources	11 %

In our research we identified five important tasks that superintendents do by asking the superintendents to rate them from most important to least important. The results are shown in Table 5.2.

According to the superintendents, their highest priority was to "Implement visions, tasks and goals of the organization in order to facilitate employees realizing them." In second place was "To anchor the political expectations and clarify the local achievement goals," and in third place was "Work to implement the organizational changes necessary for employees to be able to do their jobs effectively." The two tasks the superintendents rated the least important were "Consult with, shape and actively lead the professional staff" and "Support others in performing their work by providing them with the necessary materials and resources."

According to the superintendents, *the most important tasks that the chair of the board* performs are to lead the board during the working process, represent the education sector in the political process within the municipality and set goals for the educational sector in the municipality.

Comments on Superintendents, School Boards and Chairmen of Local School Boards
According to the superintendents, they themselves should work on a more general level by implementing visions and goals, as well as implementing and clarifying the local political visions and decisions. The chair of the board should focus on leading the board and representing the educational sector in the municipality.

7   How Do Superintendents Get Information/Knowledge

Lead Paragraph   To some degree, superintendents do collaborate and discus issues with other superintendents, even if they do express a closer collaboration with other posts in the education chain, such as school leaders, as shown before. They have internal conferences with their school leaders on a regular basis to discuss general issues.

Eighty-one percent of the *superintendents met their school leaders for internal conferences on a regular basis*, with half of them (54 %) meeting at least once a

month. The top five *topics of these internal conferences were*: Strategic discussions on national policy on education (57 %); Discussion on joint efforts to improve academic achievement (57 %); Taking a position on/considering/discussing common issues (56 %); Discussions on economic challenges (53 %) and External orientation (50 %). Focus on these internal conferences between superintendents and school leaders was on more strategic and general matters than on information from the school and the school administration.

The superintendents *did not value their collaboration with other superintendents* highly; although one-third strongly agreed with the claim "I think I have a close working relationship with other superintendents," only 14 % of the superintendents thought that their collaborations with other superintendents were more important than their collaborations with other actors within the municipality. About one-fourth (28 %) of the superintendents did collaborate on various issues with other superintendents. One-fourth of the superintendents thought that their superintendent colleagues considered them a key player in their collaboration. Twenty percent of the superintendents asked other superintendents to consult on various issues and strongly agreed with the claim "I often contact other superintendents to consult on various issues"

Comments on How Superintendents Gain Insight
As we can see above, collaborations between superintendents were not common occurrences – at least part of an explanation why could be that the superintendents saw themselves more as managers of a sector in a municipality than as managers of the educational sector, and therefore shared more in common with other managers in their municipality.

Eighty percent of the superintendents met their school leaders in internal conferences on a regular basis to discuss strategic and general issues. We can therefore assume that the exchange of information between schools and the school administration usually took place during the "management meeting" of the superintendents and their school leaders.

8   Accountability – Responsibility

8.1   *Issues Politicians Delegate to the Superintendent*

Lead Paragraph Beside the schools' core mission to teach children the knowledge in the curriculum and to make them democratic, literate, and functional human beings (good citizens), more professional issues were also being stressed. The administration in the municipality, the board and the superintendent stressed issues like organization, budget and leading the inferior layers of the educational system in the municipality.

8.1.1 Superintendents

The superintendents met the chair of their boards for 1–3 h on an average week, not including board meetings. They only met their deputy chair for 0–1 h a week outside the board meetings. When the superintendents were asked *to describe the board meetings*, a majority (57 %) thought that the decisions were usually unanimous decisions. Twenty percent thought that the decisions were usually party- or ideologically motivated decisions with small majorities. Eight percent thought that the decisions usually were compromises, and 15 % claimed that they did not have a clear picture of the decision-making process.

The superintendents were very *active participants in ad hoc municipality groups* in order to produce policy papers and administrative routines. One to three groups were the most common numbers, but 26 % participated in 4–7 groups and 6 % participated in more than 7 groups. Thirteen percent did not participate in any groups.

When asked *what the chair expected from them as superintendents regarding their priorities*, they answered: to keep the budget in balance, provide the board with a good basis for decisions and reports, inform the board about current events and progress in the educational sector, implement local and national policies in the educational sector, improve the students' and school's results in the municipality and to work towards the common goals in the municipality for the educational sector.

The superintendents were asked *if they as superintendents perceived themselves as the Ministry of Education's extended arm in the municipality*. The answers from the superintendents were on a six-point scale, where 1=do not agree and 6=totally agree. The mean answer to the question was 3.61; 32 % answered a 5 or a 6, interpreted here as agreeing fully.

8.1.2 Board Members and Chairs

"Educational boards" sometimes have a wider area of responsibility than just education. For example, 9 % of the boards were responsible for the social services in the municipality, and 20 % also had culture as a responsibility. Fifty-five percent were responsible for Swedish instruction for immigrants, and 33 % were responsible for leisure activities in the municipality.

Comments on Issues Politicians Delegate to the Superintendent
The role of the superintendent has clear political dimensions. At the meetings with the chair of the board many political items are on the agenda and the superintendent's voice is important in the decisions that will be put forward to the board. It's fair to say that Swedish superintendents have a political but also a control function in the school district that involves traditional administration and budget.

8.1.3   Mediating

Lead Paragraph From the municipalities' point of view, it seems very important that the budget is balanced. At the same time, it seems more important for school leaders and superintendents to work on school development and student results.

8.1.4   Superintendents

The superintendents were asked *what the board expected from them* and to rate the different answer options on a six-point scale (the percentage below is the sum of 5+6)

The superintendents in general thought that the boards had high expectations for them. The two tasks that were ranked the highest were *to create operational changes for better financial results* (85 %); *create operational changes to improve the results on national tests and equivalent tests* (84 %) and *collaborate with the board and the community* (83 %). It is worth noticing that *pedagogical leadership* (*curriculum issues/teaching*) was ranked the lowest (43 %), when it comes to experienced expectations from the board. In-between these are issues about developing and evaluating different initiatives.

8.1.5   School Leader

The school leaders were asked the following three questions on a six-point scale; we are focusing on the two highest points (5 & 6), which indicate high expectations, for the question *How high are the school board's demands for you in the following fields*? The school leaders answered: "To keep the schools budget in order" (91 %), "That I implement the revised curricula" (66 %), "That I implement the new Education Act" (65 %) and "That I develop the organization's internal work organization in order to achieve higher effectiveness" (65 %).

To the question: *How high are the state's expectations for you as leader in the following fields*? the school leaders answered "To implement the revised curricula" (88 %), "To implement the new Education Act" (87 %) and "To have a good ability to lead the pedagogical work in my school" (82 %).

According to themselves, *the top three work tasks for the school leader*, *the school board and the state* were to (Table 5.3):

As we can see, the school leaders themselves are focused on their school, being a good pedagogical leader, making sure that all students have the best preparation to reach their goals and to provide support for those who need it.

Comments on Mediating
The state has been, according to the school leaders, most interested in school leaders since the national policy documents and the implementations of the new Educational

Table 5.3 School leaders' perceptions of expectations from others on their work

The school leaders	Experienced demands from the board	Experienced demands from the state
Have a good ability to lead the pedagogical work in my school (97 %)	Maintain the schools' budget 91 %	Implement the revised curricula (88 %)
Develop the organization's internal work organization, in order to achieve higher effectiveness (95 %)	Implement the revised curricula (66 %)	Implement the new Educational Act (87 %)
Ensure that students/children who are unable to achieve the goals are given adequate support (95 %)	Implement the new Educational Act (65 %) Develop the organization's internal work organization, in order to achieve higher effectiveness (65 %)	Lead the pedagogical work in my school (82 %)

Act and revised curricula. The expectations of the school board that the school leaders faced included maintaining the schools' budget, implementing national policy documents and working towards higher goal fulfillment.

8.2   *Important Tasks*

Lead Paragraph   Implementing visions, tasks and goals and increasing goal fulfillment are according to the superintendents and the board members their most important tasks. The school leaders think that their most important tasks are to lead the pedagogical work at their school/area and to provide the right support for students who have difficulties reaching the goals.

8.2.1   Superintendents

We asked the superintendents to *rank their most important tasks*. According to the superintendents, the most important task was to implement visions, tasks and goals in the organization and make it easier for the employees to achieve them. They also ranked the ability to anchor the politicians' expectations and to clarify the local achievement goals as next highest. Following that, the superintendents ranked carrying out the necessary changes in the organization for the employees to do their jobs efficiently. To talk about, establish and actively lead their professional coworkers, as well as to support others with the resources they need to be able to do their work, were not tasks that the superintendents ranked as highly.

8.2.2 Board Members and Chairs

Board members answered the question: *Which issues are the most important for the board for this office period*? This question was open-ended, and we categorized the answers into 11 categories: increasing goal fulfillment (grades and results); student health and working environment; economy and budget; the size of the groups of children; fundamental/core values and equality; special education teachers and increasing competence among teachers; teacher ratios; implementing national policies such as the Education Act; support to students in need of support and school improvement/development. The board members ranked the same three issues, but in a different order than the top three issues, as the most important: increase goal fulfillments, grades and students results in general; economy and budget issues; and the students' health and working environment.

8.2.3 School Leaders

The most important tasks seen from the school leader's perspective are primarily that they have a good ability to lead the pedagogical work at their school/area; 77 % of the school leaders answered a six in affirmation this statement. Other important tasks according to the school leaders are to make sure that pupils not reaching the goals get the appropriate support, to develop the inner organization with the purpose of reaching goals and to implement the new curricula.

Comments on What Types of Issues Politicians Delegate
The importance of questions regarding the economy and keeping the budget in balance that come from the school board and the municipalities can be seen clearly in the answers from the school leaders, superintendents and the boards in this section. The major emphasis on the budget and economy could be (at least partly) explained by the fact that funding is the most powerful policy instrument the board and municipalities have over school leaders and schools. Also, in general, the expenses for the educational sector are a huge part of the municipality's entire budget.

8.3 Relations Between Control and Autonomy in the Chain

Lead Paragraph School leaders feel a high level of independence. Superintendents have, in one-third of the cases, a middle manager between themselves and the school leaders, and the board chair and members sometimes feel that they have influence to make strategic priorities in their areas of responsibility, and one-third feel that they have influence on a school level. The school leaders, however, felt that they have very little influence over the board's decisions.

8.3.1 Superintendents

Almost two-thirds of the superintendents *do not have another level of leadership between them and the school leaders*, while one-third do. When asked to *give examples of the two most important leadership groups for their work as superintendents*, they answered: the administration's management group, meeting with the school leaders, meetings with the leaders in their sector within the municipality and meetings with the staff. When asked *how they perceived their autonomy*, 38 % of the superintendents agreed fully with the statement of having autonomy, and not even one percent answered that they do not have any autonomy at all.

When the superintendents were asked if they, in their role as superintendents, thought there was *a conflict between their own values and their professional assignments*, only 13 % answered that there was, while 60 % answered that there were not. The superintendents were also asked if they had a tendency to do things that would be more accepted by the school leaders than the politicians; only a small percentage said that they did, while one-third answered that they strongly disagreed.

8.3.2 Board Members and Chairs

Slightly more than half of the board members answered *that they can make strategic priorities in their areas of responsibility and influence the boards' decisions*. About one-third of the board members thought that they could influence what the schools' focuses and priorities would be. Three-quarters of the board members thought that their work in the board was of importance for the schools' development in their municipality. One-third of the board members thought that they were good at suggesting solutions to issues or problems within the educational sector to the rest of the board.

When asked *if they thought the superintendents were competent in leading the school leaders in their work with school development*, 47 % agreed. About one-third of the board members thought that *the school leaders had the capacity to lead their own school development*, a statement which can be partly explained by the fact that about half of the board members thought there was a great variety in the professional competencies among school leaders.

When asked *if they think that the school leaders prioritized the students' learning*, half of the board members agreed. When asked if they thought the school leaders had the ability to create prerequisites for students who needed extra support, about 40 % agreed; however, when asked if they thought the school leaders had the ability to create good prerequisites for high-performing students, only one in five board members agreed.

8.3.3   School Leader

We asked the school leaders how they saw their independence in several different situations. Their answers show that the school leaders experience very high independence overall. They all ranked highly their independence concerning schools' inner organization, decisions about economic distribution, the personnel who should work at the school, the aim of the pedagogical work, students with special needs and decisions on how their own work should be done.

The school leaders thought that the superintendent, to a somewhat high extent, *requested the school leaders' experiences* for different issues. They did not think to quite as high of an extent that *they had great possibilities to influence the board's decision making*; only 5 % thought that they could do this to a high extent, whereas 12 % thought that they had no influence at all.

At the same time, close to 80 % of the school leaders were content in their role as a school leader, despite the lack of support reported. There was a *lack of communication between the school leader and the politicians*; nearly 11 % believed that they could influence the board/local authority. One-third of the principals thought they had *support from the unions*. Further studies are needed to find out the extent to which this low level of influence affects the school leaders' opportunities to influence their work. The same applies to the role of the unions' support on the individual schools' development. The school leaders believed they had a *very high degree of independence* (response option 6 on a 6 grade scale) with respect to the orientation of the educational work (41 %) and the internal organization (41 %), followed by decisions relating to children in need of special support (39 %). At the same time, we found the lowest degree of autonomy regarding decisions on the allocation of available funds (25 %) and on the personnel who would work at the unit (24 %). Private job design (35 %) fell in between.

Comments on the Relations Between Control and Autonomy in the Chain
The Swedish system is rather decentralized, which means that there is extensive autonomy in the system. There seems to be some distrust between the different levels of the educational system, especially between the politicians and the school leaders, who complain that the school board is trying to control matters but should not.

8.4   To Whom Is the Superintendent Loyal?

Lead Paragraph Many of the superintendents saw themselves as the Ministry of Education's extended arm in the municipality; at the same time, three-quarters of the superintendents said that they perceived themselves as part of the municipality administration.

8.4.1 The Superintendents

Most of the superintendents worked with a board whose area of responsibility was within the educational sector, but some also had responsibilities for social services or the culture sector. Forty-three percent of the superintendents agreed that they *viewed themselves as the Ministry of Education's actor in the municipality*. When asked if they as superintendents *perceived themselves as part of the municipality administration*, 77 % of the superintendents said yes. However, when asked if their daily work had the same characteristics as those of an administrative director for the educational sector, only 15 % agreed. When asked *if they felt a greater loyalty to the school leaders in the municipality than to the political and administrative management*, only 10 % agreed fully. Although they did feel more loyalty towards school leaders, their answers were still in the lower end of the spectra, not really agreeing with such a statement – 23 % answered that they did not at all agree that they were more loyal towards school leaders than the political and administrative management. The superintendents overall did not think that they were more loyal towards other superintendents in the municipality – 35 %, actually answered that they did not at all agree with such a statement.

8.4.2 Board Members

When asked *Do you feel that, in the current situation, there is tension between the state and the municipality levels regarding educational policy?*, 53 % of the board members answered yes, 25 % answered no and 22 % answered that they did not know.

When asked *which issues/tasks they as the board should follow up on with the superintendent*, they answered the budget, the student outcomes and personnel issues. When asked which issues they thought the superintendent should follow up on with the school leaders, they listed the same three tasks. Interestingly, leadership was not listed as something to follow up on, neither for the superintendents nor for the school leaders. Maybe it was not mentioned because it was considered a natural part of the role as either superintendents or school leaders, or maybe the boards did not think it was important.

Comments on Loyalty
It seems that there is a loyalty conflict for superintendents between the national and the municipality levels within the educational sector. The same loyalty conflict we have shown previously in this chapter also exists for the school leaders. However, there also seems to be a respectful relationship between the superintendent, the municipality administration and their board on some issues, e.g., the budget and improving student outcomes.

9 Discussion/Conclusion

The superintendents' role as school owners' top civil servant gives them administrative power and indirect political power. The political power is given to them both through discussion and contacts they have with the chairmen of the school board, and from their "filter" function between the schools and the board. Their political power also arises from the role they play in serving the board with administrative information in relation to the board's decision-making on political issues.

Superintendents also have power in relation to implementation of both national and local policy decisions by the school board. How they act in relation to policy has an effect on the governing chain. If they decide to not push for change, the implementation process will be slow or in some cases never start. But if they are very active in their leadership and look for ways to support the enactment of the new policy, they will most often improve the implementation in the different schools.

What we have argued for above reveals a loyalty conflict for superintendents between the national and the municipality levels within the educational sector. There are, of course, different ways for the superintendent to solve these conflicts. They can follow the national policy and school laws and try to implement these as successfully as possible, or they can follow their employer (the school board) and take measures to please this level of the system. Most of them will follow their own mission but do it in harmony with the local school district. They will not seek conflicts with the local political decision-makers. There was a period in Sweden after the decentralization of the mid-1990s when most superintendents' time in office was very short because the expectations of the new masters in the local school boards were different than those the state expressed. The conclusion is that today the superintendents have learnt to play their role in the local political governed school district.

Even if the superintendents sometimes feel distracted by budgets and financial matters as well as by political issues from their superiors and boards, they seem to be enthusiastic about educational matters, the development of schools and the educational sector. Most of them talk about how important they think improving students' learning and social development is in their municipality. They are aware of the importance of the relationship between their role and the support they can give to the principals in their leadership and the support of the teachers if students are able to improve results and academic output.

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Part II
Thematic Chapters

Chapter 6
Democracy in Complex Networks: Political Leaders and Administrative Professionals

Lejf Moos, Olof Johansson, Jan Merok Paulsen, Mona Strand, and Mika Risku

Abstract The core assumption in this chapter is that political actors and civil servants on the municipal level share in the common societal responsibility for the education and upbringing of the next generation. Using a filter of five core public-governance logics in the analysis of our data – the marketplace logic, the managerial, the public, the professional and the ethical –we find both similarities and differences between politicians and civil servants. We analyse how politicians and administrators are positioned in the system and how they develop their commitment to, and their competencies to take part in furthering, both a democratic education and an efficient and effective governance system, in the context of municipalities that face continued restructuring. We present similarities and differences between countries in the project, so some overlapping from the country reports will occur in this chapter.

Keywords Democracy • Educational purposes • Logics • Politicians • Professionals • Power

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1   Framing the Municipal Educational Level

Most students in basic school in the Nordic countries attend public school. In Finland this figure is almost 100 %, in Norway 95 %, and in Sweden and Denmark around 85 %. Basic schooling – and therefore the care and upbringing of the next generation – is seen as a public responsibility.

In simplistic terms, one can describe the structural couplings between state and schools in the Nordic countries as follows: the state level: parliament, the education ministry and agencies relate through the municipal level: elected representatives, the school board, and professional administrations, the superintendent, to school level.

This structure renders the agents at the municipal level part of the national democratic community and part of the state governance in these countries. Community leaders and administrative professionals collaborate, negotiate, clash and reach agreement in many tasks related to education, in order to have the system work to the benefit of the nation and of its young citizens. These actors have to find ways to combine democratic expectations with administrative efficiency, in line with national political and financial frameworks and goals, and also in line with the needs of students and their parents.

In this chapter we examine how politicians and administrators in the Nordic country school systems see themselves as positioned and empowered to further this dual task – of democracy and efficiency – in political and governance networks.

2   The Analytical Filter of Logics

In order to discuss the findings of our surveys for the Nordic countries, we must choose a set of perspectives – or logics – of education. These logics were developed so as to categorise accountabilities in schools; we amend them here to serve as a filter through which to view both political and administrative agents at the municipal level of educational governance in these countries (Firestone and Shipps 2005; Moos 2003):

- *Marketplace logic*: education is seen as constituting services, and service providers deliver educational products to consumers. The core concepts are consumer choice, competition and efficiency.
- *Managerial logic*: The focus is on planning, control, accountability, standards, top-down management, and transparency.
- *Public logic*: The governance of education takes place through political processes that involve policymakers, parents, students, and professionals. The focus is on participation, deliberation, negotiations, transparency, and responsibility.
- *Professional logic*: The municipal administration is managed and led according to professional standards and ethics. The focus is on responsibility and accountability.

- *Ethical logic*: Education is held responsible for the comprehensive and overarching goal of rearing the next generation – of upbringing, the educating democratic citizens (Moos 2010). The focus is on education at the very core of maintaining and developing society and community, by taking care of emerging generations. Education is thus *in loco parentis* with the obligations of care, 'democratic Bildung' (Moos 2008b), and 'education for social justice' (McKenzie et al. 2008) as well as participation and critique, equity and care. Here the basis of discussion consists of the cultural and ethical aspects of professional practice, the 'internalized and socially encouraged value systems' (Firestone and Shipps 2005, p. 88).

These logics will be developed further as they are brought into the discussion of our Nordic survey findings.

3   From Bureaucracy to Network (*Marketplace Logic*)

In order to understand the structural relationship between politicians, policymakers and administrators in the Nordic municipal governance, we can produce two images: one of the traditional situation that was in place until the 1960s, and the other of contemporary power relations at present (from Bovbjerg et al. 2011; Finances 1996). Both images are of course simplistic and illustrate only a particular point in time and a concrete context. Nevertheless, these images capture significant characteristics of the ways in which national policymakers, with inspiration from the OECD (1995), have worked to make public management and governance more efficient and more effective within national Nordic democratic visions and financial realities.

Around 1960, the general thinking in the Nordic countries was to have a governance system that was built on a separation between the politically elected decision-makers on the one hand (the parliament at national level, the municipal council and councils/committees at municipal level) and the bureaucracy of civil servants supposed to implement the political decisions at state, municipal and institutional level on the other. Politicians were expected to make political decisions; civil servants were expected to implement politically loyal decisions on the one hand, and to treat citizens, students or consumers equally in relation to the regulations on the other. These expectations were often expressed in the terms of Max Weber's ideal bureaucracy (Weber 1968).

Transnational agencies[1] have been a driving forces behind the opening up of the Nordic national economies towards a global competition since from the 1970s, and the more so with more power since the from mid-1990s with increased power. Their

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[1] e.g.: WTO: World trade Organisation, OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, GATT: General Agreement on Tariff and Trade, IMF: International Monetary Fund, EU: European Union (especially 'the Inner Market') and the World Bank.

economic aims of these agencies have shifted over this period, from growth through full employment and with increasing productivity (both in the of labour force and of technology), towards growth through international trade and investment. National governments have increasingly steered their work towards these goals worked through their membership in international organisations ion the regional markets.

At the level of theory, neoliberal societies develop new methods and technologies of governance (Peters et al. 2000) that rely heavily on the market as the logical basis for public policy. They involve a devolution of management from the state to the local level: to local institutions (in education, to self-managing schools), to classrooms (classroom management techniques) and to individuals (self-managing students). This is what Foucault calls neoliberal governmentalisation (Foucault 1991), in which governance presupposes agencies of management, but also requires and gains the cooperation of the subjects involved. This, according to Foucault, is the case in every modern society. What makes a difference is the logic or rationale that seems to be governing. Governance based on a management model is not legitimated by Weber's notion of legal–rational authority, but rather by a form of legitimacy or rationality that depends upon market efficiency:

> No longer are citizens presumed to be members of a political community, which it is the business of a particular form of governance to express. The old and presumed shared political process of the social contract disappears in favour of a disaggregated and individualized relationship to governance (Peters et al. 2000, p. 118).

In this logic, people are thus transformed from autonomous citizens to choosers or consumers of services. This is also the case in the Nordic countries, where parents are free to choose schools for their children (Peters et al. 2000, p. 5). The fundamental principle at the heart of this management ideology is 'freedom of choice'. A political perspective, by contrast, would stress the possibility of involvement, of being a member of a community that can discuss and influence decisions.

The tendency towards more market and less state means that political logic is being replaced by capitalist logic. One logic will regulate all spheres of life.

The New Public Management is, in short, characterised by the intention to implement market logics in a non-market field. In this view, the public sector is a quasi-market, ultimately governed by political forces. The strategies of this approach are, as mentioned, characterised by innovation and by the implementation of new technologies such as performativity and managerial accountability. And because it is seen as market-driven, this approach is characterised by a notion of uniformity. Thus educational sectors and institutions are not different from other public sectors and institutions. There is nothing distinctive about education; it can be conceptualised and managed like any other service or institution (Peters et al. 2000, p. 111).

Transnational agencies[2] are one sector of driving forces behind the opening of national economies towards a global competition from the 1970s and with more power from mid-1990s. Their economic aims shifted from growth through full

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[2] e.g.: WTO: World trade Organisation, OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, GATT: General Agreement on Tariff and Trade, IMF: International Monetary Fund, EU: European Union (especially 'the Inner Market') and the World Bank.

employment and increasing productivity (of labour force and technology) towards growth through international trade and investment. National governments increasingly worked through their membership in international organisations on the regional markets.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the Nordic governments began to steer economics in a neoliberal direction. Their core precepts were rational choice, increased market influence, and minimal state influence (through, e.g., deregulation, privatisation, outsourcing). Citizens were seen increasingly as participants in the labour force with full responsibility for their situation, yet simultaneously as consumers. Overall, the public sector was seen primarily as serving production and trade in the national system. The state was seen as influencing the availability and competencies both of the labour force and of available capital. In this vision the competitive state was characterised (Pedersen 2011, p. 72) as *regulating* (through displaying best practices and budgets) and *framing* (framing the availability of the labour force, capital and raw materials), as well as by being an *active* state (by encouraging individual citizens to enter the labour market). Pedersen argues, based on a number of decisions taken in 1993 regarding the national labour market and membership in the European Union, that this was a turning-point in the development from a welfare state towards a competitive state.

As described in the Danish Country report, Chap. 2, we see that in Nordic school systems, international tests such as PISA, combined with the progressive penetration of objective/economic logic among politicians at international, national and regional levels and among all kinds of commissions, think tanks and other media, has led to an increased emphasis on tests in national school systems as well. These developments have simultaneously made it possible to increase the weight attributed to the results of such tests, thereby further obscuring the fact that here we are dealing with the *interpretation* of test results. The outcome is that politicians seemingly attribute increased meaning to technical matters, but less to political issues. Political decisions thereby appear to be based more on evidence and less on politics. In this sense, decisions in the realm of school politics can be described as emphasising quantitative indications and downplaying indications of *political* decisions.

In Sweden, one of the main arguments when independent schools were introduced was that if several different school providers were competing with one another, the quality of education would improve for all. Sweden also introduced free choice of schools for all students, not only between private and public schools, but also between different schools in the municipal system. This meant that a student need not attend the closest school, but could apply to what in his/her opinion was the best school. These two policy changes have influenced the development of a segregation in Swedish schools, so that in some schools most of the students are from very affluent families. We also know that the private schools, despite having fewer teachers per student, still produce students with higher marks than schools with greater teacher density.

4 Public Institutions or Companies (*Marketplace Logic*)

Municipal administration, governance and management have also been reformed as part of the Nordic governance reform initiative. For several decades, the municipalities in the Nordic countries have been free to structure their political work and administration as they wish (albeit in some cases they are given a great deal of advice by government and local government when doing so: Moos and Paulsen 2014). One such piece of advice was to change the municipal structure from three layers of political boards or committees and administration to two layers. Once implemented, this would produce wider fields of responsibility (such as the right to make all relevant decisions regarding children aged 1–18) as well as resulting in a steeper hierarchy. This new model for public institutions can be seen as a company model (Christoffersen and Klausen 2012) featuring the *concern* or group, the *enterprise* and the *workplace* (Fig. 6.1).

The *concern* (the municipal, political and administrational section) operates in the interface between policymakers and enterprises. It takes care of aims and frameworks, budget models, organisational development, and professional management of quality and outcomes. In the field of education, the concern will most often be the municipal school board and its director/superintendent. The *enterprise* manages the economy, the operations, and the staff who have a contract with the concern. The enterprise corresponds to the schools, their local board (in countries where this applies) and the school leader. The *workplace* decides and administers the internal organisation and relations between leadership and staff, through a set of new social technologies including incentives and employee interviews. The workplace 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: in Denmark, Sweden and Finland, more decisions have been delegated to schools than in Norway.

It is built into this new structure that school board members take decisions on a level that overarches several types of institution including schools, daycare
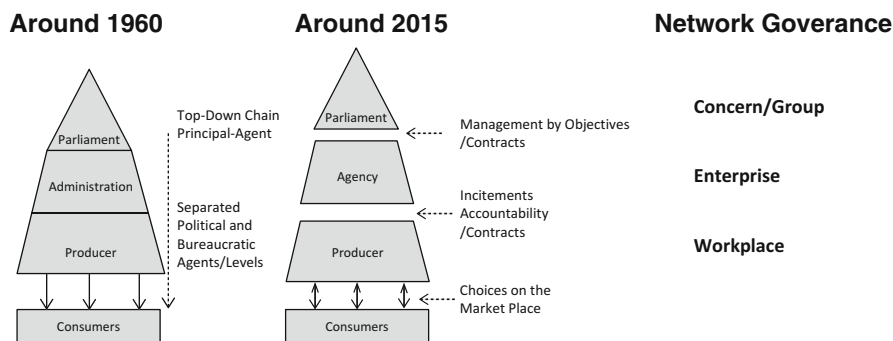
Fig. 6.1 Public institutions

institutions, leisure-time institutions and other cultural institutions. This means that board members require insight into the work of several types of institution as well as knowledge of their aims, outcomes, ways of operating and the competencies and commitment of their professional staff. This also applies to the concern manager, the superintendent. The superintendent's relation to individual institutions and to their leaders and staff has thus become steeper and more distant. In some cases new layers of middle management have been inserted, but seen from the perspective of the institution, the distance is greater and it is therefore more difficult to communicate with and be heard both by political decision-makers and by the superintendent.

The superintendent's field of work is also being enlarged to cover the whole of a child's life from age 1 to age 18. Superintendents are also becoming involved in municipal governance beyond their particular field of work, and perhaps beyond their professional backgrounds, so as to take part in shared municipal coordination and policymaking.

4.1   Politicians and Professionals

A general image of the relations between politicians and administrators in the Nordic countries shows that the relations between school boards (which are politically appointed) and superintendents (who are professionally selected) are changing at present, although the expectations and rhetoric do not change. School boards are expected to engage in long-term strategies and development, and superintendents are expected to serve them as civil servants. In real life, superintendents have taken on more and more responsibility, including writing the agendas for meetings; they are of course also employed full time, whereas chairs of the school board can only spend between 2 and 5 h preparing for each meeting, the board members even less. Even if school boards might claim that the most important sources of information are teachers and political colleagues, the superintendent is in fact the channel of information to the board: all communication from schools (from leaders, teachers, parents and students) is channelled through the superintendent and the educational administration. This is because school leaders and leaders of other institutions are considered to be part of the administration, to which they owe total loyalty. No school board members or chairs have formal links with the schools.

Municipal governance in the Nordic countries is frequently structured along the 'concern model', as it is called in Denmark. Here the city council and the mayor are the political decision-makers – the concern board and the CEO – that decide on long-term strategies and budgets, while the school board and the superintendent form the enterprise, and schools the workplaces. Links between the layers are increasingly taken over by social technologies such as strategy papers and measurement accounts.

The school boards' main tasks are seen as the economy, resources and budgeting; the structures of the educational system, together with quality, are seen as secondary

tasks. The school boards therefore attempt to influence politicians in this high priority area. School boards and superintendents have differing views on the extent of superintendents' influence on the school board (except for the Finnish school boards), but superintendents are seen as gradually taking over more policymaking, especially when it comes to administrative and legal issues. While the school boards are politically superior to superintendents, the superintendents rate their relations with school leaders as more important than those with the school board. Finland excepted, school board and superintendent have surprisingly diverse perceptions of many aspects of one another's work and relations. The data in the current investigation stem from a period of deep restructuring at the municipal level, a process that produced much confusion.

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. This move was visibly inspired by similar trends in the corporate sector (Røvik 2007). Despite the vast differences between the municipalities in size, local history, 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 not only the central school office but also 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). There is also evidence that most of these reform initiatives culminated around the year 2005 (Hovik and Stigen 2008).

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

Superintendents say that they are in charge of the educational system and thus are loyal to their administrative manager, and in some instances to the politicians on the school board. Board members and board chiefs say that they are in a middle-manager position, which means that they are loyal to the politicians they represent on the one hand (i.e. their loyalty goes upwards) and that on the other they are loyal to the superintendents with whom they often, particularly the board chiefs, work closely together. Most school leaders feel that their immediate superior is the superintendent.

It seems that the loyalty relations actually reflect the traditional municipal school organisation: i.e., that each layer in the school administration feels loyal to the next joint in the decision chain from their position.

4.2   The Hierarchy

Superintendents find it important that the chair of the school board manages overall objectives and is effective in setting directions and implementing policies on the schools. In line with this, superintendents indicate that issues most frequently processed in school board meetings are economy, resources, budget issues, and information passed on by the superintendents. Likewise they find it important that school leaders care for the school structure and school development. As part of this endeavour, the superintendents expect the school leaders to chair, and set the agenda for, the local school board: that is, the school board for that specific school.

When superintendents in Denmark were asked about their most important, most time-consuming and most interesting tasks, they answered as follows. The image is pretty much the same in the other countries. This analysis is taken from the Danish Country report, Chap. 2, but now in the context of hierarchy.

Most important	Most time-consuming	Most interesting
Development of schools 93 %	Budget and financing 95 %	Development of schools 97 %
Political issues 92 %	Development of schools 93 %	Pedagogical leadership 97 %
Planning and generating goals 90 %	Planning and generating goals 92 %	Political issues 93 %
Budget and financing 86 %	Political issues 90 %	Planning and generating goals 88 %

The superintendents tended to attribute the greatest importance to general policy and planning issues (political issues, school development, budgeting and the generation of goals), with less attention being paid to day-to-day issues such as financing, pedagogy etc. They strive simultaneously to develop schools and pedagogy as well as to support school leaders in their handling of staff. Subsequently, they find it important to achieve goals set by the local council or by the school board and to advise politicians. Pedagogy meaning school development is thus seen as an important issue for a superintendent, while pedagogy meaning day-to-day practice is not.

The table shows how *political issues* are ranked higher ascribed greater priority when it comes to importance than in time allocation or – especially– interest. Pedagogical leadership appears among the top four only in the 'most interesting' column. These few examples from the three lists indicate how superintendents tend to work with general long-term and strategic issues more than day-to-day questions. Simultaneously, they indicate a kind of tension between the three different lists. Budget and financing, for example, ranks fourth on the trans-Nordic list for importance, but is first on the list for time-consumption and is not listed at all under interest. In an ideal world, one might expect the three lists to be identical. In such a situation there would be agreement between the importance of an issue, the time

needed to address it, and how interesting it was. That this is only partly so could be taken to indicate a tension between what is personally interesting for a superintendent and what is politically and organisationally necessary for an organisation.

As becomes clear in the table, the three lists show a similar pattern. Political issues, school development, and planning and generating goals appear on all three lists, while budget and financing is in the top four for importance and time-consumption but not for interest. On the other hand, pedagogical leadership comes in the top four for interest but is not among the top four for importance or time-consumption.

Part of this tension might have to do with the fact that what the superintendent considers to be necessary can conflict with what (s)he considers to be interesting. Most superintendents are teachers by profession and could thus be expected to have schools and pedagogy close to their hearts, while their relation to issues such as administration and finance might be on a more need-to-know basis.

5   Meta-Governance and Self-Governance (*Managerial Logic*)

The development from monocentric states towards polycentric states has been structured through the development of various kinds of governance (Sørensen 2003). The contemporary 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 delegates actual governance activities to different levels. Important tools of this kind of governance are social technologies such as standards and testing, quality reports and student plans, regular staff appraisals and budget models (Moos 2009a). Through various frameworks as well as soft governance (Moos 2009b), the government encourages local authorities and individual institutions to produce and find their own identity as an institution (James G. March and Olsen 1976) with their own specific aims, meanings and accountabilities. *Self-governance*, on the other hand, *self-governance* (Foucault 1983) means that institutions can (– and are willing wish to) – govern themselves in self-governing institutions and networks. Some decisions are made at state level, while others are distributed delegated to lower levels, creating new relations between policymakers, and civil servants and different various combinations of these members on all levels. : Municipal Managers at the municipal level such as, like superintendents, are given more room to describe and produce local solutions as in ways that policymakers used to do, and school leaders are also given more room within the given frameworks and aims to create local solutions to local challenges.

In some ways, ministries and their agencies are still in control of purposes, aims, frameworks and organisation, since they make use of regulative forms of governance

(legislation, regulations, economic frameworks, etc.) (Scott 2014). They set the goals and monitor the outcomes. In some areas of responsibility, however, they have delegated decisions on how to achieve these goals and outcomes to lower-level agencies and to institutions.

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

In Sweden, the managerial logics spoke of the governing structure not being efficient in relation to well-known challenges. For instance, have trade unions, the state school inspection and other agencies discussed the school leaders' workloads as unrealistic in the last 15 years? The managerial logic should be to try to solve this, but nothing happens. In reality there is no real system for accountability when it comes to the governing chains' leading and support structure for school leaders. Another example is declining student results, which are not addressed properly in the governing chain. The change process seems not to start at once, but is postponed to the future, and the opinion is that the change takes time, 5–7 years, to see improvement. In Finland, on the other hand, trade union agreements oblige school leaders to follow and document their use of time and employers to take the documentation into account. This has resulted in increased distributed leadership in schools and school leaders taking more vacation time, including during school working days, to compensate for the overtime created during the high seasons. In Finland, the national evaluation system was able to foresee the drop in PISA results a couple of years earlier before the OECD study was published, and immediately several measures were introduced to reverse the trend.

6 Concepts of Democracy (*Public and Ethical Logics*)

It is intricate to study democracy at the municipal level with reference to citizens' and students' rights and needs. Education is obliged to aim to provide 'democratic Bildung,' giving students the optimal conditions and challenges to help them develop, learn and reflect on their position as agents in democratic communities, given that relations in schools must be asymmetrical, but still aiming at students' active autonomy (Moos 2007, 2008b). Democracy in relation to citizens is different, because critics are entitled to participate actively in democratic processes such as elections and political discussions.

When we look at the situation in respect to the political boards and the superintendents, the situation is slightly different. The school board is part of the democratic parliamentary system, elected directly or indirectly by the community to enter

into political discussion and to make political decisions on behalf of the constituency. Superintendents however are civil servants, who are required to act according to the expectations and regulations of the state and of the political boards in the municipality, but with a special obligation to strive for optimal quality in education. This means not only the acquisition of academic competencies but, equally importantly, 'democratic Bildung.'

By tradition, civil servants were expected to work within sets of legal and ethical frameworks, often named 'the public ethos' (Svedberg 2000). This ethos and economy was comprised of aspects of democracy, first and foremost of fairness and equity. The civil servant was often seen as a guardian of democracy. As transnational influences have focused more on efficiency and effectiveness, this seems to be changing. Martin Forsey (2004) has called this move '*equity versus excellence*' (Moos 2006a). The dilemma has been discussed many times (e.g.: Moos 2006b, 2012; Moos et al. 2013), because political systems insist on setting the objectives of education both as academic excellence and as democratic Bildung. Over the past decade, government priorities have changed somewhat. From pointing first and foremost to educating the next generation to participate in a democratic community and to develop democratic competencies and commitment, over the past few decades the main interest has now become the education of the upcoming generation for competition in the global labour market, thus focusing on developing student employability.

This dilemma is also present at the municipal level, and both school boards and superintendents are obliged to abide by both end of the spectrum. What one can note in Finland is that equity still has its position as first priority, but that on the broader municipal level, efficiency reasons are also major motivators. When all costs are ultimately covered by the local authorities, it becomes vital to get everyone to the level of productivity, so that the municipality does not have take care of those who cannot take care of themselves.

In this logic, the basis in liberal democracy is described as a special form of democracy in which the free individual is capable of making his/her own choices and pursuing her/his own interests, and so of taking care of his/her own life. Another dimension of this kind of democracy is the protection of the free individual, in that the individual is given certain rights or enters into a social contract. In other words, individuals are seen as autonomous, even if they are part of a community. They have formed their opinions before entering into the community, and they are not bound together by shared values. The majority vote is the preferred way of mediating opinions and reaching decisions.

In the *communitarian democracy* concept, individuals are seen as partners in social communities, bound together by a set of shared moral and social values. Values are generated within the community and can change over time. Members of a community are oriented towards a set of shared goals and are conscious of the social bonds. Such communities could include the state or smaller parts of states.

The connection between these two forms is *deliberative* democracy. Both liberal and communitarian democracy concepts see the state as a central arena for all kinds of communities. The liberal concept sees politics as formed through complex

interplays between agents in different arenas and networks, both within and outside the state. Society is seen as de-centred, and political processes can take place in many arenas both within and outside elected bodies, such as parliaments and city councils. Deliberative democracies are seen as associations whose affairs are governed by public deliberation by its members (Englund 2006). Two conditions above all must be met in this kind of democracy: first, the individual's rights must be met, meaning that the democracy is representative; and second, the deliberating process requires individuals to show a high degree of reflexivity and responsiveness towards other members of the community. A basic understanding in this concept is the concept of social identity (Moos 2011).

Applying these analyses to the municipal level, one can claim that the school boards as well as the superintendents establish forms, contents and procedures for schools which generate both kinds of purpose and aim, and that this is done in ways that are seen as transparent, involving and democratic by the citizens of the municipality. At the school board level we see from the superintendents' responses that they very often give reports to the board. This can be seen as one form of deliberative influence: the superintendents are invited to present their view of education etc. to the board meeting, thus influencing the information channelled to the board.

In terms of decision-making processes, one could mention that the superintendents' reports, together with their influence in drafting the agenda for the meeting, constitutes the construction-of-premises phase, leading up to the decision-making and the follow-up phase, the connection phase (Moos 2009b). Influence on the formulation of premises can be very influential, so superintendents do have possibilities for deliberating and participating.

In Sweden, the official version is that the governance of education takes place through political processes involving policymakers, parents, students and professionals, and that participation, deliberation, negotiations, transparency and responsibility are all emphasised. But in reality the governing structure is run by politicians, policymakers and professionals on different levels. There is no real participation in the decision process, and the implementation process is rather closed, even if it is carried out within a formally democratic and open system. The process can however be made public if some strong stakeholders demand transparency and open discussion. Finland has often looked upon Sweden as a model for conducting dialogue, and there have been doubts about having dialogue in Finland. It seems, however, that the basis and practice of dialogue in Finland are growing increasingly concrete and genuine, although there still seems to be a long way to go.

6.1 Ethical Logics

If we change the perspective from the microsociological to the macrosociological and adopt a policy perspective on societies and states – a discussion of democracies – we can maybe shed new light on the microsociological analyses. The intention here is to try and develop links between the trends and intentions in democracies

at a societal level and the discussion of how superintendents (the professionals) can build the frameworks and opportunities for educational practice in schools in ways that are supportive of the students' 'democratic Bildung.'

Bridges between society and school can take several forms. There are theories of the need for schools to '*create opportunities for action*' (Biesta 2003); there are Bernstein's theories of student democratic rights in schools, to be enacted through enhancement, inclusion and participation in decision-making (Bernstein 2000); and there are theories of democratic schools, which point to key issues such as the open flow of ideas, the use of critical reflection, and the concern for the common good, in conjunction with the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities (Beane and Apple 1999).

It seems to us that the underlying demand is for students to be given a voice, and that that is the opportunity for deliberation in schools. This view builds on a notion of deliberative democracy that attempts to build a connection between liberal and communitarian democracy (Louis 2003).

When they rank their work by importance, interest value and time-consumption, school boards and superintendents can be seen to be involved only indirectly with student academic outcomes and with ethical dimensions of education, by means of their interest in school development, educational leadership and care for students with special needs. School boards have no direct links to schools, except in connection to board members' own children. Superintendents are engaged in negotiations, translations and sense-making with school leaders.

According to the school law and the national curriculum, Swedish teachers and school leaders bear the responsibility for helping children who have problems at school, whether this concerns academic results or their social growth as persons. Both these documents display the value structure that is to be upheld in Swedish schools. The law contains a section on student health in which medical and learning challenges are brought together under the responsibility of the professional group of people, and these groups are led by the principal in many schools. In relation to the multicultural mix in most schools in Sweden today, working with democratic values and the principle of all people's equal value is central. Despite this training, a growing number of young people in Sweden have extremist views. Similar structures can be found in Finland, and superintendents, school board members and school leaders have tabled preventing the marginalisation of youth as one of their main goals.

7   Deliberation and Negotiation (*Public Logics*)

There is a long tradition of negotiation in the Nordic political system. Most governments have been minority governments, forcing government parties to find majorities for their legislation through negotiations with opposition parties; most economic politics have been negotiated between the market and the political establishment, so there is a tradition of having neither a market-driven nor a state-driven economy, but a mixed, negotiated economy (Pedersen 2011).

This trend seems to be in line with soft governance politics, the 'open method of coordination' introduced by the European Union in 2000 (Lisbon). Pedersen describes the decision-making process as a play process in three phases: (1) language-play, where the focus is on making sense, defining the problem at hand; (2) negotiating-play, where coalitions are formed and frameworks are agreed; and (3) the negotiations, where agreement is reached by majority (2011, p. 145). The focus of working with the 'open method of coordination' is on the construction of premises for decision-making and on negotiating to reach an agreement.

The public sector, which in the competitive state is seen as a service to the market, is governed by variations of what is often called New Public Management. This governance builds on a Principal (politicians)–Agent (civil servants) (PA) ideology at several levels (state, municipality, institution). Incentives are developed in order to engage and encourage civil servants to work effectively and efficiently, while evaluations and quality assurances are meant to monitor and assess outcomes (Tyler 1949). An important move has been to decentralise decisions from state to local level, thus leaving institutions with the autonomy to manage how work is carried out within the national aims and frameworks. This structure has constructed new institutions, which need to be responsive to the surroundings and the 'consumers' and thus need to have room for leadership. Both institutions and leaders are subject to fluidity: the aims and frameworks are subject to political negotiations and thus demand institutions and leaders who can manoeuvre in a fluid, negotiable environment.

While there appears to be quite a lot of room for manoeuvre for leaders of public institutions like schools, this does not mean that they are free to do whatever they feel like: the national aims and frameworks are there, and they are more detailed today than before. The social technologies used by the competitive state are strong guides: taking part in the global economic competition means also taking part in a global educational competition (Moos 2008a).

From our survey it appears that superintendents think that there is a rather direct connection between superintendents and school leaders and consequently that school leaders have a rather large degree of autonomy. Board members believe that in certain areas they often feel that they have influence. This is the development of the schools. On the other hand they feel that the state interferes too much in local matters, even if the school system is decentralised and even if the school administration has sufficient competence or resources. School leaders feel moderately independent, but many think that others than themselves decide how they use their time.

The Nordic school systems are quite decentralised. That means that there is a lot of autonomy in the system. It is a widespread impression that the different layers of the system are able to act independently, even if both board chairs and members and school leaders think that others interfere too much in their matters and thus limit their autonomy.

Collaboration between municipal politicians and civil servants, managers and educators, ought to be easy, it would seem, considering the social and cultural capital they bring to the collaboration because education and educational training is the shared professional background. This comparison however only holds when

the averages are taken as the point of comparison. Going into more detail and emphasising strong tendencies, we would find differences between these actors. More superintendents are now coming from other professional fields (managerial fields), except in Finland; school leaders are increasingly subject to management training, and school boards are increasingly engaged in a broader range of institutions and tasks that attract a more politically diverse group of candidates.

The professional logic of the municipal administration must be understood in relation to the local school board. For example in Sweden and Finland, in many municipalities the school administration under the school board consists of a very small group of people, sometimes only two or three persons. In Sweden, when municipalities exceed 25,000 inhabitants, the number of those in the administration starts to increase. Similar trends are found in Finland, although the general picture there may have more variation. The superintendent is the most important civil servant in the administration, and the relation between superintendent and school board decides much of the professional logic. If the board has a very strong opinion and high expectations for all children's success, that will affect the way in which support, leadership, governing and control are exercised in the governing chain. High expectations from the political level are very important for the expectations with which the organisation works, which in turn affects school leaders' and teachers' work.

8   Accountability (*Managerial and Public Logics*)

Increased central regulation and the need for control and monitoring are linked to accountability, as well as the introduction of incentives, performance appraisals, and sanctions. Accountability can be seen as an aspect of the evaluation processes in this system. It can be argued that this is first of all due to the underlying idea that school practices need to be made visible and transparent in order to ensure the quality of the school system and public confidence. Second, it is presumed that practice will not change or improve unless central actors are held accountable for results achieved (Dubnick 2005; Popkewitz and Wehlage 1973; Strathern 2000a, b).

In response to the question '*How many municipal leadership groups are you presently a member of*?' where policy, action plans and administrative routines may be mentioned, the superintendents who were surveyed answered that they participate in several (usually between three and five) ad hoc municipal groups in order to produce policy papers, administrative routines etc. Superintendents experience being part of the municipal leadership when they participate in these overarching and coordinating meetings with leaders at several levels from several sectors.

In response to the question '*What does your chair expect of you*?' the superintendents' priorities were:

1. Taking care of complaints
2. Giving a professional description of issues to committee and preparing clear and worked-through descriptions for the agenda of the committee

3. Giving a good orientation about what is going on in the district, and following up on individual cases
4. Establishing links between politics and citizens' needs
5. Monitoring schools
6. Working loyally to implement political decisions in dialogue with leaders of institutions.

The second and third of these priorities are important leadership tasks: this is where decisions are prepared, because the *premises* for decision-making are being constructed, indicating the field and the persons where political decisions can be made. The priorities that follow point to the *connection* phase of decision-making processes: what is happening to decisions; who is monitoring and leading these processes.

Seeing decision as a three-phase process (constructing premises, decision-making, and connecting), we can see that the superintendents assign themselves, or are being assigned, very important functions in relation to policymaking (Moos 2009a), much in line with the preparation of legislation and regulations in formal and informal networks, as described by superintendents.

8.1   Board Members and Chairs

Turning to school boards, both board chairs and board members report that they now have a wider area of responsibilities, as shown by the range of titles for the boards. For example in Denmark, 66 % of the board titles mentioned by chairs and 78 % of those mentioned by members have the word 'children' in the title of the school board. In the survey, 42 % of the board chairs and 45 % of the board members mention the title as 'something' to do with school or education. These are rather broad denominations, signalling that school *boards in general cover the whole range of children's life and education*.

There seems to be a political wish to have the school board oversee the whole spectrum of day care and school life for children from age 1 to age 18: children and family, day care, leisure time and secondary schooling. Preschool and primary school schooling activities are particularly mentioned here, as might be expected, because day care and primary schools are part of the municipalities' responsibility. Finland follows the general Nordic trend, with the exception that secondary education there may be moving more strongly into regional arrangements such as municipal consortia.

Social relations are a basic aspect of society. According to Mark E. Warren (1999), democracy is about political relations, which are social relations characterised by struggles and conflicts over goods. Thus power is a fundamental aspect of social relations. As a result, the social conditions for trust seem to be weak in political contexts because:

> Trust… involves a judgment, however tacit or habitual, to accept vulnerability to the potential ill will of others by granting them discretionary power over some good. When one trusts, one accepts some amount of risk for potential harm in exchange for the benefits of cooperation… (Warren 1999, p. 311)

In the Nordic education systems, traditional, inherited social relations are currently being contested. They are being transferred into a political context characterised by challenge and conflict, but also by new developments and change. Politics is oriented towards the future; challenges can bring about change, but they also bring uncertainty and risk. Trust is necessary because politics is oriented towards the future. Stable and predictable situations, on the other hand, secure the conditions for trust.

The complexity of the social order creates a need for coordination, and thereby a need to determine the future; this in turn creates a need for trust, because the need for future coordination is seldom met with confidence. Thus new forms of trust are required, trust that no longer emerges from an immediately experienced world and is no longer secured by tradition: '*In democratic relations, trust ought to have cognitive origins because individuals ought to be able to assess their vulnerabilities as one dimension of self-government*.' (Warren 1999, p. 331). The truster needs to be able to judge the *interests* of the trustee, without losing the advantages of trust:

> The benefits of cooperation, the possibilities for new kinds of collective action, the securities of reduced complexity for the individual, and the advantages of increased complexity for society as a whole. (Warren 1999, p. 332).

There are, writes Warren, clear and important connections between democratic institutions and trust. Institutions rely on trust. In communication with their environment, they can strengthen and support the development of trust by negotiating with individuals and by being transparent and legitimate in their decisions. Trust also lends support to deliberations as a way of solving political conflicts, and political discussions in turn can generate trust (Ibid., p. 337).

On the other hand, we can see contemporary trends in public and educational governance in the Nordic countries that are moving towards less trust and more control in the relations between the political top-officers in the concern and the more administrative servants in the enterprise and the workplace.

9   Administrative Developments over the Last Decade (*Marketplace and Managerial Logics*)

The deep economic recession of the early 1990s in Finland and Sweden led to a reconstruction in the welfare state model, particularly in the area of the relationship between the state and the municipalities (Moos and Paulsen 2014). Centralised management was replaced by decentralisation (Rinne et al. 2002). In the new setting, the responsibility and autonomy of the municipalities was strongly increased. In Denmark and Norway too, at the turn of the millennium, a series of redesign initiatives were launched in order to deflate administrative hierarchy towards a two-layer model, something that was clearly inspired by trends in the corporate sector (Røvik 2007). In Norway, a two-layer model emerged relatively uniformly despite the vast heterogeneity of municipalities in size, local history, political coalitions and

demography. Thus in 2004, 41 % of Norwegian municipalities reported that they had implemented a two-layer structure in their administrative organisation (Hovik and Stigen 2004). In consequence, a significant number of Norwegian municipalities dismantled the central school office and the superintendent position. Subsequently in 2006, about two-thirds of Norwegian municipalities reported that they were or had been engaged in a process of deflating their administrative hierarchies (Pedersen 2009). However, there is also evidence that these reform initiatives culminated around the year 2005 (Hovik and Stigen 2008). Not surprisingly, therefore, the 2009 Norwegian superintendent survey shows only 20 % of the 291 municipalities in the sample reporting a two-layer structure. Confirming this, the 2009 data, supported by the 2011 school board survey, confirms the image of a specialised hierarchical unit within the municipality organisation that is responsible for primary and secondary education. In Denmark too, governance in most municipalities has been restructured so as to contain fewer levels in the municipality (Klausen et al. 2011) (see also graph in the introduction).

Experiments with a freer hand with various local bodies and committees have been common in Sweden at least since the 1980s. A study of superintendents serving in the 1990s showed that they had experienced dealing with up to ten different organisations (Nihlfors 2003). When the same question was repeated to superintendents in 2009 and to political boards in 2012, we see that the municipalities still seem to be searching for the best structure of organisation. The reasons for this are democratic and economic as well as rational. Variations in the administrative and political design of Swedish municipalities cover, for example:

- One superintendent, one board ('solely' for education or including culture, leisure activities, etc.)
- Two superintendents, two boards
- Two superintendents, one board
- Municipal board coordinating with units for education (no special board)
- Boards on the district level for parts of the educational system

Moreover, variations in organisational design are observable in two contrasting directions. One prototype represents fewer layers between school leaders and the political board in the municipality, paired with a tighter coupling between the superintendent and the top apex. On the other hand, a contrasting trend is represented by the prototype showing many levels between these two actors.

In the Swedish superintendents survey, 56 % of the superintendents reported that they are subordinated to the CEO of the municipality organisation, and 36 % report a hierarchical layer between their office and the school principal. This layer is often entitled the area principal or the sub-superintendent. The fact that many superintendents in Sweden report that they see themselves as an integrated part of the municipality CEO's leading team can be interpreted as indicating that the school board is losing power to the superintendent. In Finland, similar trends can be noted. Municipalities and their structures, and thus the role of the superintendent, are becoming more and more diverse from each other. Here as in Sweden, superintendents are often members in the municipality CEO's leading team. In Denmark, and

sometimes in Norway, the structure of the municipal administration is visibly being changed from three layers to two layers; and in Denmark many municipalities place former civil servants from the municipal administration to work out in an area as district management.

In Finland, the municipalities are required to organise their administration in accordance with the Municipal Act; but the statutes allow a lot of freedom. Because municipalities can organise themselves independently, their organisation structure varies a lot. There seems to be no one way in which the municipal organisation can be configured to correspond to the various contexts of the municipalities (Ryynänen 2004). A very small municipality may have just the minimum decreed by law; in larger municipalities, the organisation may be very complicated. Most municipalities in Finland as well as Sweden seem to be revising their organisations in search of the 'right' organisation template (Kanervio and Risku 2009).

In 2008, 94 % of superintendents in Finland anticipated that the production of educational services in their municipalities would have changed radically by 2015 (Kanervio and Risku 2009). Although there has not yet been a follow-up study in the research framework, it can be stated that the superintendents were very accurate in their forecasts. It would be very difficult or maybe even impossible to find a Finnish municipality with a similar provision of education now as in 2008. As a result of consistent mergers of municipalities and closures of schools, unit sizes are growing and there are more numerous intermediate layers between superintendents and school leaders and between school leaders and teachers. In addition, early childhood legislation has been transferred from the sphere of social to that of educational legislation. There has also been an attempt to make radical decisions to totally reconstruct the Finnish health and social services sector, decisions which, once implemented, would affect also the education sector. In addition, all educational providers in the field of secondary education were planned to apply for their licences from the ministry of education by the end of October 2015, with totally new criteria and goals for the school network. The reform was intended to guarantee sustainable prerequisites for the strongest educational providers, as well as to maintain a sufficient network of secondary education in all parts of the country. The network would undoubtedly have shrunk, however, as cuts of 260 million Euros were also to be made. In the event the opposition was able to defeat both bills in parliament and the issue will be dealt with anew after the April 2015 parliamentary elections.

At the same time as the new secondary education licences are set to take power in 2017, the whole state funding system in Finland is to be revised. The former earmarked, cost-based state funding system was in the course of the 1990s transformed into an index-based one, however with costs through estimations still constituting the basis. In the 2017 system, the main emphasis will be on basing state funding on income rather than costs. The system will also be simplified and will incorporate factors that 'motivate' municipalities further to obtain extra income of their own and to optimise their provisions of education. This will no doubt shift the work of school boards, superintendents and school leaders even further in the direction of managerialism.

10   Municipal Restructuring: Through Merger Processes

The economic situation varies between the Nordic countries as well as between different municipalities in one country. Schools are financed by both state and local taxes, but overall conditions in particular municipalities vary widely. For example, if the municipality population is growing or declining, the prerequisite for student learning and the superintendent's working conditions will be affected.

All Nordic countries have merged some of their municipalities, but at different times. The reasons have been various, although all countries wish to create economic stability at the municipality level. In Sweden, the greatest changes were made between 1930 and 1950, when the number of rural municipalities was reduced from 2300 to 800. The reasons ranged from the need for an adequate tax base to the necessity to meet educational as well as social policy reforms; a further reason was that the municipalities needed to be a certain size to be able to build up the new compulsory school. It was also hoped that it would be easier to recruit trustees within the municipalities. The following wave of municipality mergers took place in the early 1970s, when 848 municipalities became first 464, then 278, ending up in 290 in 2012.

In Norway, the number of municipalities has been fairly stable in recent decades. This may be partly due to Norway's geographical circumstances and its economic situation. Although the issue is debated among politicians, the various governments have been reluctant to initiate merger processes through top-down diktat. Instead, the issue has been left to the municipalities, which so far have changed the situation very little. Norway still has 428 municipalities, of which more than half have fewer than 5000 inhabitants and 159 have fewer than 3000 inhabitants. Yet the 2015 conservative government recently launched a comprehensive local government reform[3] with the long-term aim of reducing the number of Norwegian municipalities to about 100 and, in consequence, merging a large proportion of them. Moreover, the expert committee appointed by the government recommended 15,000–20,000 inhabitants as the minimum municipality size in their local government proposal published in December 2014.[4] The overall ambition for the reform, as stated by the government, is to ensure that municipality organisations are efficient and effective providers of welfare services – including primary education. Despite the fact that the rhetoric of the reform is also infused with democratic goals, in terms of 'enhancing local democratic processes,' there seems little doubt that considerations of cost-efficiency and quality of service production are at the forefront. In a wider sense, the aims and objectives of the reform concur significantly with a market-oriented logic, in which a public 'holding company,' a concern, emerges as the normative model of the future Norwegian municipal organisation.

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[3] See: https://www.regjeringen.no/nb/tema/kommuner-og-regioner/kommunereform/Hvorfor-kommunereform/id752904/

[4] Labeled 'Th Local Government Proposition 2015'—Proposition No. 95.S, downloaded from: https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/08781af7a94a495486bfcce05bcb0444/meldingsdel_kommunereform_og_vedlegg.pdf

In Finland, the number of municipalities remained the same for several years although there were major regional changes in the demography of the country. During the last decade, however, the number of municipalities has been decreasing radically. At the beginning of 2009, 99 of the 415 municipalities merged. The latest white paper by the government aimed to decrease the number of municipalities to 66–70 by 2015, but this has not taken place. At the beginning of 2015 there were still 317 municipalities, and only three municipal mergers took place at the end of 2014. The government's attempts to use force to break the existing municipal structures have been countered several times by the municipalities' constitutional autonomy. At present the massive reform in restructuring the health and social services has been stopped for the same reason, and the model prepared for so long was being hastily revised to meet the obligations to guarantee the constitutional autonomy of the municipalities. This attempt, however, has not succeeded either. There still remains a general belief that there have to be mergers in order to retain local services by creating larger and more vital municipalities.

In addition to mergers between municipalities, school mergers too have been a common trend in Finland in recent decades. The almost 7000 comprehensive schools had shrunk to 2700 by 2014. The planned licence application process in 2015 and the agreed cuts of 260 million Euros in secondary education were also intended to decrease significantly the number of secondary education schools. Although the top-down attempt failed, the cuts in secondary education schools will no doubt take place in the near future. There will be larger municipalities and schools, and that will also affect the work of school boards, superintendents and school leaders, as well as the enactment of democracy in Finnish society.

In Norway, although the number of municipalities has been relatively stable in the last four decades, the developmental path is somewhat mixed when it comes to public primary schools. From 2005 to 2014, the number of schools was reduced from 3160 to 2907,[5] that is, by 8 %, indicating underlying pressure to make primary education more effective and cost-efficient in Norway as well. There is thus a visible trend in Norway also, despite the strong financial status of the welfare state, for superintendents to be confronted with external demands to organise primary education in a cost-efficient manner.

In 2007 a restructuring took place in the Danish public sector, when 175 municipalities were merged into 98 larger municipalities. The background for the restructuring was the observation that small units or municipalities could not function efficiently. This was paired with a wish to strengthen the national position in the global competition (Pedersen 2011) through neoliberal economics and New Public Management interventions. The initiatives included the introduction of Principal–Agent thinking about relations between politicians and management. These initiatives embodied private-sector organisational thinking in which municipalities were seen as groups/concerns with a steep bureaucratic hierarchy, and schools were seen as result units. Both municipalities and schools were made bigger as an effect of the

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[5] Source: http://www.utdanningsforbundet.no/upload/Publikasjoner/Faktaark/Faktaark%202014/ Faktaark_2014.01.pdf

restructuring. Between 2008 and 2011, almost 400 out of 1529 – one-quarter – were hit by closure or merger (Stanek 2011), with student intake numbers remaining stable.

This short description gives a picture of the different situations in which superintendents are currently working. The differing sizes of the municipalities indicates the differences in the work of superintendents, for example in their task of building an administration with the knowledge and size needed to implement the various reforms, for quality control or for the analysis of school results.

11 New Positions

These restructurings have established new ways of interaction between state, local authorities, and schools. They have led to decreased local autonomy and increased bureaucratisation on the one hand, and enhanced local autonomy among municipalities and schools through decentralisation on the other (Paulsen et al. 2014). The development has meant decentralisation and centralisation at one and the same time: centralisation within the decentralisation.

Whenever the educational system is centralised or decentralised, the balance between professional and political power at all levels in the system is changed. The responsibility and professional ability of school leaders and teachers are enhanced, at the same time 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). During a period of re-centralisation of the content of schools (curricula and accountability), the schools find themselves in charge of finances, human resource and day-to-day management, and the municipalities have become at the same time an important factor in the ministry's 'quality-assurance system.'

Denmark is alone among the Nordic countries in having elected school boards in the municipality and at school level in its school system. One board is the political committee, which represents the municipal council and consists of members of the municipal council represented in the committee according to the parties' relative weight in the council. The task of this political committee is to decide on the overall policies on school and education matters inside the municipality's jurisdiction. The other school board is the board of the individual school, with parental majority and with the school leader as the board secretary and with representatives for the teachers and for the students. This school board is supposed to lay out the overall principles for the organisation of instruction, cooperation between school and home, information provided to homes the students' results, work distribution between teachers, and joint social activities for the students ('Lov om folkeskolen' 1993, § 42–44; Moos 2003).

The political board and the superintendents were traditionally located in the middle of a straight line of governance from national to institutional level: from the

political committee (parliament) and the administrative agency (ministry) at national level to the municipal level. The first municipal level is the political committee (municipal council) and administration (municipal administration), and the second is a school committee and the superintendent. Finally, at the level of the schools, each school has a school board with parental majority and school leadership. In the middle of this chain is 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 also has been influenced by transnational tendencies, but building on Danish structures and culture. The municipalities have traditionally exercised a great deal of power in the governance of the public sector, and decentralised educational governance has, according to the Danish 'free' (or independent) school tradition, been a central part of the Danish educational self-understanding, and to some extent of practice.

This is in line with the structural evaluation regimes that have been established in all the Nordic countries, in which local government, schools, teachers and pupils have been subjected to external evaluation and self-evaluation (Day and Leithwood 2007). Moreover, the state has used active financial resource allocation and reporting procedures as an indirect control instrument, whereby municipalities must report their use of financial costs and human resources to state agencies on a yearly basis. Finally, accountability has been strengthened by making the results of 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 municipal sector (through direct ownership and decentralised decision-making power). There is a 'mixed mode' of regulation, which is important for understanding the current context of superintendent leadership in the different municipalities in Denmark (Moos 2009a).

Regarding Finland, one can state that as far as the superintendent is concerned, his/her role in principle is the same as that of the teacher representatives in the 1945 legislation: to serve the school board and to act as executive manager for the personnel in the local provision of education. One could claim that maintaining democracy with a strong emphasis on equity remains at the core of the superintendent's work. Almost everything else around the superintendent has, however, changed many times during recent decades and is now radically different.

Many of the trends and phenomena found in the Danish context can be found also in Finland: for example, the municipalities' major role in providing education and their governance by the state with 'hard' and 'soft' steering instruments. There are also noteworthy differences. In Finland the emphasis has been on the 'soft' steering tools and in general on a 'softer' touch to quality control and evaluation. Regarding the restructuring of public services and municipal arrangements, a shift can be identified currently towards using 'hard' steering measures. However, concerning evaluation and quality control it can be argued that 'soft' steering still mainly prevails. These emphases also affect the work of superintendents differently from in, for example, Denmark.

12   Discussion: The Superintendent as Civil Servant

The traditional role of the civil servant is associated with liberal representative democracy, and a functional, clearly demarked between sectors and public administration (Olsen 1988). The role of the civil servant within this system is that of bureaucrat and policy adviser for the elected or appointed politicians (Lundquist 1998). However, with the gradual transition from the monocentric to the polycentric state model, including governance as the primary mechanism in policymaking, the role of external stakeholders in networks have come more to the forefront (Montin and Amnå 2000; Rhodes 1997; Stoker 1998).

Furthermore, jurisdiction through an increasing number of legal regulations and directives derived from these laws represents a growing trend in the school institution in the Nordic countries. At the same time, the school superintendent as a bureaucrat exercises some (but not much) discretion in curriculum and law implementation. In these roles, a fair match with professional norms within the school institution constitutes an important precondition for this administrative discretion. As superintendents gain new and larger areas of responsibility, however, with greater distance between municipal administration and school, they have to rely on social technologies such as contracts and outcomes quantitative data. The result is that the superintendent will typically find himself or herself in the crossfire between partly incompatible demands. Adapted from the generic model of Lennart Lundqvist (1998), this can be illustrated in Fig. 6.2.

Today the distinction between governance and administration is increased by commercial logic known from market logics. As noted by political scientists, citizens are no longer primarily voters or participators in the civic community; they are increasingly regarded (and act as) consumers in a marketplace, consistent with the
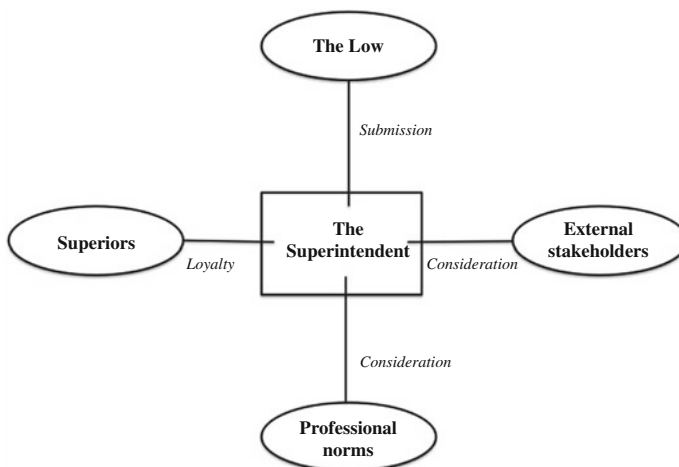

Fig. 6.2   Superintendents in the crossfire as adapted from Lundqvist (1998)

New Public Management doctrine. This can lead to tensions and conflicts between particular stakeholder interests and general norms and values anchored in the wider school institution. External control and managerial logics derived from an increasing number of school laws and social technologies, in concert with the national 'management by objectives' and quality-assurance system, also create tensions in the system through the use of curriculum control and behavioural control in the form of standardisation behavioural codes (Rowan 1990).

The superiors of the superintendents are the school boards, on the one hand, and the municipal managers, on the other. The educational reform in the Nordic countries has also influenced the division of labour between elected politicians and professionals at all levels of the governance chain. At the institutional level, professionals are increasingly focusing on their operational functions; at the municipal level, they are in general more generic managers. Local politicians are made more strategically oriented and less institutionally oriented and subject-specific, and this in turn means that local school boards have lost their sovereign position in the formation of municipal school strategies (Homme 2008).

We can see that the municipal level, both in the political and the administrational fields, has a tendency to develop into a non-educational system: the core tasks at the municipal level are budgeting and long-term strategies with local aims and accountabilities, as well as control of the national standards and tests. We can also see a shared trend in most Nordic countries, except for Finland, that the political and organisational context in which the superintendent's work role is situated, has gradually been transformed by a market logic with a strong emphasis on effectiveness and cost-efficiency in service production. As a consequence, when organisational models of local governance are altered towards the 'concern' or 'holding company' model, significant transformations to the superintendent's role as civil servant are also implied.

Authors in several Nordic countries have noted a transfer of *actual* power in local government decision-making processes from the political sphere to the administrative, in line with the Concern–Enterprise–Workplace model and on the model of the larger political boards and administrations during the last decades (Pedersen 2005; Tranøy and Østerud 2001). This tendency can be linked to the introduction of accountability devices – social technologies such as standard outcome measures linked to individual and group formal positions – as a replacement for local policy-making. March and Olsen (1995) point to an interesting paradox when it comes to the use of performance measures in democratic institutions – namely that there often is a lack of clarity about what are the actual outcomes and their effects (March 1994; March and Olsen 1995). As noted:

> lack of clarity in outcomes leads political systems to seek to control structures and processes rather than outcomes (March and Olsen 1995, p. 227),

They also note that the practice of political accountability generally responds faster and more forcefully with penalties for failure than it does with reward for success (March and Olsen 1995) – a tendency that does not promote the purposes of education and of democratic Bildung.

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Chapter 7
Superintendent Leadership in Hierarchy and Network

Jan Merok Paulsen, Elisabet Nihlfors, Ulf Brinkkjær, and Mika Risku

Abstract School superintendents are coupled hierarchically with the top apex of municipality organization through their membership of leadership teams and through personal ties to the top municipal manager, which provides opportunities to take part in strategic decision-making processes beyond the educational sector. Superintendents are also vertically linked to their school leaders through strong and dense network ties. Along the horizontal axis superintendents are active network players with peers, for example through superintendent associations or more frequently mentioned through personal ties to superintendent colleagues. Superintendents are linked to school boards through strong formal ties. In this chapter, the formation and utilization of network ties within the hierarchy by superintendents is analyzed in concert with horizontal network with peers. School board networking within hierarchy and with the political power center of the municipality is analyzed. Finally, the use that school leaders make of the network in relation to superintendents is discussed.

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1   Networks in Contemporary Governance

There is today a broad consensus among scholars and practitioners that networks play an important role in corporate as well as public sectors (Castells 2000; Tsai 2001). Specifically, network engagement is a core characteristic of contemporary governance, characterized by greater influence from independent transnational and national bodies in policy processes and quasi-markets in the delivery of public services (Stoker 1998a). The term 'governance' was adopted in the 1990s to capture the changing nature of policy processes (Rhodes 1997), manifested as a shift from the hierarchical bureaucracy model towards a more complex model (of public administration) where network actors outside the circle of the bureaucracy were also found to be influential players (Hooghe and Marks 2010). In other chapters in this volume this pattern is described as the change from monocentric towards polycentric state models. This means by implication that policy processes goes beyond those taking place in formal government structures – not least in "self-governing networks of autonomous actors" (Stoker 1998b, p. 18), where actors and institutions gain power by blending their resources, skills and purposes in long-term coalitions that are kept viable in networks. It also means that the capacity to get things done does *not* entirely rest on the power of government to command and use authority – rather it also depends on the capacity to use new tools and forms to steer and guide (Stoker 1998a). Hierarchy and network can therefore be conceived as interdependent "twin concepts" that should be analyzed simultaneously to capture the full picture of the leadership and governance processes of public schooling.

We see this as particularly important for school superintendents who operate at intermediate levels in the hierarchical line of municipality organization, mediating between the top municipal management and school leaders. Superintendents are also connected to school politicians at the same governance level, and connected to a range of actors outside the municipal organization's boundaries (Paulsen 2014). It seems therefore evident that analyzing the role of superintendents at work solely through the lenses of the hierarchical governing line will not capture the full picture of contemporary school governance and leadership. Rather we see *both* social network engagement and handling the control span in the hierarchy as important avenues for superintendents to exert social influence and to practice educational leadership in Nordic systems.

2   The Twin Concepts of Hierarchy and Network

The concepts of hierarchy and network are not separate from each other, but rather overlapping and complementary, because networks in organizations typically cross two or more levels of analysis, such as from individual to group connections (Katz et al. 2004). They should therefore rather be treated as "twin-concepts" that add complementary value to each other in the understanding of contemporary school

governance. They are also supplemental forms of coordination and ways of exercising power (Powell 1990).

2.1 The Concept of Hierarchy

A hierarchy takes the shape of a pyramid with several layers of authority bound together in a control system spanning superiors and subordinates, functional specialization in separate units, downwards delegation and upwards reporting (Blau and Scott 2003). Thompson (1967) distinguished three levels of hierarchy; the technical (operational bottom), managerial and institutional (strategic top apex) levels. The links between these levels are in principle filled by middle level managers who "perform a coordinating role where they mediate, negotiate and interpret connections between the organization's institutional (strategic) and technical (operational) level" (Floyd and Wooldridge 1997, p. 466). This mediating role has significant potential for exerting social influence downwards as well as upwards (March and Simon 1993). From their mediating position, middle level managers also operate the external boundaries of the organization, for example through regular contacts with customers and suppliers (Thompson 1967) and stakeholders (Mintzberg 1993). In the administrative hierarchy of the municipal organization, superintendents can in many cases be seen as middle managers, who mediate between different and often conflicting perspectives and interests in the hierarchical organization, as well as between stakeholders in the environment and the municipal school administration (Paulsen and Skedsmo 2014).

According to institutional theorist W.R. Powell, a hierarchical structure is characterized by "*clear departmental boundaries, clear uses of authority, detailed reporting mechanisms, and formal decision making procedures*" (Powell 1990, p. 302). The most common principles of a hierarchy are that: (1) administrative efficiency is sought through the specialization of tasks by the members of functional units; (2) efficiency is sought by arranging the members of a group in a determinate hierarchy of authority; (3) efficiency is sought by limiting the span of control at any point in the hierarchy to a small number of people (Simon 1997; Weber 1947). The more qualified the employee, the less the span of control can be designed: a narrow span of control allows easy and frequent consultations on complex problems, whereas wide spans of control most commonly mean close supervision and control, and only infrequent person-to-person consultations (Perrow 1986). In cases where subordinates work on non-routine tasks, the demand for closeness, ad-hoc consultations and direct supervision increases significantly, which is typically the case in the relationship between superintendents and school leaders.

As noted, the high speed of operations and large volume of transactions in Nordic educational governance makes hierarchy a well-suited organizational form, and its strength is then its reliability – its capacity for repeatedly producing large numbers of services of a given quality – and its accountability, in terms of its ability to document how resources have been spent (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Through the

exercise of authority, or other forms of influence, "*it is possible to centralize the function of deciding so that a general plan of operation will guide all members of the organization*" (Simon 1997, p. 8). This form of coordination is most often procedural, or routine-based, in nature, involving stable general descriptions of the behaviors and the relationships of the members of the organization (Nelson and Winter 1982).

2.2 Challenges Inherent in an Hierarchical Structure

Studies of administration have identified a series of challenges inherent in hierarchical organization, such as the span of managerial control, through which leaders at all levels control, supervise and support their immediate subordinates. The typical pattern in a hierarchy is an overload of person-to-person relations, which the manager has to deal with. In theory, "*the ideal span of control for a manager has typically been set at about six subordinates*" (Blau and Scott 2003, p. 168), which is far from practical reality in public sector organizations. Another well-documented problem is learning barriers created by the pyramid-shape of the hierarchy, where people perform their daily tasks in "isolated" subunits and staff departments (Nonaka 1994; Scott 2003). Furthermore, when hierarchical forms are confronted by unanticipated changes, such as radical new external demands from policy makers or other stakeholders in the environment, "their liabilities are exposed" (Powell 1990, p. 302).

2.3 The Concept of Social Networks

Networks, in contrast, are "lighter on their feet" than hierarchies. A social network, as a complementary model to hierarchies, is generally defined as a set of nodes (or actors), and it is "the ties that represent the relationship, or lack of relationship, between the nodes" (Brass et al. 2004, p. 795). Collaboration does not occur through administrative command but rather through relationships between people with a minimum of reciprocal actions that are mutually supportive, as described in Chap. 6 in this volume. Membership of networks, with their inherent access to knowledge and critical information, is also a function of mutual trust between the actors involved. The characteristics and differences between hierarchy and network as mechanisms of coordination and collaboration can be summarized, as in Table 7.1.

The content of social relationships between network members is most frequently theorized through the conceptual pair of weak versus strong ties (Granovetter 1973; Hansen 1999). The strength of a social tie is defined as the function of the "amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confidence), and the reciprocal services that characterize the tie" (Granovetter 1973). The strength is seen practically by frequency of interaction, close distances and the density of the partnership

Table 7.1 Key features of hierarchy and network

Key features	Organizational forms	
	Hierarchy	Network
Normative basis	Employment relationship	Complementary strengths
Means of communication	Routines	Relationships
Methods of conflict resolution	Administrative supervision	Norm of reciprocity – reputational concerns
Degree of flexibility	Low	Medium
Amount of commitment among the partners	Medium to High	Medium to high
Tone or climate	Formal bureaucratic	Open-ended
		Mutual benefits

Adapted from Powell (1990)

in terms of the number of tasks, activities or projects the collaboration is based on. The strength of network ties is *not* a static property: over time, weak ties might grow strong, and vice versa (Thune 2006, p. 69). Researchers have examined a range of characteristics of the ties involved in networks – such as formal ties (who gives information to whom); affective ties (who like to interact with whom); proximity of ties (who is close to whom) and cognitive ties (who knows whom) (Borgatti and Foster 2003; Katz et al. 2004).

2.4 Social Networks and Trust

There is evidently a trust-based component in social networks, and as the level of trust increase, cooperative attitudes replace calculative ones – and the perceived need for control decreases among the actors. 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). As a function of trust, relationships between the actors tend to be informal and long-term in nature, and also sustainable despite people changing their organizational affiliations. Arguably, organizational trust is an alternative to external control mechanisms both internal and external to the organization and co-temporal or retrospective to the event (Mayer et al. 1995). Simultaneously, actors in a trusting cooperation are influenced by a kind of self-obligation. Such self-obligation includes not engaging in activities that may betray the mutual trust relationships that characterize cooperation. Notably, trust-based network ties between actors must be based on the actors' shared perception that the collaboration is relatively risk-free. Conversely, if an actor perceives risk in collaborations with other network partners, they will most probably either leave the network or close or downplay the interactions (Høyer et al. 2014). A trusting actor, however, 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 (Høyer and Wood 2011). As argued, network should also be more common in work areas where the participants have some common background – ideologically, professionally or geographically (Powell 1990).

The image of a trusting relationship between school leaders and their superintendents emerges from data from the Nordic countries. For example, when Norwegian school leaders assess the level of organizational trust through different indicators, the main image is one of a high level of vertical trust towards superintendents. Norwegian and Danish school leaders also assess the quality of school leadership meetings in the municipality in a positive manner. The main image of trust can fairly well be linked to the various practices through which superintendents mediate and translate policy goals and municipal decisions in their direct personal links to school leaders. Specifically, we see a tendency for superintendents to perform their leadership tasks and activities within a school development discourse in which they systematically downplay quality management issues. For example, in the self-reported data on the most important tasks Norwegian superintendents bring into their regular dialogues with their school leaders, quality assurance issues are consistently ranked lower than school development issues. This also finds some resonance in data from Denmark and Sweden, where superintendents play important roles as coaches, sparring partners and mentors in developmental issues. In the Finnish case, superintendents also emphasize that their school leaders should prioritize leading pedagogical work in their schools, as well as keeping the budget, but with a particular emphasis on helping students face the challenges of meeting the criteria.

2.5   Broken Chains in the Hierarchical Line of School Governance

In our study of contemporary school governance in the Nordic countries we see a series of reform tendencies where the straightforward command and reporting line inherent in the traditional hierarchy model of school governing is broken. Specifically, we highlight four tendencies that will be analyzed below. Although these trends display different patterns and are also implemented in a different manner in the Nordic countries, they all represent a broken chain in the hierarchy, and thus challenges in the leadership chain seen from the school superintendent's perspective. First, as displayed in our data, there is a tendency in the Nordic countries to broaden superintendent's area of responsibility beyond education. Specifically, the majority of Nordic superintendents are also responsible for pre-school institutions. When the domain of responsibility, and thus also the control span, is significantly expanded, there is a risk that the hierarchical structure in itself will not offer enough meeting-points, meaning a gap in the governance chain. Informal network ties can therefore be seen as a compensational tool for superintendents for the purpose of exerting influence and gaining information.
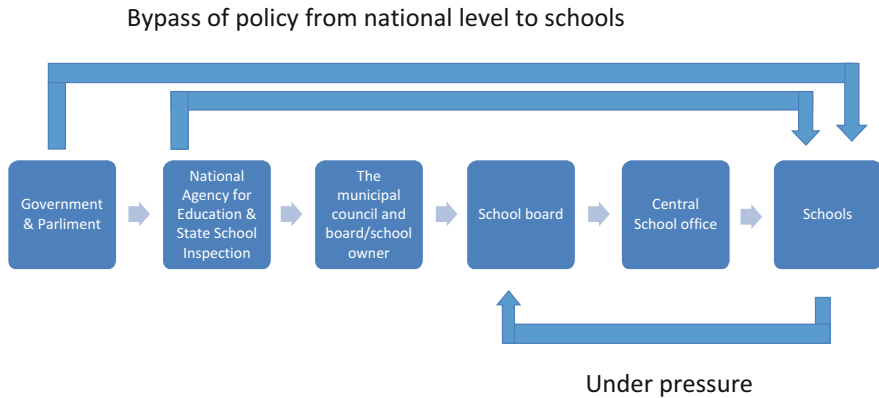
Bypass of policy from national level to schools

Under pressure

The governing chain with a by-pass government/agencies to school sand "under pressure" from schools to local political level/school board

Fig. 7.1 Methods of bypass and pressures in Swedish school governance (Johansson et al. 2014)

Particularly in the Swedish case, there is a strong observable tendency by the governmental department, the National Agency for Education and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, to bypass the municipal level and carry out a range of initiatives, prescriptions and directives directly with schools. A similar effort could be identified in Finland in the 1990s when the relationship between the state and municipalities was revised. During the 2000s the governance system was stabilized so that the national level approaches schools mainly via the municipal level, as legislation is also defined. The pattern of bypassing municipalities is illustrated in the model in Fig. 7.1.

This tendency is also amplified by an image of mistrust in the Swedish governance chain, manifest in school leader propensities to trust the state more than the municipalities about how to best govern schools (Nihlfors and Johansson 2013). There is also a visible tendency in Norway to bypass the municipalities, as seen in the bulk of initiatives and projects launched by the National Directorate of Education and Training. For example, national assessment routines are developed by the directorate, and direct steering, are in most cases accompanied by state funded training programs for teachers in how to implement the initiatives. In a similar vein, the Norwegian directorate runs a series of national training programs for school leaders. Not surprisingly, Norwegian school board members realized that they were bypassed by means of a growing number of state initiatives (Paulsen and Strand 2014). Finland often appears as an outlier among the Nordic countries. In this regard, too, the national level seems to create a framework in which the municipal level operates very autonomously. Thus for municipal school board members, superintendents and principals, local decision-making is more important than that of the state. Thus in the Finnish system it is not easy for the national level to bypass the municipal one and directly govern schools.

The increased number of independent schools in primary education also represents a gap in the municipal school governance chain. A fourth tendency to break the hierarchical governance line is represented by the introduction of intermediate levels of leadership and management. For example in the Swedish case, an intermediate actor, labeled 'assistant superintendent', is visible – typically responsible for seven to ten schools working with the instruction of school leaders. They also report back to the superintendent on school leader performance. In the Danish case, a middle layer is introduced between the superintendent and the municipal top manager. As the size of municipalities grows in Finland, the solutions typical of both Denmark and Sweden may gradually become more common.

2.6 Summary

Taken together, it seems fair to interpret the tendencies presented above as breaks in the governance line of the municipal hierarchy. Whereas the extension of the superintendent's domain of responsibility is visible in all four Nordic countries, bypassing superintendents is more evident in Sweden. In a similar vein, independent schools and intermediate leadership levels seem to be more frequent in Denmark and Sweden. Over and above this, network engagement can be seen as a compensation strategy for superintendents in order to counterbalance these gaps through increased engagement outside the school office.

3 Superintendent Networking Within the Hierarchy

3.1 The Players and the Structure of the Superintendent's Network

The main picture from the data provided by the national surveys suggests that superintendents are frequently players in internal and external networks. Internal networks are both vertical and horizontal in nature, and may be a function of the line hierarchy as well as a function of trust-based dyadic and personal relationships. Hierarchy and network, therefore, are complementary analytical tools that are useful for the purpose of capturing the full picture of the social avenues, through which superintendents seek to exert influence. Networks are formed and maintained both vertically and horizontally. Whereas vertical ties between the superintendents and the municipal top management (upwards) and school leaders (downwards) are embedded in a formal line structure, horizontal network engagement takes the form of participation in temporary project groups and personal relationships with peers. Superintendents are also connected to school boards through formal subordination
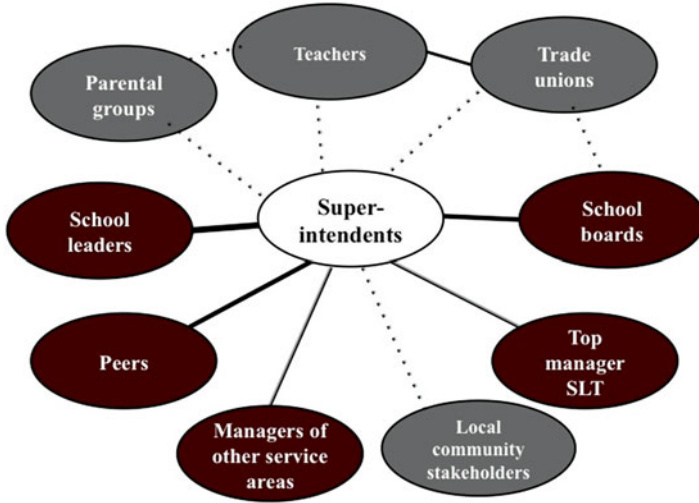
Fig. 7.2 Network structure of superintendents. *Bold lines* indicate stronger ties (more frequent interactions) whereas *broken lines* indicates weaker ties between actors

and through personal ties to the chair of the board. The structure of the superintendent's network is illustrated in Fig. 7.2.

Social ties between the superintendent and other important players in local school governance can typically take place as within group networks, for example in senior leadership teams at the top; as well as in school leader groups together with school leaders. These within-group relationships are supplemented by personal ties to the top manager, peers and individual school leaders. Since superintendents in Nordic countries perceive that they exert some influence on strategic decision-making of other service areas beyond their own domain of responsibility, it is fair to assume that they also maintain personal ties with managers of other service areas within their own municipality organization.

As shown in Fig. 7.2, superintendents are also in regular contact with representatives of teachers, parents and other local community stakeholders, however, there are significant differences between the ties formed and maintained with these actors. Whereas the social ties to school boards, top management and school leaders are strong, based on frequent interaction in formal and informal settings, the opposite is the case for teachers, trade unions and parental groups according to our data. These ties are weak, shaped by infrequent interactions, yet they provide superintendents with information that may be beneficial for mapping the power-landscape. On the other hand, as displayed in the data on stakeholder influence, teacher and parent interests are typically downplayed in decision-making processes that involve superintendents and school boards.

3.2 *Upwards Network Engagement with the Top Apex*

It seems that school superintendents across a variety of national and regional contexts maintain relationships that are embedded in strong ties to their immediate supervisor or manager. Strong ties by means of frequent meetings and day-to-day interactions are promoted by a series of coordination tasks that must be resolved, as well as decision-making processes taking place in regular meetings within the hierarchical governing line. The coupling mechanism between the superintendents and their immediate superior in the governance line follows a differentiated pattern, however. Specifically, Sweden with its 290 municipalities, has a more diverse pool of relationships between the superintendents and their immediate superior managers. The majority are connected to the municipal manager but 17 % are coupled directly to the school board as their immediate unit of command, and 15 % are subordinate to the political leadership of the municipality.

There are also other contextual differences across the cases. Whereas half Danish superintendents seem to be linked to a middle level manager between themselves and the municipal manager at the top, the other half are connected directly to the municipal manager themselves. The Norwegian superintendents are in most cases coupled directly to the municipal manager. This difference between Norway and Denmark can be fairly well explained by the heterogeneity of the municipality landscape in Norway, with a large number of small municipalities with a simple hierarchical structure, in contrast to the Danish situation with a more homogenous mass of 98 municipalities that are all large complex hierarchies. In Finland, the superintendent holds a series of strong ties to the political and administrative core of the municipality organization. Concurrent with the main images in the other Nordic countries, the Finnish superintendent is normally directly coupled to the municipal director, the top manager, through lines of reporting and command. The Finnish data also shows strong links between superintendents and the political power-centers in the municipalities through direct expert engagement in the municipality council and board.

When it comes to participation in the municipal manager's top leadership team, which is a strategic asset in most organizations (Wageman et al. 2008), most Nordic superintendents are regular members. There is also a picture running through the Nordic data that superintendents are engaged in comprehensive decision-making processes beyond their own specialism of education. For example, the Nordic superintendents perceive that they also exert influence on strategic decisions of other service sectors through their participation in the top leadership team, and also through the fact that they serve as responsible managers for more than education, as formalized in their job-descriptions. This pattern reflects an overall tendency to expand the work domain of superintendents to include neighboring sectors.

3.3   Density of Network Ties

A central question in network analysis involves the density of the network understood as the portion of potential connections in a network that are actual connections (Burt 1992). For example, if 80 out of 100 potential connections are utilized, the density ratio is 0.8. The analytical point is that a series of possible network ties embedded in a hierarchy does not in itself ensure a beneficial relationship – it is the utilization that makes network engagement a power instrument and a learning instrument. Density in networks is achieved through the breadth of the collaboration in terms of superintendents and top managers engaging jointly in a range of different tasks and projects. Although the density is *not* measured in mathematical terms in our study, the data supports some images of density. For example, by means of self-reported data the study captures the degree to which the superintendent's work is assessed by their immediate supervisor. The overall picture is one of regular contact and assessment by the superior manager: When examining the ways through which the superintendent's work is assessed (by the municipal manager), the majority reports with assessment and feedback once a year. For example, 95 % of the Danish superintendents report that they are assessed annually by their superior manager, however, in the Swedish data, there is obviously a deviant sub-population that perceives only mediocre feedback and assessment: remarkably, 29 % of the Swedish sample reports that they are either never assessed by their immediate superior, or that they do not know.

Norwegian superintendents perceive that the motives of the municipal manager in assessing their work cluster around a Management by Objective (MbO) discourse, most evidently in terms of identification of areas of improvement (based on comparisons of results with targets). This response pattern corresponds fairly well with the Swedish data, with the exception that deciding wages is ranked highest by 61 % of the superintendents. Similarly, 55 % of the Swedish superintendents perceive that the motives of their immediate superior, from which they are assessed, cluster round an ambition to identify the superintendent's strengths. Here again, 20 % of the Swedish sample did not answer this question. Also notably, only 33 % of the Danish superintendents have a written job instruction. In Finland every superintendent has a written job description, in practice. Evaluation is mainly conducted through developmental discussions with municipal directors but typically in Finland several other evaluators are also mentioned, such as the municipal inspection board and school board.

Regarding the nature of the relationship between the Norwegian superintendent and the top apex, the data shows a pattern of fairly frequent availability of the superior municipal manager (when needed), specifically for consultations about problems. On the other hand, the same immediate municipal manager plays a rather passive role in educational engagement in their relationship with their superintendents. The content of the relationships is, thus, more of a general nature, and the superintendents feel that their top manager has few contributions to offer to educational issues.

3.4   Downwards Engagement with School Leaders

The superintendents reported that the most important actors in the municipal governance are the school leaders. Running through the data sets is therefore a picture of strong ties between the superintendents and the school leaders, covering both formal meeting structures, informal coordination, support in strategic thinking and mentoring. This major inference can be seen as slightly paradoxical, as long as there is a strong tendency to have superintendents taking care of multiple institutions and thus not able to collaborate closely with all of them. Nevertheless, the data supports the image of a series of direct relationships between superintendents and their school leaders, to which they are immediate supervisor, and the nature of the relationships seems to be a blend of formal and informal ties. For example, superintendents hold school leader group meetings within the governance line, and as seen in the Danish data, these meetings are perceived as beneficial for solving strategic tasks and coordinating tasks related to the daily operation of schools. Also, as revealed in the Danish data, superintendents and school leaders use personal direct contact to discuss strategic issues of a pedagogical nature, where the superintendent also acts as a sparring, coaching and dialogue partner. This also finds resonance in the Norwegian and Swedish data. As commented on earlier, when Norwegian superintendents describe the content of their daily dialogue with their school leaders in their own words, school development tasks and pedagogical leadership issues are ranked highly. In that respect, the data suggests that formal and informal network ties add complementary value to the leadership dialogue with school leaders, as seen from the superintendent's perspective.

3.5   Summary

The analysis above confirms that superintendents are active network players within the vertical governance structure of the municipal hierarchy, and the analysis indicates a fairly high level of utilization of the unique position held by superintendents. Particularly, the professional ties between superintendents and school leaders emerge as important seen from the superintendent's perspective, yet there are also visible couplings between superintendents and the upper level of the municipal hierarchy. There are substantial differences across the Nordic countries when it comes to intermediate levels; upwards between the superintendent and the municipal top manager; and downwards between the superintendent and the school leaders.

4 Superintendent Engagement in Horizontal Networks

4.1 Internal Network Engagement in Project Groups

Superintendents span the internal boundaries of the municipal organization by means of strong ties to a wide range of professional forums and projects. The main picture from the data confirms that municipal school superintendents also maintain personal ties with a range of colleagues within their municipality organization through participation in project groups. Regarding the breadth of these ties, 40 % of the Norwegian superintendents report participation in more than three project groups, whereas the remaining 40 % participate in 1, 2 or 3 groups. The Norwegian data is silent about the content of the collaboration, however, such as in terms of agendas and issues that superintendents collaborate on across the municipality boundaries: it is fair to assume that these project groups engage in coordination matters with a broader range of interest. The Danish data confirms this image and adds supplemental information, in terms of superintendents participating in mostly 3–5 *ad hoc, municipal groups* in order to produce policy papers, administrative routines and carry out overarching and coordinating meetings with leaders at several levels from several sectors. The Swedish data confirms that almost all superintendents engage in social networks. In terms of the content of the network relationships, 91 % of the Swedish superintendents report about school issues. Over and above this, this form of horizontal networking in theory provides opportunities to exert influence on other domains, yet more importantly, the project group engagement external to the education sector offers access to valuable information and knowledge that might be used at a later point of time. Unsurprisingly, internal networking seems to form an essential part of the work of Finnish superintendents.

4.2 Networking with Peers

Superintendents continuously cross the external boundaries of the municipalities in their daily work, and the picture drawn from the data is that school superintendents engage frequently in professional networks with peers. For example, 63 % of the Swedish superintendents reported that they collaborate with peer superintendents on a great number of issues, and, in a similar vein, 55 % perceive that they are central actors in the collaboration with peers. In contrast, only 32 % of the Swedish superintendents ranked external collaboration with peers higher than similar collaboration with "other central actors in my municipality". Seventy-four percent of the Norwegian and Danish superintendents report that they have frequent contacts with other school superintendents. The Finnish results confirm the Swedish ones. The views of actors in their own municipalities are more important than those of peers in other municipalities. On the other hand, regional level planning has become more and more important in Finland and there are several attempts to compile

regional level curricula and strategic development plans which establish natural genuine platforms for superintendents to network. In addition, the Finnish Superintendents' Association, Opsia, is presently the most strongly growing trade union association in the education field.

The data is silent about the density of the relationships, however, and whether superintendents collaborate about "many things" or "few things" is not captured by the data. In the Danish case, peer-networks are described as important in everyday work: this is where new challenges, tasks and opportunities are discussed and explored. These could be described as learning communities, but they are rather loosely coupled to each other. Two peer-networks are mentioned most often in the Danish case: superintendent associations and the superintendents in the region. From these networks they receive professional development, inspiration, sparring, knowledge sharing, and community, meet the politicians and discuss political issues. In a wider sense, networking with peers offer opportunities for superintendents to scan, map and construct a picture of their environment, including predicting future trouble spots or potential allies (Daft and Weick 2001; Tushman and Scanlan 1981). Engaging in horizontal networks that cross the external boundaries is also an essential leadership function for organizations in order to assimilate fresh knowledge and critical information across the boundaries and to integrate it with the focal organization's own knowledge reservoir (Paulsen and Hjertø 2014).

5 School Boards in Local Governance Networks

5.1 The Network Structure

School boards take part in two discernable yet largely unconnected social networks. The first type of network identifiable in the data embraces the school board, its superintendent, and the administrative office to which the superintendents are immediately superior. In this form of network, school boards are politically superior to superintendents and the school office. The ties between the board and the school administration are strong and dense, since board members rank superintendents and school administration as their most valuable partners in the preparation phase of the policy process. The second form of network in which school boards are engaged involves the relationship between the board members and the municipal political organization – that is the municipal council and the municipal board. School boards are also in principle indirectly connected to school leaders and their teachers, although the data suggests that the ties between school board members and schools are weak and infrequent. The network structure is illustrated in Fig. 7.3.

The two networks in which school board members are situated provide different opportunities for exerting political influence. The ties to the municipal council and board are strong, through frequent interaction (in terms of double-membership). Ties to the administrative core of education in the municipality are also strong, yet
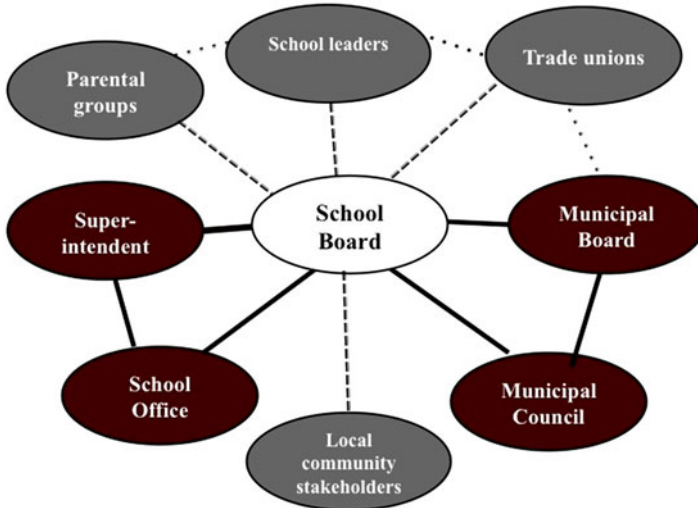
Fig. 7.3 Network structure involving school boards

of an asymmetric nature. Whereas the superintendent and the school office hold strong and dense ties to school leaders and teachers, boards are largely disconnected from this sphere. This leaves school board members in an asymmetric power relationship when it comes to governing schools. As reported in a Swedish study, however, there is also a risk of developing mistrust in the link between school politicians and school leaders (Nihlfors and Johansson 2013).

5.2 Network Ties to Administration and Superintendent and School Leaders

The two most important actors, in terms of their strength of influence on the decisions made by the board, are the school administration and the superintendent. In a theoretical sense, the social network ties between the school boards and the administrative school administration, including the superintendent, are strong, characterized by frequent interactions. It is therefore fair to interpret the ties between the school boards and their respective superintendents as dense, since they collaborate on many a range of policy issues and strategic tasks. Support for this inference comes from the self-reported data of the school boards that shows strong participation in the board's agenda setting from the superintendent. The social ties between the school board and the school leaders are weak, with infrequent interactions, and school leaders are *not* important stakeholders when it comes to the school board's decision-making processes. For example, only 28 % of Norwegian and Danish school board members see their school leaders as influential in decision-making. In

the Swedish data, a similar 29 % of the board members perceive that school leaders can exert influence on the decisions made by the board. Only 18 % of Swedish school leaders see themselves as influential in the board's decisions. In Finland the views of school leaders seem to be the third most influential for school board members but still significantly less important than those of the superintendents.

Conversely, school board members also assess their own influence on strategic and pedagogical decisions made by their schools and their respective leaders. In Finland school board members appear to have infrequent contact with school leaders but still be satisfied with their impact on strategic decisions at both the municipal and school level. It is noteworthy here that in Finland the curriculum is also regarded as a strategic document. On a more general level, 74 % of Swedish board members perceive that their work with the board has an impact on "*the development of the schools in our municipality*". Specifically, only 44 % of the Norwegian board members perceive that they can make financial prioritizations that impact the work of the school leaders and teachers, and the similar score for the Swedish board members was 39 %. Only 36 % of the Norwegian and 39 % of the Swedish board members perceive that they are empowered to set agendas for local schools within their municipality, and finally, only 20 % of the Norwegian members see themselves as empowered to make decisions on local curriculum development that interfere with the work of schools. Thus, when it comes to pedagogical matters and decisions at the local school level, the data indicates weak ties between school boards and school leaders, and, further, that these ties are embedded in an asymmetric power relationship in favor of school leaders and teachers in pedagogical matters at the school level. Taken together, the Nordic data indicates strong ties between school boards and superintendents, but in an asymmetric fashion in favor of superintendents, whereas the ties between school boards and school professionals are weak. Whereas a picture of empowerment emerges in relation to the municipal council, powerlessness seems to be a prevalent characteristic in pedagogical decisions in schools.

School boards and superintendents in Denmark have surprisingly diverse perceptions of many aspects of both parties' work and relations. For example, school boards and superintendents have different views on superintendent influence on school boards, but superintendents are seen to have gradually taken over more policy making, especially when it comes to administrative and legal issues. As noted, there are only infrequent contacts between school board members and schools leaders, and the board members perceive that they have at best only meager influence on school professionals' work. There are two main avenues to the way school Danish board members may exert influence on schools; first, through the strategic non-pedagogical decisions made in the municipal council, which in some cases also affect schools directly; and, secondly, through dialogue with the superintendent and the school administration. A similar pattern was visible when the Danish school board members were asked about their assessment of the most important source of information for their work on the committee, where information from the school administration is typically the most frequently specified category.

5.3 School Boards in the Municipal Policy Network

School boards and municipal councils are linked by some formal political routines, but more manifest through their dual membership. This is evidently the case in the Norwegian sample, where 83 % are regular members of the municipal council – which in itself constitutes strong ties. In Denmark, all board members also take part in the municipal council. In Finland 41 % were also members of the municipal council, 9 % also members of the municipal executive board, 14 % members of miscellaneous other boards and 40 % members of only the municipal school board. In the Swedish case, only 26 % of the board members were members of the municipal council, whereas 65 % of the board members were also members of the municipal board. Notably, it is the municipal council that constitutes the strongest power-center in the municipality's political organization, so the Swedish data suggests weaker connections between the school board and the municipality council. When it comes to the results of this network engagement, the school board members perceive a relatively high influence on municipal governance, particularly in the municipal council and board's strategic decisions and economic prioritizing. It seems that school board members perceive their work as having a significant impact on overall decisions at the municipality level. Here again, the Swedish data contrasts with this image, in terms of 52 % perceiving that the "*municipality board takes the school board's views into consideration in issues of education*". As noted and in contrasting, when it comes to a downwards influence in terms of agenda setting at the school level, the perception of influence among school board members decreases significantly, which again supports the image of weak network ties between the school boards and the school professionals.

5.4 School Board Ownership of Their Specialism

As Anne Homme (2008) showed in her study of municipal school governance in Norway, a series of school specialism issues were transferred from the school board's domain to the municipal policy-making and school administration (see Paulsen and Moos 2014). As noted, when local school issues appeared on the municipality's policy agenda, these issues (and the policy process of which they were part) tended to be assimilated into a broader policy process populated by multiple players: the leaders and boards of a range of municipal sectors (such as child care and culture), the municipal director, the mayor, the central administration, the dominant political coalition, and external stakeholders. Homme's (2008) point is that when this takes place, the school board loses its exclusive ownership of local school policy and governance. An implication of this pattern, at least as a speculation, is that the network engagement of school board members (with the municipal council and municipal board) emerges as an important counter-strategy in order to exert influence on municipal decisions in school matters.

5.5 Summary

Whereas school board members seem to be peripheral in relation to the pedagogical discourse in schools, operated by school leaders and teachers, they have strong ties to the municipal council and municipal board, mostly due to overlapping membership. This means that they might be fairly influential players in strategic decision-making in the municipality's political system, and also when it comes to educational matters, but they are evidently at arm's-length from micro-level implementation in the schools.

6 School Leaders in Networks

As noted, school leaders are connected to their superintendents in two distinct but overlapping ways. There is a consistently strong direct relationship between the school superintendents and the school leaders, and the latter group are thus the primary subordinates or collaborating partners to superintendents. They typically communicate person to person in supervision about strategic issues and leadership tasks. The typical pattern of collaboration is a broad range of issues of which superintendents and school leaders interact. The nature of the relationship is, as such, dense in terms of the breadth of issues. The school leaders' interactions in networks, as portrayed in the country reports is illustrated in Fig. 7.4.

In the Danish, Finnish and Norwegian cases, there is seldom another leadership level between the superintendent and the school leaders, such as the principals, (but they are increasing in Denmark and gradually in Finland). The person-to-person relationship is, as such, of a direct nature. The Nordic superintendents and school
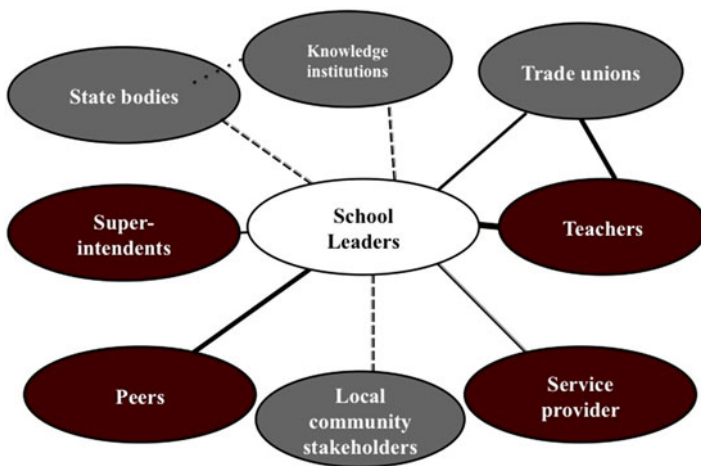

Fig. 7.4 School leaders in networks

leaders are also partnered in municipal school leader groups, which is a consistent pattern in the Danish and Norwegian and Swedish case. Superintendent and school leader networks are thus of a complex nature, since they comprise both dyadic (one-to-one) relationships and within-group relationships.

In the Danish case, the overall picture is that school leaders and their superintendents collaborate on day-to-day operations and strategies in group meetings, whereas deeper educational issues are discussed in face-to-face interaction. The Norwegian school leaders see their group meetings as useful overall, in terms of learning effects, such as their perception of strengthening competence through the group work, and a trusting climate in the meetings. As noted previously, the relationships between the school leaders and the school boards are more of an infrequent nature in terms of weak and non-systematic ties. In the Norwegian case, school board members describe weak connections and little influence on school leaders, and teachers, and the school leaders barely mention the board members in their descriptive data on influence and collaboration. In Finland, 25 % of school leaders reported having an intermediate level between themselves and the superintendent in 2013. Although the result is not directly comparable with the result of the superintendent survey in 2008 (6 %), it can be concluded that an intermediate level of sub-district principals is becoming more and more common in Finland. Finnish school leaders have on average monthly meetings with their superiors and mostly receive support from them in personnel, juridical and financial issues. They particularly expect to have mental support and trust, interaction and leadership from their superiors.

In Sweden, there is a middle layer between the municipal superintendent and the school leaders, as reported by 36 % of the municipalities in 2009. The ratio is expected to have increased in the current situation, due to re-organization initiatives. The existence of a middle layer changes the nature of the relationship between the superintendent and the school leaders because the social ties are then linked through an intermediate agent, but the superintendent meets the school leaders regularly, in any case, as shown in our data.

6.1   Summary

School leaders are linked to their superintendents by means of strong and dense ties. The main image of these relationships is that they are embedded in mutual trust, and they are perceived as valuable from the school leaders' perspective – not least through support, sparring and coaching. The analysis showed differences between Sweden and the other Nordic countries when it comes to intermediate levels between the superintendent and the school leaders.

7 Relationships to Teacher Trade Unions in the Networks

In the Nordic welfare state model, strong corporative partnership collaboration between trade unions and the civil services has been a consistent pattern since World War II (Hernes 1983; Nordby 1994). This regulatory element of the school institution has also been amplified by a collective sense of rationalism bound to this arrangement, manifest in the low occurrence of strikes and conflict in the labor markets. Collaboration between civil service agencies and trade unions has infused the school institution at the state level and the municipality level in various arrangements (Telhaug et al. 2006). Most collaborative arrangements, such as tariff agreements and hearings, have been dealt with at the national level, whereas rules for recruitment and personnel management have been negotiated at the municipal level between trade unions and civil servants, such as superintendents.

The empirical investigations underpinning this volume indicate different patterns between the Nordic countries when it comes to influence exerted by teacher unions in municipal school governance. In 2004 the Norwegian Ministry of Education transferred the responsibilities for teacher tariff agreements, including the wages and standards of working conditions, to the municipal sector, but the association of municipalities deals with the major part of tariff issues, and the municipal civil services are still bound to negotiate with teacher trade unions in a range of issues. This pattern also corresponds with the Swedish case, where teacher salaries are decided on the national level, but between other parties than previously, and these agreements are supplemented by local agreements in municipalities and occasionally also in schools. In Finland collective agreements are still negotiated and agreed on at the national level, however, gradually municipality- and school-based elements and considerations have been added to the agreements, and in Finland particularly school leaders, but also superintendents, seem to value teachers' opinions greatly, and also those of school board members. The views of trade unions, on the other hand, do not seem to be emphasized much by superintendents and principals but somewhat by school board members. Taken together, the transitions in the cooperative systems have resulted in different arrangements of more individually based salaries, however, when it comes to stakeholder influence, the data collected among Nordic superintendents and school board members indicates a decrease of teacher trade union influence. Only a minority of the school board members see the teacher groups and teacher unions as influential in relation to the decision-making processes taking place in the school boards. The same pattern is visible when it comes to superintendent assessments of external stakeholder influence: teachers and teacher unions are not influential.

8 Summary of Findings

There are some systematic differences in network engagement in Norway and Finland compared with Denmark and Sweden in terms of the organization of the hierarchical network structure. In the typical Danish administrative design,

superintendents are coupled with a middle manager next to the top, which means that there is another link in the chain upwards. Danish superintendents are also less frequently directly connected to a school board committee than is the case in the other Nordic countries. In the Swedish case, many superintendents have a link in the chain downwards between themselves and the school leader, which also affects the network structure. There are also more different distinctive types of superintendent role in Sweden, as a function of the size and scope of the municipality. In Norway and Finland, we see a more traditional pattern, where superintendents are linked directly to both the top level of the municipality as well as to the school leaders. The analysis presented in this chapter reveals firstly that the various forms of network engagement employed by superintendents provide opportunities for them to take part in strategic decision-making processes at the top apex of the municipal organization beyond their primary domain of responsibility. Second, and also along the vertical axis, superintendents engage intensively in networks with individual school leaders, and the analysis suggests that this form of person-to-person relationship strengthens the preconditions for superintendents to exert influence on the professional core of schools.

In all Nordic countries superintendents report a work-division of formal and informal collaboration with their respective school leaders, where person to person mentoring with school leaders, including sparring and support in strategic thinking, supplement the superintendent's work in formal school leader group meetings. Although the findings indicate that formal group level collaborations are important for strategic issues and coordination, deeper educational issues require personal direct communication. The findings also indicate that superintendents may play an important role for school leaders by acting as mentors and sparring partners in strategic and pedagogical problem solving. This also seems to be what school leaders expect from their superintendents, as the Finnish results show, for example. Network ties to individual school leaders accompany engagement in smaller networks of school leader groups at the municipal level, and the analysis indicates that these two network leadership practices employed by superintendents supplement each other. A third arena of networking activated by superintendents is professional engagements with peers, and the analysis shows uniformly that various forms of networking with peers are prevalent characteristics of superintendent leadership in the Nordic countries.

The analysis of the school board data brings evidence that board members are also linked to school superintendents through network engagements. Specifically, the ties between the boards and the superintendents emerge as strong and dense, but embedded in an asymmetric power distribution in favor of the superintendents. Whereas superintendents are important network actors seen from the school board members' perspective, school leaders are *not*: school boards seem to be only infrequently connected to school leaders and teachers. On the other hand, school boards are linked to local policy networks through membership of the municipal council. This is uniformly the case in Norway and Denmark, partly in Finland, and, yet as noted, significantly different in Sweden. The main trend is that school board members maintain stronger ties with the political center of the municipality than with the

schools. The superintendents operate in two discernable networks – with school leaders and politicians, and these two seem to be partly disconnected. It is therefore fair to assume that they are central actors in their local school governance chain. There are also some clear tendencies that the traditional corporative structure (including teacher unions) is weakened in the various network forms. Most clearly, the school boards seem to downplay the role of teacher unions and teacher groupings in their decision-making process.

Whereas the work role of school leaders is more strongly determined by the state in terms of legislative directives, this is not the case for superintendents. There is no doubt that superintendents have to adapt their work to state directives, but on the other hand, their work role is more strongly determined by the political and social context of the municipalities. We see this evidently in the vast variation in superintendent roles and job descriptions within each of the Nordic countries as shown in the data. From a theoretical stance, this particular difference in the context in which the work roles of school leaders and superintendents are situated, may create gaps in the local school governance chain. Visible trends of bypassing municipalities in the governing of schools through state initiatives may further amplify the image of a broken chain.

9 Discussion

9.1 The Situational Context of Network Engagement

The empirical studies undertaken in the Nordic countries justify the inclusion of social network theory in theoretical models of superintendent leadership in order to capture the full breadth of their work role and action repertoire in municipal school governance. A possible reason for the relatively high level of network engagement can be explained by the tendency to integrate several areas of responsibility to the superintendent's job. Their field of responsibility and work is thus being enlarged to cover child care and education from 1 through 18 years (Denmark), from 1 through 16 (Norway); and by implication, they are being involved in municipal governance beyond their particular field of work, education, in order to take part in shared municipal coordination and policy-making. In Finland, early childhood education has also been transferred from social to educational services, thus further expanding the role of the superintendent who, especially in small municipalities, may have a wide array of other areas of responsibility as well. Finnish legislation also mandates all public decision-making to be based on genuine dialogue between the various stakeholders. What is more in Sweden, some municipalities have more than one superintendent collectively responsible for the total education of children and young people from 1 to 18 years and in other fields of municipal services such as culture. In these cases, to a large extent determined by municipality cases, it means by implication that the number of layers and professional network ties increases, as does the complexity involved in the work role. All these tendencies point to the crucial importance of superintendents engaging in networks.

Another observable tendency in studies of local school governance in Norway is that strategic decisions about primary education (in the municipalities) tend to be absorbed by a wider range of influential actors – so that school board members and superintendents lose their sovereign role as decision makers in school matters (Homme 2008). In cases where school issues are transformed into a broader decision-making sphere in the municipality, it can be assumed, at least as a speculation, board members also must broaden their scope of engagement. Further, networking thus comes to the forefront. In a theoretical sense, the analysis in this chapter supports the central premise of governance theory in the sense of highlighting the importance of network in policy processes.

9.2 Superintendents and Their Network Position

Degree of centrality is defined by the number of direct relationships, or social ties, that an actor has with other actors in a network (Song and Miskel 2005, p. 13). Specifically, the central actor of a given network, characterized by being the hub of many relationships and thereby uniquely positioned to exclude some and include others, is a potent source of power (Cross and Cummings 2004). The "spider position" in a network gives the central actor several opportunities to control the flow of information, steer communication lines and to bypass some actors in order to exert influence over them. Actor centrality is thus used as a predictor of organizational influence, because the network ties empower the central actors by giving them greater access to valuable information (Pappas et al. 2004). We therefore ask whether or not superintendents can be assumed to be central actors in their networks, and, in a similar vein, whether we see patterns and trends that alter this position. On one hand, in the un-broken governance chain characterized by direct links between superintendents and the municipal top managers paired with direct links to the school leaders, the picture of a superintendent's actor centrality emerges as a fruitful analytical tool. Specifically, when superintendents are positioned to take part in decision-making processes at the top and translating these directly to school leaders through formal groupings and interpersonal relationships – we see that many communication links go through the superintendents. On the other hand, we see strong trends that seem to weaken the superintendent's network position in the Nordic governance systems. First, through the state bypassing the municipality level in governing directives, as in the Swedish case, the superintendent can be locked out of important communication lines in the vertical governance network. A similar effect can be seen through the implementation of intermediate levels of leadership, between the superintendent and the school leaders. Third, in a similar vein, the central position of the latter actor is also weakened by the introduction of a middle-level between the top municipal manager and the superintendent, as in the Swedish and Danish case. We also see different trends in the Nordic countries. Whereas the chain is more broken, seen from the superintendent's perspective, in Sweden and Denmark, there seems to be stronger links throughout the vertical governance line in Norway and Finland.

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Chapter 8
Political Cultures

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Abstract This thematic chapter analyses both similarities and differences between the political cultures of the participating Nordic countries. It has been demonstrated that a country's specific political culture has a great impact on the way its schooling system is organised. This view was centred on national cultures. In the Nordic countries, with their traditions of decentralised systems, many of the most important decision are taken by the municipal systems. Therefore this chapter seeks to apply the concepts of national political culture to the local municipal level. The chapter aims to explore the differences between the Nordic countries' schooling systems through the lens of how different political cultures influence the organisation of the national school systems and draw them in different directions.

Keywords Municipalities • Nordic school systems • State vs. municipality • Organizational levels • Conceptual framework

1   Comparing Nordic Policy Cultures in Education

Internationally, there has been a tendency to view the Nordic countries' schooling systems as very similar, for example in the ISSPP (Day and Leithwood 2001). A number of Scandinavian trends that differ from those in other parts of the world have been identified: a relatively strong state, relatively strong local authorities,

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comprehensive education, and a collaborative leadership. These strong trends build on national values that are in some ways alike (Moos 2013b). Of course there are similarities, but there are also differences.

The comparison of similarities and differences between the Scandinavian countries' political cultures may contribute to clarifying our pictures of those cultures in Sartre's sense, namely that we can only see what a thing, for example a culture, is, when we see what it is not (Sartre 1972 [1943]). Cultures that seem alike may, if compared, exhibit differences if these are looked for, and that may be a tool better to understand the influence of the domestic culture on the school system, and in turn on the superintendent's opportunities and restraints in the system.

What we are looking for in what follows is how the governing of the various countries' school systems is executed. It is not possible to govern a nation and its institutions strictly by economic and administrative means through legislation alone. Cultural norms, traditions and values – in short, culture – permeates the way things are done, and the cultural traits that lie behind the ways things are done may be more important than formal government tools in steering the schools systems (Moos 2013c).

The increasing influence of globalisation on societies also influences education. As relations between national states and systems have become stronger, it is to be expected that policies on education will be influenced across borders, through what Røvik (2005) calls recipes, which prescribe what is to be done (Røvik 1998/2005). Such prescriptions spring, for example, from international comparisons such as TIMMS and PISA and the subsequent prescriptions from institutions such as the European Union (EU-Oplysning 2008) and the OECD (Pont et al. 2008).

This influence becomes modified and translated before its implementation in the school system. The translation process differs between countries owing to differences in context and especially owing to differences in national and political culture. Among the Nordic countries, however, the connections are close, and institutions exist in which issues of common interest are discussed. In 1952 the Nordic Council was formed, and in 1971 the Nordic Council of Ministers in order to better formalise coordination between member governments (Moos 2013c).

The translation of imported ideas into practice may take place at national, local, or institutional level, and that will often make the resulting practices different from one another. In our case, the differences may be due to differences in translation between the respective countries, but within countries they may differ again owing to different translations in different municipalities and different schools – because policies, ideas and their translations are social constructions. As Røvik states, "General and abstract ideas may be concretised, mixed with local traditions […]" (Moos 2013a).

It has been demonstrated (Moos 2013c) that context plays an important role when education leadership is assessed and compared. Political culture constitutes an important context for the way schools and schooling systems function. Therefore it is important to be aware of the political, societal, cultural and institutional context in which the leadership of the schooling system works (Moos 2013c). Those contexts are part of the opportunities and constraints with which the superintendent

must cope. As Bourdieu and Passeron (2006) have demonstrated, the old practice, structures, values, and norms of society, be it great or small, are still present for new perceptions and influences (Bourdieu and Passeron 2006 [1970]).

Louis and van Velzen (2012) look upon political cultures from a national perspective (Louis and van Velzen 2012). But political cultures unfold and are active on a local level as well as the national level. Precisely because in all the Nordic countries there exists local room for manoeuvre in school administration and development, it is therefore safe to use the concept of political culture elaborated in this book in the analysis of the political cultures (van Velzen et al. 2012). Therefore it is important to look at the local cultures when comparing across country borders. That is the task of this chapter.

The hypothesis of the chapter is that aspects of the similarities and the differences are due not only to specific differences between the political cultures but also to the common Nordic model. This approach will be the lens through which our topic is analysed.

The concept of political culture is here to be understood as a plurality of values that for the duration of a particular period of time characterises a country's political institutions. 'Freedom,' 'equality,' 'equal opportunities' are examples of values that constitute a political culture when, throughout a period of time, they are consistently coupled in an interpretation that wins broad acceptance (Pedersen 2011).

The chapter will try to investigate similarities as well as differences in political cultures across the participating Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden – in order to illuminate the meaning and influence of local political cultures on development of the schooling system.

1.1   Methodological Considerations

The methodological approach of the chapter is founded on our survey investigation results as presented in the separate country reports. These outline the specific traits of political culture in these countries. On this basis, we will make comparisons between the analyses of the country results; and on the basis of these observations we will try to use the differences and similarities established as a guide to understanding the role played by historical and cultural differences in the field of school administration.

The focal point of our analysis is the superintendent. It is the superintendent who at the local, municipal, level in the parliamentary steering chain (Kofod 2007) is the linkage between the political and the administrative part of the school system, and it is thus the administrative and policymaking or implementing function that on the one hand has the greatest share of responsibility for the implementation in daily practice in the schools of political decisions by the municipal council and board. On the other hand, it is the superintendent, who is senior to the school leaders, who is the last joint in the parliamentary steering chain between parliament and students.

With the superintendent as our focal point of analysis, we hope to be able to cast light on the local political cultures in the school administrative system by using data extracted from the municipal school board chairs, members, and the school leaders. One might say that this approach is an attempt to map the political cultures of the school systems of the Nordic countries with the use of the pointers that will be elaborated below.

1.2   The Conceptual Framework

We intend to use the same analysis framework that has proven its worth in the work of Louis and van Velzen and, particularly, Devos (Louis and van Velzen 2012; Devos et al. 2012). This work identifies seven pointers, from which we have selected six, for use in the analysis of political cultures in various European countries and two states in the United States. Following this method but shifting the focus from the central national level, to the decentralised municipal political and administrative level, we hope to gain a more detailed picture, closer to the operating core of the school system (Mintzberg 1983) than that showing the national picture. The pointers we will use as analysing focus are the following:

Openness: the amount of availability of political participation for stakeholders and citizens on school matters >< constrained or elite dominance

Decentralism: the degree of distribution of power sources in school matters: decentred >< centred power resources. The degree of centralisation of power in the municipality, the superintendent >< the power at the decentralised level, for example a specific school.

Egalitarianism: the degree of the persistence of government or municipal policies to redistribute resources so as to minimise disparities >< limited efforts in redistribution.

Efficiency: emphasis on cost–benefits and optimisation of policy performance in school matters >< limited discussion of input–output considerations.

Quality: emphasis on an elaborated state and/or municipal role in providing oversight and monitoring the quality of school performance >< less systematic, *laissez-faire* approach to determining quality.

Choice: the degree of emphasis on increasing the range of options available to families and opportunities to influence school policy at multiple levels (Devos et al. 2012).

These pointers were the framework for analysing the different political cultures of seven countries, six of which were West European countries and the last of which was the United States, focused on the aggregate state or societal level in the various countries. With the focus on the municipal level, we will gain a more close-up picture of the influence of political cultures on day-to-day work with children's education at the municipal level, the level where the centrally decided laws are implemented through the municipal councils, the municipal committees, and the schools.

These six pointers will be further elaborated in the paragraphs that follow.

1.2.1   Openness

Governments and municipalities construct political processes and structures so that stakeholders' access is facilitated. The idea is embraced that politics is ideally a matter of concern for every stakeholder in society and for every citizen. The concept of openness is characterised by an open political culture which offers multiple venues for stakeholders to exercise influence on policymaking. In our pointer of openness we will focus on stakeholders' access to the municipalities' decision-making process in the form of the development of premises and the definition of frameworks, decision-making, and the connection to existing administrative and political practices.

There are both formal and informal forms for construction of the premises for decision-making.

The most common form of formal construction of the premises of decision-making is indirect: through the organisation of the political system and elected politicians in the municipal committee.

Another way in which citizens can influence the construction of decision premises is through the public discourse in the press, through influence and pressure on the elected politicians, and through framing ideas that are included in the political processes.

It is in what takes place before deliberations and decisions in the municipal council or school board that the openness varies most. Prior to any formal consideration by the municipality there is a period in which decisions are made on what ideas will appear on the agenda. This informal period may encourage wide participation, or may be confined to a more or less closed circle. Ideas are often discussed in formal and informal networks that may establish themselves as more or less permanent coalitions. These networks may create the expectation that they are part of the formal proceedings, or even that they have been able to establish themselves as part of the political process itself.

In Denmark, and in a similar vein in Norway, there is the tradition or political culture that before a new law in the educational field is put forward, central stakeholders such as the teachers union, the national association of municipalities' (i.e. the school owners), the industrial council (the consumers of the educational programmes), school and society (the parents association) and sometimes the students association are consulted and asked for ideas. The same process takes place in Sweden, both in relation to proposals by state commissions (the SOU or Statens offentliga utredningar) and in relation to the formal lawmaking process. Any proposed new law has to go through certain stages before it goes to parliament for decision. In Finland, too, the decision process is founded firmly on dialogue between the various stakeholders at all the levels of the education system.

In the present analysis, our focus is on the degree to which the agenda-setting and issue-formulating processes in educational policymaking are more or less open (Devos et al. 2012, pp. 11–13).

At the political level, municipalities in the Nordic countries are typically governed through standing committees, and among these is the committee that has schools as its field of responsibility.[1] In these committees, politicians have the ultimate overall political responsibility for the operations of the schools. These politicians have been chosen, in some cases through elections, and this way of influencing the construction of premises of decisions is thus an example of an elite making decisions in a rather closed circle, and thus of a quite elite-based way of making decisions. In other cases, for example in Denmark, Finland, and Norway, school politicians are appointed by the municipal council to the school board.

With the new, larger municipalities since the Danish municipal reform of 2007, the relation between politicians and civil servants has changed, with the politicians' responsibility becoming more of an overall than hands-on political responsibility, while direct responsibility for daily operations is taken care of by the superintendent (Christoffersen and Klausen 2012, p. 58[2]; Moos et al. 2014, p. 12). This development is an example of a loosening of the couplings between politicians' hands-on day-to-day decisions in educational matters in the municipalities to the benefit of the elitist-based layer of municipal administration (Weick 1976, 2001).

Superintendents participate in several working groups or networks with top municipal managers or directors on the management of crosscutting and overarching municipal tasks. This includes them in the elite-based municipal management and leadership beyond their initial field of work. The main purposes of superintendents' meetings with their seniors and peers in municipal administration are coordination and producing development and coherence cross-sector and across the whole municipality (Moos et al. 2014). Superintendents' participation in these networks where cases are often discussed and informally decided upon is also a sign of a closed and elite-based decision culture. But a further problem with the networking is that the superintendent is thus distanced from his educational administration of the school sector. We can see that in about 30 % of municipalities, superintendents have introduced an administrative structure between themselves and school leaders because they need help in the schools governing process. As the size of municipalities grows in Finland, a similar trend of intermediate layers is discernible, resulting in challenges to maintain the decision process as open and genuinely interactive as it has been in the past.

Regarding the public sector, it was decided in the Danish parliament to focus on the importance of the public sector being 'close to the citizen': that the greatest possible number of decisions should be taken at the local level, that citizens should

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[1] The name and area of responsibility change from municipality to municipality, but there is always a committee that has schools as its responsibility.

[2] When we talk about how the municipalities are governed, it is important to stress that there is no single picture of how the municipalities are organised; there are variations among the municipalities because there is room for discretion in the law, so the description is that of an ideal type.

have a say on what goods and how should be provided by the public sector, and that public institutions should be transparent (Finansministeriet 1983). A few examples serve to illustrate this, including increased influence for parents at school level in the form of school boards, as well as parents' free choice of schools (Moos et al. 2014, p. 6).

The local school board is supposed to lay out the overall principles for the organising of instruction, cooperation between school and home, information for homes about student results, the distribution of work between teachers, and collective social arrangements for students (Lov om folkeskolen 1993, § 42–44; Moos et al. 2014, p. 7). There has been a tendency to broaden out the construction of decision premises at the local institutional level through local school boards giving the parents a stronger say than before.

It is however debated how much real influence these boards have or whether they are merely hostages of the system as a part of a co-optation strategy (Klausen 1996, 2001). This is an example of the loosening of the organisational couplings between the central municipal administration and citizens and school stakeholders. It could be regarded as an augmentation of citizens' possibilities to influence decisions at the expense of the administrative and political elites. The question is, however, how these possibilities are used, as it is not a given that possibilities for influence are actually used. Many believe the local school boards to lack substantial power or real influence, and the voter turnouts for elections to local school boards are very low. So the question is whether parents' membership of and majority on local school boards really is a case of enhanced openness.

Board chairs and members themselves believe that they are indeed influential – particularly 'upwards' in strategic decisions and economic prioritising within their area of responsibility. Superintendents find that the level of influence on local educational politics is such that the politicians in the municipality are very interested in schools and education (Moos et al. 2014).

The superintendents point to the chair of the municipal board and the mayor as the most influential. This could be an indication of a steep hierarchy in local governance, with the top positions making the most important decisions. It is in a closed circle that the political elite take the important decisions. At the same time there also seems to be an image of clear demarcation lines between the political actors and the civil servant, the superintendent, so that the democratic steering chain (Kofod 2007) really does seem to function.

The board chairs and members also think that the board is very important 'downwards,' for the development of schools. They consider themselves to be important for the municipal development of the schools (Moos et al. 2014, p. 15). Preparation of the school board's agenda for its meetings is increasingly being taken over by the administrative and judicial civil servants in the municipal administrations. There thus seems to be agreement between officials and politicians that there is a rather elite-based decision culture in the Danish municipalities, and that the day-to-day organisation of work on the board is being taken over by the professional staff. Superintendents are centrally positioned when it comes to construction of premises

for decision-making, for implementing decisions, and for connecting practices to decisions.

In Denmark, the most important actors giving information to the board members are: teachers, other political parties, national evaluations, the internet, students, and media reports on schools. The least important informants are the school administration and the superintendent (Moos et al. 2014). The board members do not seem to have any priorities regarding information gathering, and in this respect there does not seem to be an especially elite-based culture. Norway emerges as a partly contrasting case to Denmark in this respect, since board members there assess school administration as the most important source of information, while teachers are typically low-scorers.

The Nordic superintendents say that they feel they have plenty of room for manoeuvre (Moos et al. 2014, p. 27). Regarding their perception of influence, the superintendents see themselves as members of the municipal administrative leadership, with their prior loyalty as senior administrative officers going to the municipal education administration. As senior administrative officers, the superintendents have a great deal of influence and in many ways drive a parallel pathway to that of the politicians. But it is the top politicians who are sitting in the driver's seat, as an expression of a rather elite-based political culture.

One can make the case that in Finland there still exists a shared will to base decision-making on the traditional principle of civil servants preparing and politicians deciding. In addition, rather than trying to find alternative pathways for decision-making, novel ways are being sought for to maintain and develop the dialogue between the various stakeholders. Furthermore, in legislation the status of participation has been strengthened in several ways in recent decades. Risku et al. even claim that Finnish schools and local providers of education are not able to operate successfully without a well-functioning collaboration between all the stakeholders, both in common and individual issues.

As in the other Nordic countries, in Finland the superintendent has a central role in local decision-making as interlocutor between the various stakeholders. Both board members and school leaders name superintendents as their primary sources of information. For board members the superintendent seems to have quite a sovereign position, also in preparing the agenda for the board meetings. Superintendents themselves mostly rely on the views of school leaders, teachers and the municipal central administration when preparing issues for board members to decide on. School leaders appear to draw on a many-sided flow of information, with the views of teachers, school boards, municipal councils and executive boards, municipal central administration, various reports, pupils and students as well as parents all ranking high. Most primary schools have school-based parental boards. Student boards are obligatory both in basic and upper secondary schools, and their role increases in step with student age. The role of trade unions and political ideologies in the dialogues does not seem strong.

In Norway, the value of openness is captured both by board member and superintendent assessments of stakeholder influence in their policy processes. When superintendents are asked in their own words to rank the regular issues they discuss

with their school leaders, parental collaboration is hardly mentioned at all as important. When school board members are asked to rank the various stakeholders' and actors' influence on decisions made by the board, the tendency is clear that they assess the influence from the school administration and superintendent highly. The pattern is converse when it comes to teachers, teacher unions and parents, which score low in perceived influence on decisions made by the board. Taken together, these findings indicate that the actual corporative power of formal trade unions in local school governance is declining, while parents are still held at arm's-length in pedagogical matters.

In Sweden, the general governing structure follows the pattern of municipal council/parliament, then municipal board/government, then school board, then superintendent and school leader. But during the last 15 years, local school systems have tried to make changes in the role of the school board. This board has been abolished and replaced by a committee of fewer politicians, linked to the municipal board. The chair of the committee has in most cases been a member of the municipal board. In some cases this has not been a good solution, and some of the municipalities have gone back to having school boards. The other change that has taken place in most municipalities of over 40,000 is the introduction of a deputy superintendent position, so that in some municipalities there are now two layers of deputy superintendents between the superintendent and the school leader. This is a development that in some cases has had a negative effect on communication in the governing structure.

In contrast to Denmark and Sweden, Finland and Norway are characterised by diversity in the form of many small municipalities. Accordingly there is no uniform way in which the municipalities are governed and led, and this pattern of tolerance for different solutions has become an institutional norm of the Finnish and Norwegian municipality sector during the last three decades. On the other hand, trends of mimetic isomorphism in Norway have also frequently been observed, particularly in the choice to deflate the administrative organisation around the millennium. In many cases however these redesign efforts have emerged as ambiguous in content (Brunsson 2000; March and Olsen 1976).

Paired with a tolerance for ambiguity and diversity (Hofstede et al. 2010), openness has been a long-standing tradition characterising the policy culture of Norwegian public services. A "corporative democracy" exists (Nordby 1994), in which the trade unions have played an important role both in formal negotiations and in hearings (Hernes 1983; Olsen 1978). There is also a long tradition of parental cooperation at all levels of the Norwegian school institution – from national bodies to local committees at each primary school (Bæck 2010a). Not surprisingly, similar aspirations are found also in Finland. On the other hand, when it comes to participation in the pedagogical discourse, most parents feel that they are excluded, and this pattern runs across social class and parental educational level (Bæck 2010b, c; Paulsen 2012). In Finland, however, according to surveys, parents still seem to be quite satisfied with their participation in educational matters. Opinions vary greatly, however, ranging from those who feel they receive too much information to react to,

to those who feel they do not receive vital information or enough options to reflect upon.

In conclusion, there seems in general in all the Nordic countries to be a rather closed political culture in which the political and administrative elite has the greatest influence both directly in taking decisions on educational matters in the municipality and indirectly in planning and agenda-setting. The situation is not uniform, however. There is of course some local influence, especially in the local school boards of Danish schools, where parents constitute the majority of the board members and where decisions are taken by school leaders on the school's administration and economy. Finland has its informal parental boards, which take part in the dialogue but do not make decisions as such. In general, it can be questioned exactly how much influence the Danish and Finnish boards really have. This does not apply in Norway and Sweden, where there are no school boards at the school level.

At the same time there is a common feature across all four states that can be seen as a doxa (Bourdieu and Passeron 2006 [1970]), in which because it is taken as given that these are societies where democracy is well established, it is not questioned in the public debate that these societies are open and democratic with respect to citizens' opinions and influence. It is thus rather remarkable that citizen access to influence on school matters seems rather limited in the Nordic countries, as it is the political and administrative elites that both set the agenda for schools development at the municipal level and construct the decision premises regarding decisions on school matters. In the Finnish system, the existence of the various municipal and school-based solutions creates the opportunity for much variation, although the legislative obligation to openness and dialogue is explicitly determined.

1.2.2 Decentralism

Decentralisation can be understood as the situation in which the power to make decisions is placed closer to or further from the setting where the decision will have impact. There are however various forms of these centre–periphery relationships.

1. *Decentralisation*
   1.1. In political settings, *territorial decentralisation* refers to the situation in which tasks that could have been executed by a central agency are assigned to sub-agencies in regions where each sub-agency reflects the region.
   1.2. *Functional decentralisation* exists when specific tasks that were previously executed at a central level are delegated to organisations that focus on that specific task.

      Decentralisation implies that power is distributed among different legal entities, each of which has the same standing as the others.

2. *Deconcentration* is a semi-permanent delegation of tasks and responsibilities to internal units that are totally owned by the larger unit. Deconcentration maintains organised units within a web of hierarchical responsibility and control.

3. *Deregulation* involves a reduction in the quantity and scope of legal rules and obligations. This does not automatically accompany decentralisation.

Decentralisation, deconcentration, and deregulation are not a guarantee of greater professional autonomy, understood as the capacity to design and live within laws and regulations designed by oneself. From the perspective of those working in agencies that are not at the centre, making use of decentralisation requires courage, as well as a mindset that seeks and accepts the responsibility that autonomy implies (Devos et al. 2012).

The Danish municipalities have gradually acquired more power concentrated around the elected mayor and the employed city manager, at the expense of the power of the politically composed elected municipal council (Sørensen and Torfing 2005). As the municipalities were merged into a smaller number of larger units in 2007 (from 171 to 98), many schools were shut down or merged into departmental schools. In 2011, there were 1317 public schools or *folkeskoler* compared to 1708 in 1996, a decrease of 391 or 23 %. There has thus been a territorial centralisation in the school structure around fewer, larger schools.

In the last 30 years of new public management as a dominating steering technology and ideology, we have witnessed a functional and territorial decentralisation of tasks and of responsibility from the state to the municipalities and to the schools. Legislators and municipal politicians have therefore perceived the need to strengthen the organisational couplings between the various administrative layers of the schooling system in order to be able to manage it (Weick 1976). Various new social steering technologies have been developed in order to be able to control a system that is now characterised by being at the same time both strongly and loosely coupled. Among these technologies can be mentioned the use of assessment data, the monitoring and publication of student results, and accounting reports that represent new ways of coordinating and monitoring the school system. New ways of interaction have thus been introduced between state, local authorities, and schools. These developments have resulted in – on the one hand – less local autonomy and increased bureaucratisation, and – on the other hand – enhanced local autonomy among municipalities and schools through the decentralisation (Paulsen et al. 2014). This has meant decentralisation and centralisation at one and the same time – centralisation within the decentralisation.

In general, there is a widespread feeling among municipal politicians that the state interferes too much with the decentralised public school. In recent years the state level has centralised a number of issues at the expense of the municipal levels' influence, especially regarding centralised tests, comparisons between schools through publishing school exams results, and numerous alterations in the law of the comprehensive school – 18 alterations within 10 years. These issues, and this functional centralisation, suggest that there are tensions between the state and the municipal level regarding educational issues.

Whenever the educational system is centralised or decentralised, the balance between professional and political power at all levels in the system is changed. Responsibility and professional ability for school leaders and teachers are enhanced,

while at the same time evaluation becomes an important instrument for governing and… *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). During a period characterised by strong trend of re-centralisation of school content (curricula and accountability), the schools find themselves in charge of finances, human resource and day-to-day management, yet at the same time the municipalities have become an important factor in the ministry's 'quality assurance system'(Moos et al. 2014, pp. 6–7). On the centralisation side, there seems to be a tendency to centralise the core business of teaching, augmenting the control with schools' teaching results.

On the other hand, 83 % of the Danish superintendents surveyed indicated that they feel they have plenty of room for manoeuvre, even if the structure of the political construction points to considerable decentralisations from the top towards committees and their political members and chairs (Moos et al. 2014, p. 15). In the realm of administrative matters, decentralisation has not been rolled back to the state level: there is still substantial autonomy in the municipalities' dealings with the administration of schools.

Relations between superintendents and school leaders are direct, as only 7 % of the Danish superintendents report the presence of an additional level of leadership between themselves and school leaders. In other research projects (Moos and Kofod 2009), we have heard school leaders in the new, larger municipalities complain that the ongoing direct communication between school leadership and local administration/superintendent has been transformed into written communication. They complain that they seldom have the chance to meet with the superintendent, who has so many institutions to look after and has to therefore write many policies and principles (Moos et al. 2014, p. 26). Inside the municipalities, therefore, school leaders feel that the system has become more centralised.

School leaders feel that they have discretion concerning the internal organisation of school (61 %), educational work (54 %), and prioritising of their work (47 %). The most striking finding is perhaps that almost half school leaders do not feel empowered to decide on their own prioritising of their work. They seem to feel steered from outside, rather than being self-steered. The administrative municipal system seems to have become functionally and also territorially centralised in the hands of the superintendent, with a sharper division between the administration around the superintendent in the town hall and in schools. This state of affairs is counter to the general image that Danish schools are very autonomous, and these answers seem to contradict that image (Moos et al. 2014, p. 28).

In all the Nordic countries, school leaders experience according to the surveys freedom and discretion, but they seldom use it in its full capacity. They can in many ways be characterised as afraid: they do not challenge their teachers, and express the opinion that they cannot ask them to do more because they have so much planning and administration. Yet in Denmark the most widespread model of municipal administration is the so-called company model, the preferred model in 78 % of the municipalities. According to this model, the school system is administered by a board of managers which as top administrative management conducts strategy,

coordination and development. The responsibility for day-to-day matters is delegated to decentred schools (Christoffersen and Klausen 2012; Moos et al. 2005).

In all the Nordic countries, we see the state simultaneously employing both decentralisation and centralisation as twin strategies (Møller and Skedsmo 2013). There has been a functional decentralisation between schools and municipal administration around the position of the superintendent regarding administrative, managerial matters, with the leadership regarding this as a loosening of the organisational couplings between these functions. On the other hand there has been a functional centralisation as between schools, the municipal administration and the state, which increasingly oversees the curriculum, thus bypassing the democratic governance chain. On the territorial side, there has been centralisation, with mergers of schools occurring alongside an administrative separation between schools and municipal administration.

In Norway, longitudinal research indicates differences of perception of centralisation and decentralisation between local politicians and municipal administrative managers (Hagen and Sørensen 2001). Whereas local school politicians were generally critical of the state two decades ago, seeing the state's steering of municipal primary education as too strong, this tendency subsided after the year 2000. Specifically, a majority of local politicians in 2007 saw the state's governing of the education sector as "appropriate" (Fiva et al. 2014). However, municipal administrative leaders perceived the state's governing as *too strong*, and they are particularly critical of the state's steering of basic education, daycare institutions and care homes for the elderly (Fiva et al. 2014, p. 42). This research thus indicates that local politicians are less critical of centralisation tendencies than their administrative counterparts.

Superintendents' assessments of their professional autonomy show that 92 % of them assess that they have "*freedom to make decisions in my daily work*." Moreover, 81 % assess that they "*have a large degree of control over my daily work*", and 76 % perceive that they "*can implement actions towards the school leaders in accordance with my own judgements*." Finally, 75 % assess that they have "the authority to assess the work of school leaders." Thus the Norwegian picture is more or less the same as in Denmark.

Turning to the school board members, the main trend is a high level of perceived influence. For example, 76 % assess that "*the school board has the ability to affect the municipal council in school policy issues*." Measures of influence in other domains of upwards influence towards the dominant political coalitions display a similar trend of significant perceived influence. However, when it comes to downwards influence towards the schools, teachers, and school leaders, the picture changes. Only 56 % perceive that "*the school board can exert influence on the prioritisations of our schools*"; and 36 % perceive that "*the school board is empowered to set the agenda for the schools' prioritisations*." In accordance with this, only 20 % of the sample perceives that the "*school board is empowered to make decisions about local curriculum development*." The school leaders also perceive a high level of autonomy in their daily work. For example, 88 % perceive high level of autonomy "*in decisions on the internal organisation of the schoo*l."

In Sweden the same picture emerges, but there is also evidence that school leaders have not adapted their internal organisation to become more effective and to access help with instructional leadership processes in the schools, a right given to them by the school act of 2010. That act also gives them the right to ask staff members who are especially competent to take on different tasks, and, again, they use this possibility if they have an assistant school leader.

In Finland, similar trends can be identified as in the other Nordic countries, but, again, there are also noteworthy differences. As regards the relationship between the state and the municipalities, the previous state-led, system-oriented centralised education system was radically decentralised in the 1990s. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) call the new system the *Fourth Way*. The fourth-way system is led from the top, built from the bottom, and both motivated and supported from the sides. In Finland, there seems to exist both the demand for and acceptance of a shared national will to be enacted autonomously by local actors. For that purpose, local authorities have the obligation to fulfil the tasks mandated for them in legislation, as well as the constitutional autonomy to do so.

Finnish municipalities and schools seem to use their autonomy efficiently. The organisational solutions found by both municipalities and schools differ remarkably from each other in accordance with local context. According to Ryynänen (2004), Finland follows the ideology of *democratic individualism* which, in alignment with contingency theory, is based on the notion of local decision-making being the most efficient and democratic way to organise society.

It might be claimed that, in the case of Finland, decision-making by the state establishes the framework within which local actors operate autonomously. The general principle appears to be accepted by all, and there seems to be no significant criticism of the state interfering too strongly in local matters either. There is tension between state and local authorities, however, for three main reasons. First, for historical reasons, Finland is only now beginning to undergo similar structural changes (including municipality mergers) to those that most Nordic countries experienced decades ago. Recent demographic and financial developments in Finland render that process very challenging. Secondly, the goals set at the national level encounter a scarcity of resources at the local level, establishing contradictory commitments for local actors. And thirdly, there has been a growing dissatisfaction because the governments have not been able to establish a sustainable framework within which local authorities can work.

Technical pressure on local actors in the form of standardisation, national testing and inspection appears to be softer in Finland than in the other Nordic countries. Might that be one reason why local actors in general seem rather satisfied with their own situation? Superintendents report being most satisfied in their work with the opportunities to use their own competencies, make their own decisions, realise the issues they consider good and, in general, to develop their local provision of education. Almost exactly the same views can be found among school leaders. In addition, members of the municipal school boards report that they are satisfied both with their capacity to influence educational issues and their status in the municipalities.

Several authors have argued that in the present situation, across different national systems, the state has increasingly tightened its grip through indirect steering in the form of soft governance (Hudson 2007; Moos 2009). A growing trend in Norway (though less visible than in Sweden) is for the state to utilise a sort of "licence to bypass" the municipalities by forwarding directives and initiatives directly to schools and school leaders. Once again, the situation in Finland is different, although similar tendencies can be noted there as well.

Taken together, several different partly conflicting trends in centralism in the Norwegian policy culture underscore that centralisation and decentralisation are "twin strategies" in practical politics. This has also been the case over the decades. Specifically, the professionalisation of municipal service production, including school administration, has reduced the degree of freedom for local autonomy in practice. However, the empirical pattern presented reveals a pattern of local autonomy, with internal couplings in the governance chain that are both tight and loose. The superintendents are active players in micro-policy processes by means of tight couplings to the school leaders embedded in a pattern of vertical trust, as well as tight couplings to the school boards mainly as a product of asymmetrical distribution of knowledge. Further, the school board members see themselves as empowered in general school policy matters in the political organisation of the municipality, yet when it comes to downwards influence towards schools, the level of perceived influence decreases.

In Norway, as in Denmark, we see a twin strategy of functional decentralisation and recentralisation. The centralisation is on both national and local level; the decentralisation is particularly between schools and the municipal administration.

In Sweden, a functionally decentralised system has existed, yet with a clear division of power, since the early 1990s. The state still makes all the laws and has an implementation and control structure of quality in place as a functionally centralised system. The municipalities and the individual schools run the schools and hire both school leader and teachers. But even here the state has decided on the qualifications for these people. So we can say that in the school sector we have a very controlled, functionally decentralised system; but we can also underscore that the school districts for the public schools work very effectively as a local governing body. One example illustrating this situation would be if a school leader wished to hire an English teacher but, after finding someone who would fit in very well, was unable to hire them because another person in the organisation who had been made redundant in another school had the right to any free position as English teacher for a period of 6 months (the length of this right can vary between school districts).

In Finland also, the simple dichotomy of centralisation and decentralisation does not work either. However, several sometimes contradictory tendencies can be identified both in the overall system and at the various levels. It seems that the various actors are still learning how to manage in the new societal approach established in the 1990s. In general it can be claimed that the territorial and functional decentralisation as well as the deregulation appear to have constructed quite a consistent entity. Due to demographic and financial challenges, however, much remains to be done regarding deconcentration. The current situation with its decision-making and

solutions based on state-level, municipal-level and school-level structures and processes is not sufficient; both trans-municipal and trans-school decision-making and solutions will be called for in future.

There seems to be a general trend in Denmark, Norway and Sweden that, following general functional decentralisation as a consequence of the new public management wave of the 1980s, the decentralisation has been followed by a sort of counter-functional centralisation by the state, particularly in the areas of the curriculum and the testing regime. There has thus been a sort of twin strategy of simultaneously strengthening and loosening the organisational couplings between state level and municipal level. On top of that, in all three countries a state functional centralism seems to have developed: in other words, the state bypasses the municipal level and interferes in the schools as a group rather than with individual schools, influencing the curriculum through testing and ranking of schools. Within the municipalities, the superintendents have been actors in a centralisation campaign between the schools and the municipal administration. In Denmark, on the one hand school leaders feel that it has become increasingly difficult to get in contact with the administration; on the other hand, school leaders feel that their degree of local autonomy is limited. By contrast, the Norwegian board members feel that it is difficult for them to influence school leaders. In all three countries, the pattern of decentralisation has been determined by each country's overall administrative traditions and construction.

In Finland and Norway, with their territorially decentralised municipal systems and many small municipalities, there is a feeling among superintendents and schools that superintendents, board members, and school leaders have a reasonable room for manoeuvre. The territorial decentralisation has influenced the functional decentralisation. Sweden and Denmark are in this respect more centralised territorially, with larger municipalities; in Denmark there has also been a wave of centralisation with mergers of schools.

In Denmark, Norway and Sweden, functional decentralisation has occurred from the municipality to the schools in the management of the administration and leadership of staff and the curriculum; at the same time, there seems to be a tendency concerning the output or results of the work with the curriculum for the state level to bypass the municipalities' authority in controlling the schools' results and checking the results through national testing of the students. There is thus a double strategy of both tightening and loosening organisational couplings between schools, municipal administrations, and the state. As often, some of the general Nordic trends can be identified also in Finland, but in a milder form.

1.2.3 Egalitarianism

Egalitarianism is often linked with the concept of justice and is one of the central focal points of modern democracies. But the concept of egalitarianism is an ambiguous concept with several different meanings:

1. The right of citizens to keep what is earned through his/her efforts.
2. The principle that all citizens should be treated equally and have equal opportunities.
3. The principle that social policies and therefore education policies shall remove the barriers to success for individuals or groups (Lauglo 1998).

In modern societies, education is a tool that can both create equality and perpetuate economic inequality. In an egalitarian society, all have the same right to fulfil their life-projects. Society and its institutions are to serve the citizens so that they can realise their life-projects.

When equality is on the agenda, politicians look for evidence that their regulations do not directly disadvantage groups of citizens by gender, race, religion, immigration status etc. All democratic countries pay some degree of attention to this goal in connection to the level of access to educational opportunities.

Political design decisions may lead to equality in a society. There are basically two ways to achieve this goal:

1. *Vertical equality*: the most common way is to compensate those who start out with disadvantages with special support.
2. *Horizontal equality*: emphasis on providing everyone with the same resources to engage in their life-project.

The two concepts of equality are often mutually incompatible. When a country emphasises egalitarian solutions, the result is usually high levels of taxation and public spending that conflict with the right for citizens to keep what they earn. An emphasis on inclusion may on the other hand undermine the rights of individuals to enact their life-projects in their own way (Devos et al. 2012, pp. 15–18).

In Denmark a municipality is required to run its operations based on objectives and frameworks established by parliament and government. There is discretion in determining how the operation is to be organised in order to achieve the objectives. For example, what resources are to be used, how are they to be organised, how are the premises to be designed and, to some extent, what staff are to be employed. Regardless of how a municipality decides to organise this, they must guarantee all children and students an equivalent education (Lov om kommuners styrelse 2013; Moos et al. 2014, p. 5).

The state uses active financial resource allocation in combination with reporting procedures as an indirect control instrument; municipalities must report their use of financial costs and human resources to state agencies on a yearly basis, thus also securing a minimum of equal opportunities for the students (Moos et al. 2014, p. 7).

This endeavour to create equal opportunities for students is also regarded as an obstacle to the development of special treatment for gifted students in the Nordic countries. The focus is thus on vertical equality: gifted students are not supported in developing their talents, so that they do not outstrip less gifted students too visibly in school. It seems that all are be treated equally, rather than according to their gifts and talents. Board members seem to be somewhat dissatisfied that school leaders do not create good conditions for high-performing students. This could reflect the tra-

dition of very egalitarian Nordic school systems, which traditionally have focused more on students with special needs than on high-performing students (Moos et al. 2014, p. 27). The responses from board members indicate that the historical social-democratic welfare state's vertical equality values are now being questioned and challenged by values which weight horizontal equality, giving weight to the principle that citizens are to be treated equally and have equal opportunities, in line with the principles of the new public management competitive state (Pedersen 2011) and the general neoliberal trend in Western societies.

Norwegian educational policy has been strongly influenced by egalitarian values since the early twentieth century. The term 'equality denotes the principle of horizon equality: an overall goal emphasising that the same resources and opportunities should be provided for all students, independent of their socio-economic or cultural background.

In Norway too, the policy ideal has gradually changed from horizontal equality of opportunity towards vertical equality in results. For children from different backgrounds to have similar opportunities in life, they would have to be treated differently. The underlying line of argument states that equality of results would necessitate inequality of provisions and distribution of resources. The ideology indicates that the state is responsible not only for providing opportunities for all to participate in education, but also for whether people are actually successful in doing so. This shift reflects a more general debate about what equality means in reality. For example, the educational policy literature distinguishes between different facets of the equality concept, including equality of access, equality of survival (the capacity to fulfil the completion cycle), equality of output (of schooling) and equality of outcome (the societal capitalisation of the individual's educational output). In this respect, the qualitative shift of the 1990s from a horizontal to a vertical view of equality represents a move towards emphasising equality of output. This development can be regarded as a change from a primary focus on horizontal to an increased focus on vertical equality. This contrasts with the Danish development.

In all Nordic countries, the individual student's right to receive special education (in accordance with professional judgement, carried out by the pedagogical and psychological services) is anchored in the Educational Act and in several directives. Thus it is taken for granted, and accordingly partly absent on the various task-preference structures in the investigations. However, it is noteworthy that student special needs are close to absent in superintendents' regular dialogue with their school leaders. Among school leaders, 72 % perceive a strong demand from the municipality to prioritise "*students facing difficulties to achieve the goals to get appropriate help and support*." In other words, this issue is higher on the school leader agenda than it is for superintendents and school boards. One reason for this is that while in Norway and Sweden school leaders are highly conscious of these children in their schools, the higher district level sees this phenomenon as something for which the schools already have funds; their view, accordingly, is that it is up to the school leader to use his/her power to reorganise the school so that money will be there for these children. This conflict frequently leads to situation where school leaders do not push for additional funds.

It can be argued that the achievement of egalitarianism and the Nordic welfare state were the primary societal goals for Finland after gaining independence in 1917. As in the other Nordic countries, the focus here was on horizontal equality – until the 1980s, when the Nordic welfare state and structural equality in education had mostly been fulfilled. That process was managed through a state-led, system-oriented, centralised administration. Once the primary goals were achieved, Finnish society has partly continued to proceed along the same path and partly been trying to find the next major goals to aim for. Increasing demographic and financial challenges have hampered both efforts. Regarding egalitarianism, Finland, like Norway, has moved strongly in the direction of vertical equality. The approach is often referred to as radical equality. There have been several legislative reforms to strengthen the process, and local authorities often criticise that they do not have the resources to meet mandated goals. However, there seems to be a shared acceptance of the goal and its priority among municipal school board members, superintendents and school leaders alike. As in Denmark, there is an increasing concern about how to support gifted students.

All the Nordic countries share a long tradition of egalitarianism in the public schools in the sense that the focus has been on all students having the same opportunities. The problem is, what is to be understood as equal opportunity? Should all schools have the same access to economic resources per student? Or should education policies remove the barriers to success for individuals or groups? In Denmark, vertical equality has tended to prevail, but the focus is increasingly changing to horizontal equality. This development can be interpreted as an increase in recent years of the neoliberal influence towards building a competitive state, moving away from the more general humanistic trend of the traditional welfare state in later years, perhaps as a consequence of Denmark's membership of the European Union and its open market since 1973. In Norway, which is not a member of the European Union, there has on the other hand has been a shift from the stance of horizontal equality to a stance whereby all students have access to same results, meaning that there must be an unequal distribution of resources between the privileged and less privileged, the concept of vertical equality. Although Finland is an EU member state, a development similar to that in Norway can be identified there as well.

1.2.4 Efficiency

In our context, efficiency often focuses on scrutinising public expenditures in order to improve the use of resources. How the efficiency matter is embedded in political cultures varies from country to country. In some countries the focus has been on shifting public services into what is claimed to be a more efficient private market. In others, there is only a public recognition that public service can be delivered with less waste and without weight on privatisation. In most cases, an emphasis on efficiency requires accepting a degree of inequality. The neoliberal emphasis on efficiency has characterised all governments in the Nordic countries, both centre-right and centre-left governments.

The acceptance of efficiency as a goal leads to the search for measurable and objective units of comparison. In many countries there is a tendency to equate quality with efficiency, with less attention paid to the alternative ways of defining quality that might require deeper discussions about innate excellence. When efficiency is promoted in the public sector focus, it is often about management of perceived waste (Devos et al. 2012, pp. 22–23).

In Denmark, superintendents feel that they have to prioritise most of their time for 'budget and finances,' even if they find this area less interesting and less meaningful. There is a weak tendency towards seeing themselves as being more policy-makers than implementation-responsible or administrators.

The issues most frequently processed in school board meetings 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 information from administrative managers. It is very seldom that the school board deals with individual problems (Moos et al. 2014, p. 13).

As the government has cut funding to the municipalities, finances remain a challenging issue for the political board. A lot of detailed structuring and planning was therefore needed at this level (Moos et al. 2014, p. 14). These responses in the survey show that efficiency takes a prominent place in the boards' focus. This can be explained as the consequence of a double reasoning process: first, that efficiency is the most prominent responsibility of the municipal council, and therefore also of the municipal boards; and secondly, because a shrinkage in the economy as has been the case since 2008 places additional emphasis on economy, because it is the municipal council's responsibility to see that taxpayers' money is spent as efficiently as possible.

School leaders perceive that the school boards' expectations of them to keep to budget are very high (82 %), lower (58 %) on implementing new school acts, and still lower (53 %) on the ability to lead education in their schools. Other expectations score lower than 50 % (DCR p. 19). Efficiency is thus very much in focus simultaneously at several levels in the school administration.

Efficiency has thus been much in focus in Denmark, as part of the post-1980s new public management wave, as a means to adapt the Danish economy to the global competition. This was partly triggered by poor Danish competitiveness in the international markets and by almost permanent public budget deficits dating back to the 1970s. Economically speaking, the Danish public sector ran out of control. Parallel to this development, the focus on efficiency in the public sector was also inspired by regarding Denmark as a competitive state in which welfare state thinking had been superimposed by competitive state thinking, which demanded efficiency in the public sector and in the school sector. Education and the school are today regarded as important means to enhance Danish competitive power (Pedersen 2011).

Regarding efficiency, similar phenomena can be noted in Finland as in Denmark. It can even be claimed that many aspects of the efficiency concept manifest themselves even more strongly in Finland. On the one hand, Finland is now for the first

time experiencing structural changes, such as municipality mergers, that Denmark (and Sweden, partly also Norway) embarked upon decades ago. On the other hand, demographical, ideological and financial development in Finland further complicate efforts. Regarding demographic changes, Finnish society is ageing more rapidly than any other nation in the European Union, and internal migration from the countryside into (particularly south-western) towns is strong. Ideologically, the relationship between the state and municipalities was radically reversed in the 1990s, and today local authorities are the main providers of education services. This they have to do with outdated municipal structures and fewer and fewer resources. The municipal structures have not been modified to meet the changed demographic profile, and each municipality wishes to maintain its sovereignty. The scarcity of resources, on the other hand, is a result of the revision of the state funding system; it has intensified with the prolonged recession that Finland has faced since the 1990s. It is not surprising that financial issues and efforts to increase efficiency are the top single task for Finnish municipal school members, superintendents and school leaders.

The issue of cost efficiency and reduction of financial inflow to primary education has not been high on the Norwegian policy agenda due to the nation's favourable national economy and funding of its welfare-state model. A wave of increasing efficiency was initiated by the government around the millennium shift (Møller and Skedsmo 2013), but the introduction of a major curriculum reform from 2006 downplayed this agenda. This is not to say that financial management is not important; rather the opposite is the case. Superintendents rank financial management and budgeting high in their task-preference structure, and so too do school boards. Also school leaders see "*keeping the school's budget*" as a central expectation in their work – both imposed by the municipality (96 %) and as a self-regulated demand of their own (91 %).

Efficiency plays, it would seem, a bigger role in the Danish and Finnish school system than in the Norwegian system, due to the greater slack in Norwegian public finances. In Denmark, and as earlier described in Finland, this issue is among the most prominent, both for municipal boards and for schools. Thus there would seem to be a rather distinct difference between the Norwegian situation, where the efficiency matter in schools does not play a prominent role, and that in Denmark and Finland, where it is very much in focus both as economic steering (as an important part of the Danish and Finnish endeavour to enhance the country's competitive power in globalised world markets) and as a prominent means in the competitive state's toolbox. Traditionally Denmark and Finland have been small, open economies without many raw materials, whereas Norway has its oil. These differences may explain why the efficiency issue plays a bigger role in the Danish and Finnish school systems than in that of Norway. In Sweden there are differing views on this issue. One is that there is too little money in the system; the other argument says the problem is not too little money.

1.2.5 Quality

The concept of quality serves as a benchmark for the effectiveness of an educational system. The quality question in this sense asks for the character of an educational system. Globalisation in education has brought a comparative element into the concept of quality that has transformed this question into a quantitative one in which comparisons may be made using international assessments, such as for example PISA. This shift from a qualitative, descriptive perspective to a measurement- and quantitative-based one has brought about a major change in how policymakers think about how to assure that the public schools are good (Devos et al. 2012, pp. 19–21).

The regulation of the Nordic school systems has changed in many ways during the last two decades. At the beginning of the 1980s there was a strong and general move to decentralise finances, personnel management and other areas from state level to local municipal level, and in many cases from there further down to the school level. These changes were introduced at a time when several countries faced a difficult economic situation because expenses in the public sector had run out of control. At the end of the 1990s a recentralisation of the goal-setting and evaluation of schools' work was also observed (Tanggaard 2011) in order that the central authorities should regain control over and enhance the quality of the public sector's output (Moos et al. 2014, p. 6).

Quality has begun to play an important role since the PISA investigations have shown that the Danish school system has not lived up to political expectations. Therefore it is not surprising that 95 % of the superintendents are assessed by their superiors, either annually (80 %) or every half year (11 %). Nine per cent are assessed by their political leaders. The main reasons for this assessment are, in prioritised sequence: (1) in order to make superintendents accountable to known expectations, (2) in order to identify areas that need improvement, (3) to contribute to CDP, (4) in order to describe relevant goals, and (5) to identify strengths, (Moos et al. 2014, p. 12).

The prominent position of quality in the municipalities' work with schools is shown by the board members when these report that quality and curriculum, meaning student learning, learning environment and teaching are the most important issues they work with (for board members, 33 %; for board chairs, 15 %). This comes before even economic issues.

Board members emphasise quality and curriculum twice as much as chairs do (Moos et al. 2014, p. 14). The political interest in education in general and in quality assurance/assessment is high. This goes for both local initiatives and those that are initiated at national level (DCR p. 15).

School boards expect superintendents to be the active party in quality assurance with schools. When the administration finds that a school is underperforming, the superintendent is expected to intervene with school leaders. School boards can examine and discuss the situation, but have no active role in relation to school leaders.

Superintendents prioritise face-to-face interactions with school leaders: communication and sparring, but also through work in respect to the school and municipal organisation and the quality report (Moos et al. 2014, p. 17).

Quality plays a prominent role among both Danish board members and Danish superintendents in their perception of their jobs. Probably the most important factor in influencing the political culture around the quality issue is the introduction of international comparisons such as TIMMS, PISA, TALLIS etc. Participation in these comparisons showed that Danish students scored worse than students in the other countries that were used. These international measurements and comparisons – part of the globalisation movement and part of the view of the state as a competitive state in which education plays an important part in building up the nation's competitive force – actualised the need to scrutinise and rethink what was needed for Danish schools development. It is in that context that the discussion of quality in the Danish school should be understood, and that is why focus on quality in schools is shifting from processes in the schools to their output in recent years. That is reflected in the responses to the questionnaire, which show that the quality question plays an important role in the school boards, which, as representatives of the school owners, are responsible for securing that the schools can maintain and augment the quality of their results.

Recent changes in Norwegian educational policy may be evident in the introduction of the national quality assurance system (NQAS), which includes evaluations and standardised achievement tests. These measures increase the focus on educational outcomes in terms of student performance in achievement tests, indicating new modes of school governing (Helgøy and Homme 2006).

The increased focus on educational outcomes in terms of student performance in achievement tests includes concepts of educational quality that seem to have been defined by expectations of specific outcomes (Skedsmo 2009). An important aspect related to the increased focus on evaluation and measurement is the need to make key actors such as superintendents, school leaders and teachers accountable (Johansson et al. 2013).

When school board members were asked to prioritise tasks for which they felt they should hold superintendents responsible, the responses were:

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

The free-form answers cluster and cohere around a set of demands that hold the superintendent accountable for student quality in terms of an appropriate level of student achievement.

Compared to the inspection-driven systems found in many other Western democracies, the Norwegian approach does not imply direct control of educational quality in terms of teaching and learning in schools. The state supervision follows a system-revision approach and aims to expose cases where legal regulations are not followed (Sivesind 2009). So far, state supervision has focused on areas such as the

right to special education and adapted teaching, securing a safe school environment, and the extent to which the municipalities have established a system for quality assurance.

Swedish political discussion has been highly focused on the quality of schools, and the debate has been hard because Sweden has lost its position as one of the ten best-performing countries in PISA. There have been many attempts, through changing the law and school practice, to try to regain PISA position. Sweden has looked at the top-performing countries and tried to adjust to their standard way of performance. There has even been a state commission to look into how long different implementation structures for school reforms should be expected to take. For the moment, the government and the opposition have decided to work together with a quality agenda for schools all the way up to 2020. But at the same time Sweden has a very active state schools inspectorate that is conducting not only school evaluations according to school law, but also wider quality analysis of different aspects of the local school system.

Quality insurance is perhaps the area where Finland differs most from the other Nordic countries. This may be a consequence of Finland excelling in international learning-outcome and societal-impact surveys in recent decades. A further reason may be that with the rearrangement of the relationship between the state and municipalities as well as the financial recessions, the tradition of the state being financially committed to finance the implementation of educational reforms no longer exists. The state is no longer committed to fund the legislative reforms and obligations as it was before. On the other hand, it also seems that the state cannot direct municipalities in detail as it used to. An evaluation system confined to supervision, quantitative factors and outcomes will not suffice in the present situation.

In contrast to what is often presented, Finland does have an extensive evaluation system that includes international, national, regional and local levels. The scope of the evaluation system is not on outcomes but on the process. Likewise, the data of the evaluation system are not confined to results, but attempt to capture many-sided information. The salient findings of the evaluations are public, but the emphasis is on the supporting actors in the various levels being able to develop their operations rather autonomously. In the opinion of Finnish municipal school board members, superintendents and school leaders, quality is an essential issue; but it does not manifest itself in the everyday in the same way as in the other Nordic countries. The technical pressure is softer.

To sum up. In all the Nordic countries, quality has in recent years taken on a prominent role in the assessment of the school system and schools. A very important trigger for the introduction of this focus on the quality issue in the Nordic countries has unquestionably been the introduction of international and transnational comparisons as a by-product of the increasing globalisation in which three of the Nordic countries are involved. In Finland, the scarcity of resources also plays an important role. School quality has become an important factor in augmenting the countries' relative competitive strengths. In order to be able to compare school quality rather easily between countries, measurements are being converted into quantifiable figures, and the quality that is measured is the quality of the outcome of

student work. At the present time, quality is in these countries measured by national tests, possibly with the exception of Finland, and school boards in all Nordic countries think that the quality issue is an important one.

There are both similarities and differences between the Nordic countries in how the quality issue is handled. Common to all the Nordic countries is that the outcome is measured nationally and that all countries are participating in the international measurements, for example PISA. Common to all the countries is that the national parliament and state administrations are 'meta-steering' the schools through legislation and supervising test results for the schools, at least in some way. The day-to-day handling of schools, however, is the responsibility of the municipalities as the school owners (except in the case of the private schools).

There are however differences in the ways in which the quality of school outcomes is monitored. At one end of the continuum there is Sweden, which has a centralised system with a state commission that is the agency that monitors school quality. Norway has a sort of middle position, where there is state supervision not so much of school results as of whether things are in accordance with the law. In Finland there is a lot of evaluation at various levels, but the information is mainly used to guide the process at the various levels autonomously. At the other end of the scale, in Denmark, there is no central state supervision and control organ. Monitoring of school quality is handled mainly by the municipalities, owing to the decentralisation of the primary responsibility for the quality of the school system from the state level to the municipalities. This does not mean that the state does not interfere in school matters, but that it is happening in a more indirect way than in the other two countries.

1.2.6   Choice

A central question in discussions about social values is how to resolve the tension between individual rights and social responsibilities. Educational choice can be the result of different intentions.

In certain countries the right to choose a school according to one's own preferences is a fundamental question in the educational system, reflecting pluralism. Freedom of education is enshrined in the constitution in the Nordic countries, and that includes more and less government funding for all schools, including independent or private schools. Public schools are run by the municipalities, under a certain level of government supervision. Choice is in a state of tension between equity and social segregation.

Choice has recently been associated with increasing competition between schools and marketisation. The argument for this trend is that when products compete in a free market, they are forced to improve. Thus the argument continues that the product of the educational system would likewise improve once subjected to market forces. In the same direction is the argument that such a market environment would encourage schools to be more responsive, resulting in educational practice that better meets parents' preferences (Devos et al. 2012, pp. 23–26).

The idea that the public sector is best governed using steering techniques inspired by private-sector competition, consumer choice and transparent institutions has been fostered by new public management as a steering technology and technique. One sign of this tendency is free parental school choice, both across school and daycare institution catchment areas and across municipal borders (Moos et al. 2014, p. 5).

By tradition, the municipalities have been important agents in the governance of the public sector. Decentralised educational governance has, according to the Danish 'free/independent school' tradition, also been a very central part of the Danish educational self-understanding, and to some extent of the practice (Moos et al. 2014, p. 7).

Denmark has a long tradition of choice, which is regarded as a core characteristic of liberal democracy. Concerning parents' opportunities to send their children to an independent school, it has been decided ever since the first constitution of 1849 that there is an obligation that all children must have an education, but there is no obligation that they have to go to a school (Skott and Kofod 2013). Therefore around 15 % of Danish school children go to a private school (Bang 2003). On the other hand, there has for many years been the tradition that children in the public schools are allocated to schools according to where they live. Public schools have had certain catchment areas from which they recruit their students. In recent years, as part of the new public management wave and the neoliberal ascendancy, that has been changed. It now is possible to choose school across catchment areas. There has thus been a trend towards more choice in the public school system too.

In Finland, the foundation of the education system still strongly follows egalitarian principles. Most schools are public and managed by the municipalities. The few independent schools have either a religious or ideological approach. There seems to be a societal view in favour of keeping things as they are. Local authorities have the obligation to provide education, and they allocate a local school to each pupil. One can also note neoliberal trends. In comprehensive education, parents have the right to decide whether to send their child to school or not and to choose the school for their child. In practice, children attend the local school, partly because in the sparsely populated countryside it is not that easy to go to another school, and partly because variations in school quality are among the smallest in the OECD countries. In upper secondary education, the young have total freedom in what school to select.

Free schools within the primary education sector in Norway are restricted to religious groups or distinct pedagogical communities such as Steiner or Montessori. This differs from the Swedish system with its commercial free schools. This special property of the Norwegian primary education system ensures that most children enter a public school independent of social class. Furthermore, free school choice within the municipality is restricted to a small number of municipalities, among them Oslo, with its largest population. Over and above this, the restrictive attitude to choice has been a central value in the social-democratic and left-wing camps, strongly supported by the teachers trade unions. On the other hand, the centre-conservative wing has shown a positive approach to private schools, yet in a more regulated commercial regime than in Sweden. Thus the current conservative

government has launched a liberalisation of free-school regulations, in line with the former centre-conservative government in office 2001–2005. Taken together, the issue of choice reflects deeper ideological conflicts over the normative and cultural-cognitive, i.e. ideological, basis of the Norwegian unified school institution.

Sweden is very different from Norway but similar to Denmark in respect of private or free schools. It has about 25 % free schools that are run as businesses, and some of these generate a healthy profit. There is debate in Sweden today over whether this should be allowed or whether the laws should be changed in order to prevent the free schools generating profit.

In all the Nordic countries, the majority of students go to public schools, and free, independent or private schools constitute a minority of schools. Norway is the most restrictive country regarding the possibility of choice between public and private schools. In Denmark, the possibility of sending children to a private school is part of the understanding of democracy. Therefore about 70 % of the school fees is paid by government funding (Skott and Kofod 2013) and 15 % of the children attend private school. In Sweden, 25 % of children attend private school. But in contrast to Denmark and Norway, the Swedish private schools are publicly funded, and the private owners are allowed to generate profit from the school. In Finland, independent schools obtain their funding from the state according to the same criteria as municipal schools.

1.3   Reflections and Conclusions on Political Cultures

The main object of this chapter on political cultures and their significance for the running of the school system in the respective countries has shown that there are, as expected, both similarities across and differences between the Nordic countries. There is a great deal of evidence that national culture influences the way things are executed in organisations (Hofstede 1985, 1991).

In this chapter we have probed the meaning of the local political municipal cultures and the way in which these influence schools in the different Nordic countries. This investigation has shown that there are important shared influences from the international environment in all three countries.

There seems in all these countries to be an interaction between the globalisation of the economy and the national political cultures: an interaction that is having pronounced implications for the countries' school systems. For the last 20 years, the Nordic countries have participated in international comparisons on schools across boarders: TIMMS (since 1995 in mathematics and natural science), PISA (since 2000 in overall school results), PIRLS (since 2006 in reading), and TALIS (since 2008 in teacher and leader attitudes to the school milieu). In Denmark, Norway and Sweden, schools scored below expectations, and these scores became a wakeup call for the politicians, resulting in initiatives in legislation, the establishment of evaluation and supervision agencies, and a special focus on how to improve schools' results. The different ways in which these basically similar challenges have been

tackled in the different countries show the difference in political culture. Finland's success in these international surveys has allowed development to focus on other issues, or on the same issues in another way. Of course, the different Finnish context has also influenced the differences.

All Nordic countries have as a consequence of globalisation been greatly influenced by the new public management wave as a means for the respective countries to cope with international competition. Common to all the Nordic countries is that they build on the so-called Nordic welfare state, inspired by traditionally strong social-democratic values and a relatively strong state. Therefore equity – of various forms – plays an important role in the political cultures. The analysis in this chapter has shown that there is perhaps a tendency towards a more competitive situation, in which education is regarded as an important factor in the international competition. Hence the focus on how the respective school systems score internationally, as well as the focus on quality, but regarded as efficiency and assessed in numbers.

The Nordic countries have different administrative histories and histories of the school's placement in the administrative system. These history and administrative traditions differ in each country. Denmark has a rather long history of a decentralised administrative system, in which the school owners are the municipalities and in which it is difficult just to bypass the municipalities in matters of school. Sweden has a more centralised but no less democratic system, whereas Norway has a tradition in between the other two countries. The Finnish system, on the other hand, was until the 1980s strictly state-led, system-oriented and centralised; then the roles of the state and municipalities were radically reversed. This history and these traditions have had and still have a great impact on how the political cultures function today. They are important explanations for the differences between the Nordic countries' political cultures. In spite of this, there often seems to be a rather elite-based culture in the school sector. There seems to be an interaction between the state and the municipal political and administrative structures and the cultures that define how the schools are handled in the respective countries. The history and the administrative and political traditions have to a great extent been defining factors that have created the political and administrative culture that has determined how the schools are handled. These are the differences and the similarities that we have identified in the above analysis.

With this picture one might about the roles of the various functions, i.e. in what ways the superintendent, the board chair, the board members or the school leaders influence the political culture that frames the way in which decisions on schools are taken at the municipal level. The broad picture shown by our country reports is that in the interplay between the administrative structures, which are more or less regulated by a combination of national legislation and local agreements on the one side and the persons taking the specific decisions on the other, the structures frame the sample space for the culture, and the culture, for its part, frames the possibilities for the decision-makers. On the other hand, at the same time as the actors' and the decision-makers' possibilities are enhanced and also limited by the decision structures and the culture, they are also actors in shaping and influencing both the structure and the culture (Giddens 1984/1999).

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly which of the stakeholders and actors that have been discussed play the most defining role in developing the political culture, because culture and formal structures define the sample space and actors influence both culture and structure. And in this sense, the different cultures are products of, among other things, the public debate on schools and the quality of national schooling as reflected in the international assessments, the various countries' administrative and political histories, the national, transnational and international competition, the local political and cultural history, the view of the school's role in society, and the specific actors that run the municipal school administration.

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Chapter 9
Competence and Understanding in the Governance Chain

Elisabet Nihlfors, Hans Christian Høyer, Klaus Kasper Kofod, and Mika Risku

Abstract Education is of fundamental value for a society; to raise and foster a new generation of citizens in a global and local multicultural context. It is therefore crucial to identify the competences that are needed for multiple actors in the school governance chain, with the aim of achieving this mission in different contexts over time.

An underlying question in this chapter, when dealing with competence and understanding, is what the purposes of education are and who has the power to decide how national decisions should be understood and realized locally. In this chapter some of the prerequisites for discussing this question will be problematized. The focus is on political and professional leaders at the local level and their possible impact on the prerequisites for education. The research results presented here are derived from analyses made of the statements of different leaders – both political and professional – preferably at the municipal level, and of their work in the governance chain in a municipality.

The empirical data are analysed from descriptions of what is required to translate individual knowledge into joint or shared competences, which in turn may increase the possibilities for action in order to achieve educational policy goals. To this is added the importance of understanding one's assignment to increase the organizational competence in a municipal organization. A guiding presumption of this chapter is that if leaders who govern schools – both political and professional leaders at different levels – are able to take charge of different areas of knowledge within the

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organization and translate that into joint competences, shared and used by all, the possibilities of identifying and determining the relevant prerequisites for education in a broad sense will increase.

Keywords Shared competence • Shared understanding • Prerequisities for education • Purpose of education • Relation politicians and professionals

1   Introduction

Ensuring educational quality is high on the agenda in many countries and municipalities. Performance indicators of students' learning outcomes are shared and compared between schools, municipalities and countries. At the same time our data show that there are members of school boards, in some countries, who believe that students' results have improved when they have actually worsened (Nihlfors and Johansson 2013) and school board members who feel that their level of influence on school-based decision-making is low (Nihlfors et al. 2014). The relationship between the school boards and school leaders is relatively weak and infrequent in some of the Nordic countries (Paulsen and Moos 2014), but in all of the Nordic countries there is a tight coupling between the school administration/superintendent and the chair of the school board when it comes to organizational, strategic and financial matters (ibid.). Our body of research, as such, portrays a web of tight and loose couplings between the key actors in local school governance in the Nordic countries, and some of these connections are also embedded in asymmetric power relations. Even if the municipalities have an important role in the governance of schools, the state still remains an active player. At the same time, however, educational policy is moving towards being subjected to the increasing influence of outside experts and agents, who often use standards and data which can be seen as depoliticizing the field (Moos 2009; Skedsmo 2009). These results raise certain questions: how, for example, can different actors, stakeholders and others at different levels be involved in sense-making processes if they have such different knowledge and also different purposes?

There are big demands and expectations of an organization that both has knowledge as a fundament for people working in the organization and as a goal for all its students. Added to this is the fact that, in Sweden, there is a statutory requirement for education to be based on research and proven experience (Swedish Education Act, Chapter 1, section 5), which makes it even more obvious that different types of knowledge are needed as the basis for this work. Knowledge is needed not only for educational and learning issues but also in several other different fields, such as organizing for learning, allocating resources, analysing students' results, taking responsibility for children's health care, food issues, leisure activities etc.

1.1   Different Actors

In the Nordics countries the chairman of a board or committee who is responsible for education in a municipality gets a great deal of her/his information from the central administration, which is usually led by one or more superintendents. The superintendent gets her/his information from different co-workers; directly from the school leaders or via some form of middle management and also from the administration at municipal level. Overall, and with different networks included, a large number of people are directly or indirectly involved in the governance of education and in the construction of the organizational knowledge required in the governance process. If we add actors in the national and global arenas, it becomes obvious that different actors have to cover a large number of different areas of expertise where different types of knowledge and competences are needed. We have in our questionnaires and interviews asked, among other things, how different actors perceive their own and others' knowledge, skills and capacity, and have also asked questions related to different values and expectations from and of each other, and the expectations as well as influences of different stakeholders.

As a starting point we can state, on the basis of our empirical research, that a majority of our respondents – school leaders, superintendents and school board members –are well educated and dedicated to the work. They like their work or their position of trust and want to make a difference, and are convinced that they *can* make a difference, for and in the education sector. Most of the superintendents and school leaders have a background in education, while the politicians' backgrounds differ. A majority of politicians, in most of the Nordic countries, have a background in the public sector (Moos and Merok Paulsen 2014). We will discuss in this chapter to what extent different respondents' statements indicate that there are prerequisites for different types of individual knowledge and skills that can be turned into shared competences, that can in turn form a base for shared actions that are embedded in trusting relationships in the governance of schools in the municipal sector.

1.2   Different Context

All the municipalities in the four Nordic countries work under very different circumstances. The differences are both inside the countries and between them. A couple of examples of these differences are the size of municipality, the number of inhabitants, the volume of people moving out of and into a municipality, the presence of immigrants and refugees, demographic composition, diversity of employers, rate of unemployment, distance to a bigger city, distance to college or university etc. In some municipalities students and parents can choose between different schools in the same municipality and/or between independent and municipal schools. In other municipalities there is a struggle to prevent schools from closing. These circumstances may affect the enactment of national educational reforms, as

politicians, superintendents and school leaders not only understand the reforms differently but are also motivated – or not – to carry them out depending on their different purposes, political or professional. Interpreting the circumstances at hand also needs a certain type of expert knowledge and a certain level of shared understanding. If, for example, interdependent actors in the governance chain have incompatible frames of reference, often conceived as a high cognitive distance, the risk of conflict increases (Nooteboom et al. 2007).

There are some differences in the Nordic countries when it comes to the level of decentralization, recentralization or both at the same time in different areas of education. Finland and Sweden can be taken as examples of two extremes; Hargreavs and Shirley (2009) describe Finland as steered from the top, built from the bottom, and both motivated and supported from the sides, while Sweden is described by Blanchenay et al. (2014) as a mismatch between official responsibilities and the actual powers of the various stakeholders. They find it difficult to know who is in charge of what. Norway has during the last decade decentralized formal powers and authorities from the state to the municipalities in important pedagogical matters, such local curriculum development, teacher training and leadership training, associated with the implementation of the curriculum reform known as the "Knowledge Promotion" (2006–2010). Yet on the other hand, the state has strengthened its indirect and direct steering through performance indicators, national training programmes and directives aimed at municipalities and schools, and local decisions have increasingly become "blueprints" of national policies (Engeland 2000). There can, as such, be assumed to be an imbalance between state control and local autonomy in the school governance chain (Paulsen and Skedsmo 2014). Regardless of this or other circumstances, the school leaders in all the Nordic countries have a duty and responsibility for running the local schools and the superintendents for leading and managing the local provisions of education.

The reasons for decentralization differ between countries and at different times even if the economic issue is often one of the reasons (Weiler 1990). When something is decentralized, differences between municipalities and schools may be expected and also required, which may also be a reason why decentralization is used. One might say that to fulfil the goals of decentralization demands differences in the performance of different schools. Questions that may be raised in this context are whether legislation and the funding system are designed so as to create and support the required (e)quality; how large differences are acceptable; and who are the ones to judge /…/… *there may be differences in education itself that makes it unequal even if the targets are met*. (Quennerstedt 2006 p. 117 *Our translation*). In all four Nordic countries there is an attempt to guarantee both equality and equity in relation to education from the national level, through national laws on school education and through public funding for those schools that are free of charge for the students. Public commitment to education and to equality and equity is high in all the Nordic countries.

The municipalities are to a great extent self-governing authorities with a range of responsibilities including education. Financial issues are a key responsibility for the municipalities. In most of the Nordic countries, money for education was for a long

time transferred from the national to the municipal level as earmarked funding. This system ended in, for example, Finland and Sweden in the mid-1990s, and has had an impact on the relations between the national and local level especially as concerns educational reforms, since extra money has not been included for implementation at local level. Sweden has, for example, in the last two decades had a large number of nationally decided educational reforms every year, or every second year, and many municipalities think that the reforms have been "under-funded". This is an example of demands being made on municipal authorities for the knowledge and skills relevant for implementing different new reforms while they also have to enact those reforms and at the same time be in charge of financial issues.

Another factor that may affect what competences are needed is whether or not education is looked upon as just one among various other responsibilities for the local school board. In some municipalities a board may have responsibility for education as well as other areas like elderly care, leisure activities and/or culture. Other boards may be responsible for some or all education, from preschool to upper secondary school education (Moos and Merok Paulsen 2014). Another factor to examine is whether or not education is handled in a specific way. Is it looked upon purely as a state-driven activity or is it an activity "owned" by the municipality or the independent school owner? Schools and education are formally "owned" by the municipalities or by independent school owners when it comes to fulfilling the national goals in all four Nordic countries. The question of ownership is here put forward as an issue of values that can affect decision-making. Regardless of the answers to these questions, national decisions made by the Parliament are supposed to be enacted by the municipalities whatever their local circumstances might be. Both politicians and professionals in different positions in the municipality or in independents schools are responsible for the results. The question elaborated in this chapter is whether our data indicate that there are prerequisites for shared competences and understanding to guide decision-making.

A question that arises is whether the competences within the organization are valued and visible and whether this in turn influences the processes of enactment. We have earlier shown that there is a difference in the degree of trust and confidence between politicians and professionals on different levels in the Nordic countries (Høyer et al. 2014). When it comes to control and trust in Local School Governance, one analysis of the Nordic data shows that: *Educational policy was increasingly moving toward a governance space developed by experts and agents and depoliticized through standards and data* (Moos 2009; Skedsmo 2009 in Høyer et al. 2014). One might ask whether these movements also have something to do with the complexity of education that requires a high degree of competence on different levels and from different actors. Our attempt in this chapter is to investigate, by analysing our empirical data as inspired by Hall (1990) and Sandberg and Targama (1998), whether we can identify weaker and stronger elements that might explain some of the differences between the four countries when it comes to the process regarding competence and understanding.

These few examples above are aimed at highlighting the fundamental underlying questions of education in a discussion of knowledge and shared competences for

governing education; what purpose do schools and education have from the single municipality's point of view? The answers may differ, depending on both the political point of view and the local circumstances, some of which are mentioned above. The answers may, in the next step, also influence the understanding of different reforms as well as single decisions by the school board that will affect the prerequisites for a school leader at a single preschool or school.

1.3   Different Understanding

There is a complexity and a wide range of areas that school leaders, superintendents and school board members have to respond to. This in turn raises the question of how different actors in the field *understand* the purpose behind, for example, national decisions; how they understand the actual situation for education in a single municipality, the needs at different schools, the differences in working environments for single preschools and schools in the municipality or in the context of independent school owners etc. Here, understanding should be interpreted as the ability to consider how to create the best prerequisites for teachers and school leaders to fulfil the aims of the curriculum in a way that lives up to its purpose. Decisions are both political and professional and are influenced by different stakeholders in the wider society, each with their own understanding.

The present Education Act in Sweden states, as mentioned earlier, that school leaders and teachers shall work on the basis of scientific knowledge and proven experience. This law underlines the importance of knowledge-based decisions and also shines a light on the borderline between political and professional decisions when it comes to fulfilling the purpose of education in a single school. What knowledge and skills are important on different levels to live up to this objective, and how are political and professional sense-making processes made possible? In Denmark, for example, the law on the *folkeskole* is broad in its expression in terms of what kind of knowledge should be taught and how it should be taught. This leaves room for school leaders and teachers to interpret and choose both the knowledge to be learned and the didactic methods (Bekendtgørelse af lov om folkeskolen/The Folkeskole Act 2013, section 1). Nevertheless the understanding between actors at different levels is needed to make it possible for school board members to make knowledge-based decisions that take account of the situation in a particular school.

The legislation in all the Nordic countries concentrates primarily on the obligations of the education provider or school owner. One finds no mention of the school superintendent or the municipal school board in the legislation. With regard to school leaders and teachers, the legislation states that each school has to have a school leader responsible for the school's operations, and an adequate number of staff. However, the core curricula express explicitly how education has to be organized nationally in terms of agreements between the various stakeholders.

School board members, superintendents, school leaders and teachers all have different expectations of how things should be handled and for what purpose. That

is something that can be a strength or a weakness, depending on how these differences are used in the governance chain. A question that arises is, therefore, how much do the different actors know and understand of one another's interpretations and understanding. We have shown that there seems to be a sense-making process between the superintendent and the chair of the board, but that does not seem to be enough, since mistrust can be found, for example in Sweden, between different layers in the chain (Nihlfors and Johansson 2013).

In this chapter we have chosen to discuss knowledge as something partly separate from, yet interdependent with, competence. Our approach to the generic competence construct concurs with other conceptualizations that emphasize that competence embraces skills and attitudes complementary to knowledge in the cognitive sense (Cannon-Bowers et al. 1995). Moreover, work-related competence is mostly situated in specific work contexts or group relations, from which it is hardly possible to separate it (Wenger 1998). Further, a key component in this approach is shared understandings within a focal group, most likely a function of within-group negotiations for the purpose of making sense of difficult situations (Brown and Duguid 2001). This means that for superintendents that cross internal and external boundaries continuously in their daily work, competence is re-defined and re-negotiated when superintendents enter, respectively, school board meetings, school leader group meetings, administrative school office staff meetings and, finally, senior leadership team meetings at the top of the municipal hierarchy. This is, relative to our empirical data, necessary to make explicit as we are working with several different actors with different backgrounds and understandings of what education is and can be. We restrict our presentation to visible meeting places and attempts to see how various actors express their prerequisites for their different experiences. Is their understanding challenged and/or do they have conflicts between the missions given to them (by, for example, the state or municipal council) and their own understanding?

To be able to understand implicitly it may help if you are prepared to challenge your own views, that you are humble and respectful of other people's thinking, and that you have an open mind in listening to political and professional knowledge expressed on various questions (Sandberg and Targama 1998). Dialogue and mutual respect are an ingredient required to achieve this kind of understanding. And a better mutual understanding can be part of the extension to build competence for creating actions in terms of negotiated decisions that lay the ground for actors to work towards common goals.

2   Theoretical Framework and Method

The theory of competence connection by Hall (1990) is used as a starting point for our analyses. He shows that a high performing organization is /…/… *characterized by equally strong forces for the three dimensions of collaboration*, *engagement and creativity* (ibid, p. 153 *Our translation*). Competence, according to Hall, is

something that is changeable as well as being dependent on the interaction between collaboration, engagement and creativity.

Hall (1990) defines personal competence as the interaction between adaptability, creativity and commitment: *competence is a state of adaptability*, *response preparedness consisting of people's enduring ability to react in a committed and creative manner to the requirements set by the surrounding world* (ibid. p. 38 *Our translation*). This definition can be combined with a salutogenic view: competence is being able to get a sense of coherence (Antonovskij 1991). Some prerequisites for achieving coherence are that you are able to create your own understanding of the situation and make it meaningful, which in turn affects your possibility to handle the situation.

The importance of understanding as a foundation for developing competence has also been problematized in work by Sandberg and Targama (1998). They see competence among professionals as the way the individual understands her/his duty in the actual context. *This understanding gives meaning to the experience and decides which theoretical and practical knowledge an individual perceives herself/himself to have*, *and how the knowledge is utilized* (ibid., p. 164 *Our translation*). They make clear that they do not see competence as being the same thing as a person's knowledge, values and experiences. It is more like a raw material that is meaningful if and when it is integrated in the person's understanding of the mission or the work that should be done.

2.1   Competence Connection

Shared competence enhances the possibilities for an organization to handle situations, something that is closely connected to both political and professional leadership. To be able to be involved primarily in the decisions that affect your own day-to-day work is crucial but it must also be extended into goal setting, analyses of results, and discussions about measures as they create personal engagement and creativity. School leaders, superintendents and school board members are actors on different levels but at the same time part of the same processes to enhance students' learning, to mention one important issue. To reach full competence the environment has to enhance the connection of the individual engagement and creativity with the shared competence. To have the ability to achieve excellence, one has to be in an environment where the competence is requested and appreciated

In Hall's thinking, collaboration is the source from which engagement and creativity have the potential to flow; collaboration starts the process. What is important to stress is that these processes have a goal; a performance or action. Collaboration is not something for its own sake. Collaboration is a dimension which defines to what extent you participate in decision-making as well as in finding solutions to problems in your work. The core of engagement is a question of partnership, to have influence over your own work, to make it meaningful and to provide context. The
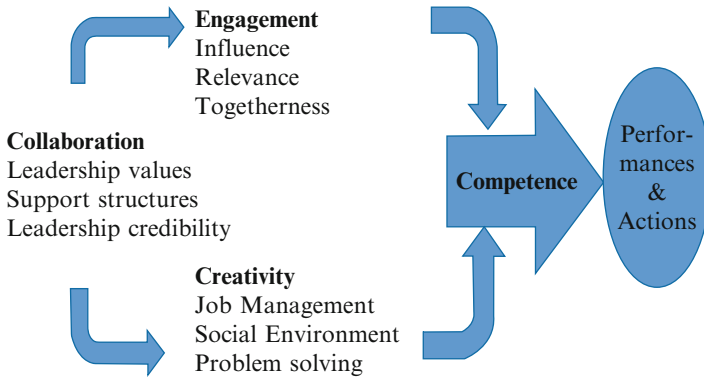
Fig. 9.1 Competence connection Hall (1990). *Our translation*

dimension of creativity, on the other hand, is where the competence processes are created thanks to collaboration and engagement. To make it happen the environment has to be inviting and supportive.

In Fig. 9.1 the different dimensions of Hall's model are presented. Each dimension has different areas. These are very briefly presented below.

Collaboration; *Leadership values*: How are co-workers valued in the organization, how do leaders value competence among co-workers? *Support structures*: Different types of power and influence, working relations and information flows. *Leadership credibility*: What is the estimated result of giving management suggestions and opinions, how are rules and principles dealt with, how do leaders select experts who manage work planning and organization?

Engagement; *Influence*: The perception of, for example, the degree of control you have over your own work, the freedom to decide on time, resources and how to organize your own work. *Relevance*: Do co-workers feel that their work is appreciated, are working goals demanding and realistic? *Togetherness*: Do the leaders encourage collaboration and respect for different knowledge and skills?

Creativity; *Job Management*: How is the work/commitment presented, how is work distributed, do co-workers have access to the resources they need when they need them? *Social environment*: Are feed-back and criticism used as common development tools, do the leaders encourage individual initiatives? *Problem solving*: How is common problem solving dealt with, how are conflicts handled?

As an analytic tool the different perspectives can be judged separately, but Hall's (1990) model is characterized by equally strong forces for the three dimensions of collaboration, engagement and creativity. The competence connections are both vertical and horizontal but they are isodynamic; equally strong and values and actions consistently mutually reinforce each other (Table 9.1).

The three different dimensions in Hall's model have been used as a grid on our empirical data. The data are gathered from three different questionnaires issued in

Table 9.1 Competence connection

Collaboration	Engagement	Creativity
Leadership values	Influence	Job management
Support structure	Relevance	Social environment
Leadership credibility	Togetherness	Problem solving

From Hall (1990). *Our translation*

each country: one to school board members, one to superintendents and one to school leaders. Each dimension has been analysed separately for each respondent group in each country. Thereafter a conclusion is drawn as to the relationship between the three dimensions, and the similarities and differences between the four countries are discussed. The results are also discussed together with Sandberg and Targamas' (1998) conclusion that:

> Since no-one has the ability to opt out of their own understanding the only way seems to be an open and trusting dialogue, in which all parties can clarify their ideas and opinions, and at the same time try to clarify their premises and basic approaches (ibid. p. 153–154 *Our translation*).

There is also a pre-understanding in this chapter in alignment to Sandberg and Targama (1998), which is that reflection is a prerequisite for learning, which can be developed by understanding through self-reflection, reflection and dialogue with others and through being informed by current research (ibid).

3 Competence Connection in the Four Nordic Countries

In this part we present data from the four Nordic countries following Hall's three dimensions and the underlying areas.

3.1 Collaboration

Collaboration in this context should be looked upon as a starting point for the competence process. The main underlying areas are: Leadership values, Supporting structures and Leadership credibility (Hall 1990).

Leadership values School superintendents in the Nordic countries work with a variety of school administrators, both in terms of numbers and skills. Both superintendents and politicians are content with their own capacity and as a whole also with that of others. When it comes to the relations between school leaders and

politicians, Sweden stands out as a country where the majority do not trust one another's capacity in the governance chain when it comes to school development.

Support structures All the respondents in the Nordic countries are active in formal and informal networks. Especially the horizontal networks seem particularly valuable. Many superintendents have a close network with other superintendents but also with other managers in the municipality. One third have an extra level between themselves as superintendents and school leaders. In some cases this seems to draw the different levels apart, but in some parts of the different countries the regional or district level is necessary to keep the system together. In Finland, a gradual growth in municipal size has been identified due to municipalities merging. As a result, a new, intermediate level between the superintendent and school leaders may be seen to have formed. Collaboration between municipalities exists in a more or less structured and formal fashion in the Nordic countries.

The relations between the chair of the school board and the superintendent are characterized by closeness. They meet regularly. The superintendent also meets the school leaders regularly, but only half of the school leaders think that the superintendent asks for or requests their experience, while at the same time three out of four think that the superintendent takes their values into account on different issues.

Leadership credibility When it comes to trust in the relations between the superintendents, municipal school boards and school leaders, we can state on the basis of our surveys that that does not seem to be a major question in Finland, in contrast to the other countries. In Finland there is trust between the various actors, although another issue is, however, that some studies indicate that there are problems in transforming evaluation results into concrete decisions (Lapiolahti 2007; Svedlin 2003). In many municipalities in Sweden, the data show a kind of insecurity when it comes to what facts and data the school board get as a foundation for their decision-making. It is both the school leaders and the politicians who express this insecurity, which is a question for the administration and superintendent to deal with. One problem seems to be that the material given to the school board is a generalization of the situation in the municipality, which does not show the differences between schools in the same municipality, which can be huge. Most of the respondents think that the quality reports from the individual schools are of interest, but it is rarely that they lead to a decision by the board. Norway stands out here, as they have working dialogue meetings between responsible leaders at regional and local level to decide how to handle the results in the quality reports. On the other hand, only a minority of the school leaders perceive the work with the quality report as being valuable for their school development endeavour. In Sweden it is evident that when the National Schools Inspectorate hands over its reports to the local school board after an inspection, these are taken into account and the required decisions are made.

3.2   Engagement

The second dimension in this competence process is engagement or commitment, and the prerequisites for this are: Influence, Relevance and Togetherness (Hall 1990).

Influence   There are strong indications of this element in all the Nordic countries. All the respondents feel that they can act freely and have a high degree of autonomy. Most superintendents and school leaders have no written instructions (beyond national documents like the education act and curricula). Finnish superintendents and school leaders express themselves differently compared with the rest when they say that they serve the education provider or school owner and not the state, but they also feel that the decisions of the local authorities can be contradictory to the national ones.

   The agenda for the school board is decided by the superintendent and the school board chair in close collaboration. The board members think they can have influence on the municipal board when it comes to education matters. The influence over the economy and who to hire and fire at school level is limited for most of the school leaders. There are some differences between the countries but also between different municipalities in the same country.

Relevance   Here it is once again noticeable that not all knowledge within the organization appears to be used, as few of the school leaders think their experience is wanted. Denmark and Finland stand out in a positive way, as in these two countries the school superintendents or superiors do ask for the school leaders' experience (around 60–70 %). On the other hand, Finland's superintendents regard their working goals as often contradictory and thus unrealistic, which causes them a lot of stress.

Togetherness   In many respects, the school organization works in a hierarchical manner. That being said, the horizontal networks seem to be stronger than the vertical. However, the school leaders get much of their engagement from the students and staff.

3.3   Creativity

If collaboration is the triggering dimension and the energy comes from engagement, it is in the creative dimension that the competence process really starts. Creativity includes: Job management, Working environments and Problem solving (Hall 1990).

Job management   The different organization schemes demonstrate, but also the respondents' answers indicate, that with a middle leader there is a greater distance between the school leader and the superintendent than before, which affects the

possibilities for school leaders to argue their own case directly with the superintendent. There are different reasons for the existence of middle leaders; geographic reasons, division of work, to reduce the workload for the superintendent etc. Middle leaders also appear in smaller municipalities and sometimes the middle leader can facilitate for school leaders. This is especially the case for smaller entities, which allows them to have a say in the agenda of the school owner. There are differences across the Nordic countries when it comes to the frequency of middle leaders between the school leaders and the superintendents. In Norway, with its scattered municipal structure, a middle-level leadership layer would be found only in Oslo. In most of the other 427 municipalities there will seldom be a middle level between the superintendents and the school leaders.

Social environment   Feed-back scores low for superintendents and school leaders in Sweden but scores high in Denmark and Finland. To take a couple of examples, nearly all superintendents in Denmark are evaluated on their work, while only half the superintendents in Sweden get personal feed-back from the politicians.

We have no questions in our surveys that can give us indications of innovative acceptance. If innovation can be understood as trying out new things, across borders etc., it may be interesting to note that in no country do as many as 50 % of the superintendents and school leaders say that they need to bend the rules in order to manage their work. Bending the rules can also be seen as a question of ethics, and from that point of view it is not a question of innovation. If bending the rules is interpreted as something that is necessary to be able to handle the situation at hand, this can be compared with other results which show that few school leaders at any level ever experience conflict situations in their work due to their own grounded values.

Another example of caution or fear may be the effect of having a strong National Schools Inspectorate. Some school leaders in Sweden say that they prefer to wait to try something new until the National Schools Inspectorate has visited the school. This is an example of hindrance to individual innovative forces unfolding, because a national inspection agency may promote isomorphic tendencies and hence be an obstacle to individual innovation (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Scott 2014). Another case of isomorphism is illustrated by the way in which national agencies and bodies implement national training programmes for school leaders, leader recruits and teachers – within a national framework. In Norway, the National Directorate of Education and Training has decided national frameworks for school principal training programmes and, similarly, for school leader candidates and leaders of day care institutions. The universities that provide programmes thus need to adapt their curriculum to the pre-defined national framework in order to get funding from the Directorate. By implication, this means homogenization of the understanding of what kind of competencies school leaders, day care leaders and leadership recruits require in order to function well in a leadership position. In a wider sense, this set of governing universities is close to coercive isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), where a dominant actor in the university's environment by means of financial power forces the organization to adapt their understanding of school leadership competence to the external standards defined by state agencies. As noted by

DiMaggio and Powell (1983), this specific form of isomorphism within a field is based on asymmetric power relations between the dominant actor in the environment and the focal organization, and it is by implication a different mechanism compared with mimetic isomorphism (fads and fashion) and normative isomorphism. The latter is for example the case when professionals show loyalty to norms determined by their profession and impose followership demands on their colleagues. On a general basis, as seen in the case of national training programmes, coercive, normative and mimetic isomorphism can work fairly well work in concert as institutionalization mechanisms for the purpose of enhancing shared understandings and competences within a sector

Problem solving   As mentioned above, few respondents in the Nordic countries say that they have conflicts between their own values and their professional duties. To some extent, the politicians, along with the superintendents and school leaders, think there are tensions between the national and municipal level; often this is about lack of money. The politicians in the interviews show different ways of managing national decisions in the local context. It is not just about the positions from different parties and economic considerations, but also about the municipality's ability to practically and concretely implement various proposals in competition with other urgent areas in the municipality. There are quite often difficulties in solving problems directly when they are dependent on changes in allocation of money or issues around personnel which affect other schools or levels.

4   Discussion

Collaboration has the potential to contribute to engagement and creativity so that shared competences are created which may trigger actions. In this process described by Hall (1990)'s theoretical account, we added that shared understanding, created in communication with others, forms the basis of the expertise or competence that the community develops in the work (Sandberg and Targama 1998, p. 95). We find rather similar results from all our four countries, with variations within each country, but of course also some differences at country level.

There are *collaborations* within the three different groups of politicians, superintendents and school leaders, yet less collaboration between these groups. School board members mostly rely and/or have to rely on the superintendent and her/his staff in the initial policy processes of agenda setting and selection of informational sources. One may assume that the superintendent, on the other hand, relies mostly on her/his administration and the school leaders – in order to exert influence on the core activities of schooling. Notwithstanding, when it comes to collaboration, these horizontal networks are more frequent and more appreciated than the vertical ones in most countries. There is at the same time some uncertainty about how information from one level to another is disseminated, handled and understood, both from a bottom-up and a top-down perspective. Even if there is close collaboration between

the chair of the school board and the superintendent, as they meet regularly and discuss the board's agenda, there is much to indicate that many proposals are drawn up by the superintendents' administration. The question of where the borderline goes between collaboration and dependence is one that we will have to leave aside.

There are differences between the Nordic countries in terms of how much the various respondents feel that they are listened to, and their views taken into account etc. There are also descriptive accounts of weak links between school board members and the school superintendent and strong links between the chair and the superintendent (Nihlfors et al. 2013). This can be seen as a sign of strong organizational couplings between the chair of the educational board and the superintendent, while the couplings have become weaker between some superintendents and their school leaders and between superintendents and board members (Weick 2001).

An explanation for these phenomena may be that most of the board members are spare- time politicians, which creates some limitations and at the same time confines the possibility of having a deeper understanding of the field(s) they have responsibility for. The tight couplings between the superintendent and the board chair and the weaker couplings between the superintendent and school leaders and board members may be an indication of an increasing concentration of power around the top of the administration and the top political echelon of the municipal administration (Sørensen 2002; Sørensen and Torfing 2005). A question that remains is how much shared understanding there is in decision- making by the school board even if most of the decisions are made by consensus according to our results.

When it comes to *engagement* and *creativity*, the degree of autonomy is substantial, as our respondents see it, and they are confident that they (no matter which actor) can make a difference. Few school leaders think they can influence the decisions at school board level, which most board members confirm to be the case. It is interesting to note that the Finnish school leaders do not rate the influence on the school board as high as the superintendents but it is still explicitly above the neutral value. Few school leaders in the Nordic countries think they have access to all the tools needed to be able to take responsibility the whole way through. Nevertheless, very few respond that they have or have experienced conflicts between their own values and the values of the school owner or the state. There is a question mark over the possibility of enacting different new policies if both knowledge and resources are lacking at school level, but that does not seem to influence the feeling of autonomy and engagement.

4.1   Understanding Texts

The data give us a picture of many meetings in large groups, in terms of school board meetings, senior leadership team meetings (where superintendents participate) and municipal school leader meetings headed by the

superintendent. What seems to be of significant importance is to produce written documents, even if they are used only to some extent for dialogue meetings. Texts are one of the strongest foundations of policy processes and negotiations in the form of laws, curricula, quality reports but also other different reports used as a basis for decision-making.

Many actors on different levels are involved both in developing different documents and in interpreting them, with everyone's interpretations based on their own knowledge and understanding. A re-contextualization of the text thus takes place, and the contexts that are involved also depend, to a certain degree, on the autonomy each level has (Bernstein 1990). Therefore language has a big impact on what and how different issues are understood.

It is rare that our respondents cite the preparatory work to a national reform. In the Nordic countries most of the laws and curricula, decided by the parliament, are built on different preparatory works. In a time perspective, the preparatory work for major national decisions and reforms have been extensive products which both provided a historical background and framed the proposals in the current context. Earlier, this preparatory work was done over a long period of time, which included hearings and debates and establishing committees of, for example, different stakeholders. In the last two decades, however, preparatory work has frequently been done by a single investigator in a shorter period of time and with a prescribed clear political will. This requires and sets high expectations of competence and understanding in the governance chain, to be able to interpret the law and curricula and other national proposals at local level. It seems rare for the local actors to take these preparatory works into account, and one may ask how many of them are familiar with this type of text and from there are able to understand the text at a deeper level. What we do know is if and when they read them, they interpret them out of their own understanding (Ball et al. 2012).

Other written texts of major importance are the official documents prepared by the superintendents and their administration for the local school board. We may assume that the preparation of these texts in the administration, between the superintendent and the chair, influence not only the proposals made but also the language used. From the responses in our survey, it is evident that they themselves, the chair and the superintendent, say that it is not easy to tell who is influencing who and how. But we can see that there is a distance between the chair and the members of the board who are not as much involved in the preparation work as the chair.

Global perspectives are also visible in these texts mentioned above; words and expressions may be derived from, for example, OECD, EU and/or New Public Management vocabulary. The words can, not least in the educational field, be understood both as ordinary vocabulary but also as part of, for example, New Public Management vocabulary, which has other value-added connotations. All the texts mentioned above are official and are in turn read and interpreted not only by school leaders but also by, for example, the mass media and other stakeholders. Various interpretations are made by different stakeholders and co-workers in the organization before a text becomes the ingredients of teachers' daily work.

The existence – or not – of a common language or at least a shared understanding of the content have importance for the governance of schools from national to local level (see for example Alvesson and Björkman 1992). A challenge for leaders who want to work on the basis of their own and their co-workers' understanding is to have or to create a shared meaning with the overall mission. From there, different processes for competence development can be worked out.

5   Concluding Remarks

The starting point of this chapter was that education is of fundamental value for a society; to raise and foster a new generation of citizens in a global and local multi-cultural context. It is therefore a delicate task to identify the competences needed to achieve this mission in different contexts over time. By using theories of competence connection propounded by Hall (1990) and of understanding by Sandberg and Targama (1998) we have attempted to problematize whether shared competence, built on knowledge and shared understanding between politicians and professionals, can affect the prerequisites for good performances in the organization. Our results show a rather mixed picture of the governance of schools which gives us no clear answers, but rather new questions. Specifically, the findings that emerge from the Nordic studies of municipal school governance show that some actors are tightly connected to one another whereas others are *not*. For example, school boards tend to be well positioned to negotiate in the policy processes taking place in the municipal councils, whereas they are partly decoupled from the enactment of the same policies at the schools level. So when schoolteachers and school leaders engage in sense making of political decisions, in order to create shared understandings, school politicians are decoupled.

One fundamental result, with few exceptions, however, is a lack of communication and dialogue in basic educational issues between different actors on different levels. The lack of communication reduces the possibilities to create shared competences. Roald (2009) has identified four different strategies in working with quality evaluation, which he terms: control oriented, decision oriented, learning oriented and process oriented. The last strategy presupposes knowledge oriented collaboration in order to be able to gain a deeper understanding of complex problems, to understand the challenges and to find possible solutions.

> A master key to an active school ownership appears to be a learning approach which understands the fundamental difference between linear information transfer and dynamic knowledge development (Roald and Røvik 2009 p. 132 *Our translation*)

Another conclusion may be that there are possibilities in all the countries (some more than others) to have even more creative and innovative moves by using only the text materials that are at hand (for example quality reports and other data), by working with feed-back, by seeking to enhance mutual understanding, by providing

open support and, of course, by including risk taking; in other words by building and preserving a trustworthy organization.

To attain dynamic knowledge development it may be of importance to discuss one's understanding of roles and positions in the governance of schools. The borderline between politicians and superintendents is, in our data, sometimes obscure and sometimes evidences a clear division of power. What could be discussed is whether the borderlines in different municipalities are situated where they are due to lack of knowledge, out of shared competences in the organization, or as a result of power. How clearly are different roles and functions in the governance chain expressed and how well known are they?

We are dealing, according to the educational system, with both politicians and professionals, both civil servants on the administrative level and on the school level, and we are moving in-between different rules, norms and cultures. The self-reported data we have used here does not give us the possibility to analyse the power relations between different actors in different organizations. But we can conclude that there is a mix of substantial, relational and institutional power (Christensen et al. 2011) in the relationship between the chair of the board, the board members and the superintendent. And this same mix of power is also found between the chair of the board and the chair of the municipal council that has the economic power in the municipality. Furthermore, even if and when the educational board have taken decisions, the power in the main question is often on the next levels: the city/municipal council and, ultimately, the national level who allocate money and determine the budget.

This in turn shows clearly that decisions about the prerequisites for school leaders' day-to-day work are made on several different levels, with actors take decisions on the basis of different competences and different knowledge of the actual situation. And it is different knowledge and competences that are required for different positions in the educational system. This applies not only to the relationship between political and professional considerations but also to the relationship to different stakeholders globally as well as in the surrounding society. Different knowledge is required, for example, to analyze data on a global, national or local level and another set of knowledge to be able to decide about relevant measures or to handle the leadership in an individual school or workplace. How you understand, for example, national reforms is not only a question of which political party you belong to. Various settings have their different educational histories, different ways of valuing knowledge and of understanding learning. This is one explanation of why knowledge and understanding are closely related to each other and why different actions have to rely on the possibility of enhancing shared competence on the basis of the individual knowledge at hand. To obtain these skills we need to challenge our way of looking at organizing and leading education, including ways of communication to promote, for example, collaboration, engagement and creativity for a common purpose.

The municipal level is interesting to focus on in research as it is an example of a point where national and local decisions, influenced more or less by international policies, are handled by spare-time politicians negotiating with professionals in dif-

ferent professions and with many stakeholders observing and trying to influence the outcomes. Another question that needs further research is what it means for the local school when and if the municipal level loses its influence on the curriculum? *The local curriculum, traditionally a characteristic of Nordic education, is disappearing to make room for a national curriculum, and thus transnational, indicators and standards. Finland is the exception to this trend, as it is part of the PISA programme* (Moos and Merok Paulsen 2014). And there are more than PISA results to consider in the curricula, as Widmalm and Gustavsson (2015) argue: schools adapted to PISA standards erode independence and tolerance: *If we are focused solely on PISA results, the risk is that we will throw away things that work well and which nurture citizens who are democratically minded, resourceful, and able to work on their own responsibility* (ibid).

One crucial point seems to be to achieve or to ascertain different ways of knowing and understanding at local level when it comes to the main purpose of schooling. That discussions and dialogue may perhaps bring new dimensions to the discussions about systematic quality work that are supposed to take place in the individual school. It seems to be a long journey to reach a shared competence between school leaders, superintendent and school board members, and perhaps that is not a goal in itself but more a process that strives towards greater understanding and respect for different assignments in the governance chain.

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Chapter 10
Governmentality Through Translation and Sense-Making

Lejf Moos, Jan Merok Paulsen, Olof Johansson, and Mika Risku

Abstract Public education governance is currently subject to change in the Nordic countries because regulations, norms and values are changing. This in turn has transformed structures and positions and has thus compelled agents to change their behaviour, mindset and identity.

In this chapter we explore the ways in which influences, decisions and ideas are being taken from one level to other levels in the public education sector in the four Nordic countries, and how they are interpreted and translated. How do groups and individuals, authorities and organisations find ways of operating and making sense in the stream of external expectations and internal interests and motivations?

In the focus of our argument are the *means and ways* in which things are done, be it through chains of governance or through formal or ad hoc networks involving formal and non-formal agents. And we are interested in the *what,* the kinds of decisions and ideas that are being taken from one level to the other.

The Scandinavian branch of new institutionalism has brought evidence of a range of translation and sense-making practices employed by municipal managers in order to make central aims adaptable at 'street level.' Following this line of argument, superintendents may employ different repertoires of translation in their dialogue with school leaders in order to maintain a work context that is manageable for both groups. Specifically, we can see a pattern that superintendents operate in different translation modus in their relationships with school leaders and with school

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boards. Whereas they typically operate in a modification modus in their daily dialogue with school leaders, they employ a more radical modus in their relationship with the boards.

We shall make use of Scott's regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive pillars and carriers of influence and values, and of translations and sense-making processes and understandings, in combination with Foucault's and Dean's understanding of governmentalisation and social technologies. As the background for the analyses are the country reports and the arguments from other chapters, there will be some overlapping in the text.

Keywords Influence • Translation • Sense-Making • New Institutionalism • Social technologies • Governmentality

1   Governing Public Sectors

The Nordic countries have been developing their fundamental paradigms of governance since the 1980s (Moos et al. 2014). Following World War II, many countries prioritised the development of social democratic welfare states. In the 1980s, however, these states shifted their focus towards remaining competitive in the global marketplace (Pedersen 2011). A very influential player in this development was the OECD (the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), which issued one of the major soft governance instruments, a report on the urgent need for the reform of public sectors in the OECD member states (OECD 1995). The OECD found inspiration in the work of management theorists such as 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 immensely influential (Bovbjerg et al. 2011).

This shift in Nordic governance can be identified in the social and labour market as well as in educational policy; 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, with more management by national objectives – in the marketplace. Such a change entailed 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 principal/head teacher).

In this project, the focus is on the municipal level. We shall examine the inner workings of municipal governance, as well as its relationship with the state and with public institutions. We know from already existing research (Moos and Paulsen 2014) that these structures have been restructured in all Nordic systems. We shall therefore first introduce the fundamental logics of traditional governance in the pre-1980s monocentric state, a system which was based on the separation of power

between executive, judiciary and legislative institutions, and which also imposed sharp distinctions between policymakers and civil servants.

In this traditional, monocentric model, politicians were seen as legitimate because they were elected to parliament, and civil servants as professionals were seen as legitimate because of their expertise and experience. The primary task of politicians was to develop politics, purposes, values and aims, while that of civil servants was to do with operations, 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; Pedersen 2005).

This chain-of-governance model worked for decades. Regulations and discourses were developed at the state level, then channelled down to municipal and institutional levels. Accountabilities were seen to go the opposite way, up from institutions to municipal and then state levels. Local governance in the municipalities was seen to be a pivotal aspect of governance in the Nordic parliamentary systems. However, in recent decades another level should be added to this chain: transnational influences from transnational agencies such as the European Commission and the OECD. Simplistic cascade models of straightforward lines of influence were now replaced by models that saw these connections as creating, conveying and filtering processes (Antunes 2006; Paulsen and Moos 2014; Scott 2014) at each level.

2   Polycentric or Fragmented States

The opening up of states, including the Nordic states, to collaboration and competition with other states and with international enterprises, agencies –, and most importantly, with other marketplaces – has brought about changes in the way states are viewed and the way in which state sectors and institutions are managed. New structures and relations are producing a new kind of state – a polycentric state, with a highly complex web of 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 often takes place in what on the surface appear to be non-political ways; for example, it may be based on the market or on a range of theories including public-choice theories, principal–agent theories, scientific management theories or transaction-cost economy theories. The general concept– with inspiration from the OECD – is called 'New Public Management.' It is characterised by efficiency and marketplace thinking, product or outcomes thinking, consumer thinking, and low-trust management thinking (Moos 2013a; Moos et al. 2014).

In this process, restructuring takes place in slightly different ways. In Denmark, the restructuring was done in order to facilitate the management of public expenditure as well as welfare-state institutions and initiatives. It also promoted 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 certain areas of decision from one level to another – from the government level to the municipal council or to institutional boards.

A parallel model 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 labour between societal sectors or institutional spheres in society: for example, between the corporate sector and the political system, and similarly between organisations in the civic community and local government. Second, in the segmented state model the boundaries between the political sectors are clear and visible. Consequently it is easy to determine who does and does not belong to a particular policy sphere. Third, the boundaries between policy sectors are more or less impermeable, which works to limit access to the various policy discourses. As argued by Tranøy and Østerud (2001), at the turn of the millennium this pattern changed into a fragmented model. There are two main consequences of this change: first, there are now more players in the policy fields; and second, players are able to enter and exit various policy spheres. One of the many cases analysed by 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 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. In several ways, therefore, 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, while both countries are members of the OECD).

While the overall development in Denmark and Norway has been similar, we can see that Swedish policies are more inclined to continue on the monocentric state model (Moos and Paulsen 2014). 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, but on educational issues in particular they leave some room for manoeuvre to the somewhat autonomous municipalities (although the municipalities' autonomy has to some extent become restricted in recent years).

Finland too is 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 – has remained strong and independent, both in relation to the state and in relation to schools. This principle was articulated in the Finnish constitution in the 1990s (Moos et al. 2014). Even so, during the 2000s successive governments tried to merge municipalities and establish regional entities which would comprise larger units. It was thought that these new, larger units would have sufficient

resources to provide the basic public services mandated by legislation. Although there seems to be a shared understanding in Finland of the rightness of this development, progress has been slow. For example, the attempts of the 2015 government to pass legislation transferring the administration of health care and social services to regional levels, requiring all educational providers in upper secondary education to apply for their licences anew from the ministry, with revised selection criteria that would also more commonly have led regional structures, ultimately failed.

3   Bypassing Links in the Chain

After the collection of survey data for this project was finalised in 2012, new developments were carried through in Denmark. An important part of the public education governance system is the regulation of teacher wages and working conditions. Traditionally that has been regulated through negotiations between employer agencies and employee agencies. For decades, the local government (the national association of municipalities) in close coordination with the Agency for Modernisation at the Ministry of Finance and together with the teachers union (by far the biggest and most influential in this field) negotiated biannually an agreement on national, municipal and school levels. In the negotiations of 2013, the local government would not enter into another agreement, but wanted to get rid of the national and municipal agreements and leave most of them to the school leaders of each individual school. The teachers union could not agree, and the employers declared a lockout of teachers. After 6 weeks of lockout, the parliament agreed on a legislation that was very loyal to the local government (and to the ministry of finance). Act 409 prescribed that frameworks for this area were to be set by the ministry and that negotiation on details was to be carried out between the principal and individual teachers, thus bypassing both the municipal authorities and the teachers union.

A further process of bypassing has become increasingly visible over the past years: the privatisation – or setting free, as it is often called – of schools. For more than a century and a half there has been a private school sector covering around 16 % of students in the basic school years. Each of these private schools is governed by a local school board, that is accountable to the ministry alone. Over the past decade a similar model has been imposed on universities as well as gymnasiums and vocational schools (upper secondary schools) under the title of self-governing – freestanding – schools. The boards of all these institutions answer directly to the ministry without any link to the local authorities, thus pre-empting the authority and power of the municipalities or regions. Act 409, described above, can be seen as yet another step in the movement towards network-governance, as will be described in the following section. A similar situation was created in Sweden with the act of 2011.

The Norwegian municipalities are responsible only for daycare institutions and basic school (age 6–16), which means that the regional counties, 19 in all, govern the upper secondary schools including gymnasium schooling and vocational train-

ing programmes. Teachers' wages and working conditions[1] have been regulated in a national tariff agreement between the National Association of Local and Regional Authorities (NALRA, the umbrella organisation of the municipalities) and the teacher trade unions since 2004. Relatively little of this regulatory area is left to the individual schools and their school leaders, or to the superintendents. Norway also has maintained a relatively strict regime on the opening of commercial and independent schools, although the current conservative government has launched a more active free-school scheme.

In Finland, the municipalities have been the main education providers since the legislation reforms of the 1990s. Soft governance by the state has seemingly not led to sufficient restructuring of the service network to meet the changes in the demographic and economic setting. As one result, the state has been trying to revise legislation so as to transfer service production to regional organisations, thus cutting down the municipalities' obligations to provide public services. As usually in Finland, this change in thinking impacted first on the health care and social services areas. The government tried to pass legislation transferring the administration of health care and the social services to regional levels. Similar trends could be recognised in education services, but, as typically, in a milder form. All education providers of upper secondary education were to apply for their licences anew from the ministry of education, under revised selection criteria that would have made the development of regional structures more likely. In this new situation, the municipalities would have directly governed only basic education. At the time of writing, it seems that the changes will not take place: the committee for constitutional law decided that the bill restructuring health and social services was unconstitutional, rendering it void, and the opposition was able to delay the hearing on the reapplication of licences for upper secondary education so that the bill was cancelled. Whatever the results of the parliamentary election, the need for restructuring remains.

In Sweden, there is still a clear division between the state and the school owners. The majority of the school owners are municipalities, while about 25 % are the so-called free schools, which various different types of owner. Some are very big companies that have many schools; others are owned by the principal or by some ideological group. The school law of 2011 gives both the school owner and the principal increased responsibility; but the same law uses the bypass mechanism in many paragraphs, giving the principal the right to take decisions without consulting the school owner. This situation is not easy to handle for the principal. In many cases school leaders are bound by budget decisions within which they must work and which on occasion prevent them from making changes they are obliged to make by law. One such example is building an internal organisation if this will result in extra costs. How the governing practice between school owner and principal should adjust to the bypass legislation is a major issue that still remains to be solved.

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[1] In 2014, the teacher trade unions went on strike to protect their individual autonomy in organising their working schedule. It is fair to say that the employer side, NALRA, lost the case both in terms of the current tariff agreement and, not least, in the public debate in the mass media.

4 Our Conceptual Understanding

The model in Table 10.1 illustrates our analysis of the national educational governance institution as an interdependent mix of the municipalities, the schools and the state system. All parties are relatively independent of one another, yet at the same time they are linked to one another in educational governance as illustrated by the theory of meta-governance and self-governance in network-governance (Foucault 1983). In our interpretation, Scott develops the concept of those relations further when he point to the multitudes of modes of relations in his system of institutional pillars (Scott 2014). We can then return to Foucault by pointing to one particular type of links – social technologies – a concept that combines Scott's institutionalism with concepts of power technologies. Social technologies are highly influential in regulating and forming relations in institutions and systems.

In order to get a nuanced understanding of the nature and processes of the relations between agents at different levels in the system, in what follows we draw on theories of *translation;* and in order to get even closer to the human processes in and between agents, we shall use Weick's theory of *sense-making* (Weick 1995, 2001).

5 Network-Governance: Governmentality – And Social Technologies

In Chap. 6 on 'Democracy in complex networks', we introduced the concept of network-governance as a mixture of meta-governance and self-governance (Moos, 2009a, Sørensen, 2003). That introduction was made in the context of democracy and networks. In this chapter we shall give a similar introduction, but now in the context of stakeholders translations and sense-making in networks. *Metagovernance* involves implementing financial and legislative frameworks, often named 'management by objectives,' and initiating discursive governance: it imposes frameworks and attempts to influence discourse, yet it defers actual governance activities to different levels (Pedersen 2005). Through those frameworks and means of governance (Dean 1999; Foucault 2001/1978; Moos 2009b), the

Table 10.1 Social technologies in institutions

	Regulative pillar	Normative pillar	Cultural-cognitive pillar
Social technologies	The state regulates: sets frameworks and aims	→ ←	Through negotiations, sparring and dialogue: translation to **self-governance** (shared practice, understanding and sense): **governmentality**: governing the soul (Dean 1999; Rose 1999/1989) with references to norms, culture and professional sense-making, 'worldviews' (Coburn 2004, 2005)

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. The *self-governance* (Foucault 1983) means that institutions and agents can – and are made to wish to – govern themselves in self-governing institutions and networks. This creates 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 frameworks and aims to create local solutions to local challenges.

Ministries and their agencies are in many ways still in command of purposes, aims, frameworks and organising, since they make use of autocratic ways of governance (legislation, regulations, economic frameworks, 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.

The situation in Nordic educational systems is that 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 (Moos et al. 2014). As the recent progress of regionalisation in Finland indicates, the state can also through legislation rearrange the basic labour division between the various actors if it so decides.

6 Pillars and Social Technologies

Our objective in our analysis of the surveys of superintendents, school boards and school leaders is to understand relations at the local municipal level in more detail. We have chosen to use Scott's understanding of institutions because it fits well with our understanding of the local educational systems of schools and municipal leadership and administration (Scott 2014, pp. 56): *'Institutions comprise regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life.'* Institutions are relatively durable social structures, as they stabilise and make meaning for the participating agents and the surroundings. Scott argues that institutions can be described using three elements or pillars that work together in combinations. The regulative pillar, first, comprises rules and regulations, as well as formal and informal monitoring and control mechanisms. The normative pillar, second, is a particular perspective on values, expectations and standards. The cultural-cognitive pillar, the third, consists

of symbolic systems, shared perspectives, concepts, meanings, and categories that can guide behaviour.

As has been mentioned, we combine Scott's understanding of the general pillars of institutions with an understanding of governmentality that draws on Foucault and Dean, focusing on how governments work to produce the citizens best suited to fulfil their policies. Governments attempt to organise the practices – including mentalities, rationalities, and techniques – through which subjects are governed. The basis for this kind of governmentality is to govern people in ways that ultimately make them self-governed through the 'conduct of conduct.' One feature of this form of governmentality is the use of social technologies.

Social technologies are technologies with a rationale, a meaning and a purpose (Foucault 1961/1972). They are therefore technologies used for a particular purpose. As Dean describes, they can be managing and leading, performance or identity-building (Dean 1999). 'Technologies' here does not refer exclusively to technical technologies like the internet or computers, but more widely to the use of any kind of technology: procedures, habits, recipes, manuals, and ways of doing (Foucault 2001/1978; Moos et al. 2007). One example of such a technology is the quality report used in the Danish education system. On the basis of an act passed by parliament, the ministry issues frameworks, procedures and guidelines for how municipal authorities are to report plans and progress in the education system annually, on the basis of reports from schools. Multiple intentions, both open and implicit, are contained in this social technology. For political and economic reasons, the ministry needs progress reports from schools and municipal systems; and because it wishes to accustom schools and municipalities to acting in a performance-managed system, thereby taking over responsibility for this aspect of management by objectives, it wishes them to be based on self-described goals and self-evaluation. In Sweden, the state school inspectorate performs this function.

In Finland, similar information is produced, but through a more versatile apparatus and with somewhat softer guidance. However, it is observable that research evidence is coming to influence government decisions to an increasing extent, and thus to influence what is expected of municipalities and how they are subsidised.

7 Translation as Governmentality Practice

The concept of translation in organisational processes builds on the premise that reform ideas are diffused from a sender to a receiver within an organisational field, e.g., a population of municipalities in a geographical area. Where there is significant institutional distance (Kostova 1999), i.e., normative and cultural discrepancy, between the reform idea from the sender and the recipient organisation, the reform message can be affected by cultural incompatibility (Christensen and Lægreid 2002). Such incompatibility can be bound to broad professional norms, with which reform ideas represent a cultural clash, or it may refer to organisation-specific norms and values. Either way, the diffusion of reform ideas across levels in a governance

Table 10.2 Translation modus and translation rules (Røvik et al. 2014)

Translation modus	The reproduction modus	The modification modus	The radical modus
Translation rules	Copying	Addition	Conversion /change
		Subtraction	

system is "sticky" (Forsell 2001). Translation capacity can thus be seen as an important form of leadership practice in educational reforms, as demonstrated in studies of how management knowledge and leadership concepts are diffused in large fields of organisations – especially under large systemic reform projects (e.g., Abrahamson and Fairchild 1999; Røvik 2007; Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall 2002). In a translation process, however, the translator must be extremely knowledgeable about the context from which the reform idea is retrieved, as well as about culture and knowledge in the recipient organisation. The process of translation thus involves both the de-contextualisation of new concepts from their original cultural and political context, and, in a similar vein, re-contextualisation into the context of the recipient organisation in order to create the best possible match with the dominant cultures at the meeting-points. In a more recent analysis of individual translation practices, Røvik and colleagues have suggested a conceptual model of four translation practices, involving three distinctive translation modus (Røvik 2011; Røvik et al. 2014), as illustrated in Table 10.2.

The reproduction modus builds on the premise that it is possible to transfer "best practice" from one organisation to another with an effect similar to that in the sender organisation. There is plentiful evidence that such a process, transferring reform concepts across organisational boundaries, is difficult and, at best, contingent on a range of factors in the recipient organisation – which of course varies with the complexity of the reform practices in question (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008). However, we also know that teachers select instructional methods from colleagues in other schools and reproduce the practices more or less as a copying process. Adding and subtracting, in Røvik's (2011) terminology, is taking the new reform practice and adding to or subtracting from it, in order to adapt it to the existing practices in the recipient organisation. What Røvik (Ibid) terms conversion or change implies a radical change of routines and work practices that will also influence the operating work in the classrooms in a significant manner.

8 Sense-Making as an Aspect of Cultural-Cognitive Activities

In order to take the analysis further, we shall build on the following concept: *"An organisation is 'a network of intersubjectively shared meanings that are sustained through the development and use of a common language and everyday interactions"* (Moos 2011 p. 38; Walsh and Ungson 1991; Weick 1995). Agents negotiate membership in a community as they share the meanings of relations and tasks. Affiliation emerges in day-to-day interactions and communication.

The sense-making processes between superintendents and school leaders are pivotal because they can and should serve as models for the sense-making processes in the whole education system. Sense-making takes place in many forms of communication, speech and behaviour. One aspect of sense-making is 'enactment,' the communication and negotiation of meaning through behaviour and the observation and interpretation of behaviour.

According to Weick et al. (2005), we can see sense-making as communication that builds on the interactions experienced by superintendents and school leaders. An example is when *'the flow of action has become unintelligible'* (2005, p. 409) and when external expectations seem strange and unintelligible, and there is a need for explanations and defence: What happened? What did I/we do? How can it be interpreted and understood?

Weick et.al. (2005) define sense-making as follows:

> Sense-making involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalise what people are doing. Viewed as a significant process of organising, sense-making unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage on going circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into those on going circumstances. (p. 409)

The stories told about the past are then used to build premises for decisions about the future. The sense that school leaders and teachers make in these situations, in their interactions and communications, is formed in social settings and in communities, and is therefore the outcome of shared social activities of communication (Wenger 1999).

> When we say that meanings materialise, we mean that sense-making is, importantly, an issue of language, talk, and communication. Situations, organisations, and environments are talked into existence. (Weick, ibid)

The starting-point for sense-making processes is often situations of surprise or setbacks where reality does not match expectations, so that there is a need for explanation. Shocks of this kind can initially, when first noticed, bracketed and labelled, act as an irritation or provocation to common-sense understanding and thus trigger sense-making processes. Most often they do not, because we have developed defences in our consciousness that guide irritations into not being noticed (Leithäuser 1979). In some cases we see that the irritations are quite significant and those involved in the situation are provoked. But it is also a commonly used leadership strategy to point to aspects of practice or in the daily life of schools in order to irritate other actors' awareness and in this way trigger sense-making processes. When actors highlight situations or actions, it is often because they find them to be problematic; as they start to express the phenomenon in language, they also develop a hunch as to the solution, and thus to new actions.

Weick summarises this as follows (ibid p. 413):

> Answers to the question 'What's the story?' emerge from retrospect, connections with past experiences, and dialogue among people who act on behalf of larger social units. Answers to the question 'Now what?' emerge from presumptions about the future, articulation concurrent with action, and projects that become increasingly clear as they unfold. (Weick et al. 2005)

Because it can help to make sense of external expectations such as new reforms or new social technologies, sense-making can therefore be a very important aspect of translation. Many external demands cannot be neglected and professionals must be brought to think that they can make sense of them in their professional life.

This reflection resonates with Cynthia Coburn's findings in a study of the impact of reforms on teacher attitudes and practice (Coburn 2004). The most important finding was that reforms are implemented if there is agreement between the basic logics of the reform and the teachers' worldview: in other words, if the reform makes sense to them. School leaders were able to influence teacher attitudes and thereby worldview, if they participate in sense-making processes with them (Coburn 2005).

9   Municipal School Boards in the Municipal Governance

In the four Nordic countries, municipal councils are elected by citizens of the municipality, either in political parties or as personal candidates. The municipal executive board and other boards appoint civil servants. Members of the school board are appointed by the municipal council, both from its own ranks and from outside.

An overview of the last decade's restructuring in Denmark, Norway and Sweden reveals that the municipal structures are in the middle of a process of transition from a model consisting of the municipal council and area-specific boards (in the introduction named **Education,** comprising a board and a superintendent) to a new model consisting of the municipal council, the political board, and specific administrations that refer to the wider political board (in the introduction named **Education+**, comprising a wide board, a director and a lower-ranking superintendent). Approximately half the boards are now of this wider form, covering multiple areas such as daycare institutions, primary schools, secondary schools, libraries and culture. The new structures bring with them new challenges for board members, who must now become informed about a wider range of issues, problems and relations. They must also manage the consequences of the reforms in national governance, involving the decentralisation of economic and human resource management and the re-centralisation of the curriculum and of accountability aspects of education. These changes have transformed the work of school boards in the sense that the focus is now less on educational issues and increasingly on economic and managerial issues.

In Finland, most municipalities are still small, and the school boards have wide remits and are served by a superintendent with a similar remit. The transfer of early childhood education from social to education services, and the extension of student-welfare services, have further broadened these remits. It is highly likely that in Finland too the size of municipalities will be increased through mergers, and similar developments as in the other Nordic countries may yet be observed. Whatever happens, as the operational environment becomes transformed, the municipal structures

as well as those of the educational services are also constantly changing, along with the role and work of superintendents.

The political expectations in the school boards of Denmark, Norway and Sweden are that governance is almost exclusively a matter of management and of the assessment of resources and outcomes – line-managerial and marketplace accountabilities. The educational focus receives little interest (Moos 2013b). This may be because municipalities have little influence over educational content, because matters to do with the curriculum and the assessment of results have bypassed this level and have proceeded directly from the ministry to the institutions. In Finland, however, the situation is different. In Finland, the local curriculum is important, and quality assurance takes place at the local level. No reports are sent to the national level. Even the quality assurance system is executed at the local level. When Danish, Norwegian and Swedish board members and chairs were asked what they considered to be the most important policy issues with which their boards should engage, they answered 'structure and economy,' followed by 'daycare and youth issues,' both relatively new issues for the boards. They also indicated that the board leaves educational decisions, such as quality issues and the curriculum, to the next level in the governance chain. The links between these levels consist of social technologies such as contracts, quality reports, and employee interviews. The views expressed by Finnish school boards in principle correspond to those in the other Nordic countries, but with some distinct differences. An even more explicit emphasis can be noted here on the structural changes that seem to be required by the operating environment. In addition one can note a concern about the effects of the changes in the operating environment on the quality of education and on the ability to abide by the legislative obligations. As early childhood education is transferred to educational services and the radical changes in student-welfare legislation are put into practice, these issues too are appearing on the agendas of school boards, superintendents and school leaders. Furthermore, the national core-curriculum reform will be enacted at local level in both comprehensive and general upper secondary education in 2016, so curriculum work presently takes up a lot of the time of all local education actors.

School superintendents are seen by school boards as fulfilling a long list of responsibilities. They are expected to develop and implement local initiatives and reforms; to create the conditions for collaboration both between institutions and with other municipal institutions; to evaluate the results of local initiatives; to collaborate with the school board; to lead school leaders in their educational leading; to create changes that produce better financial outcomes; to create changes that produce better results in national tests; to develop and implement national reforms; to evaluate the results of national reforms at local level; and to lead education (curriculum and teaching). School boards seem to cast themselves in the principal role, setting direction and producing aims, and the superintendents in the agent's role, carrying out the policies. Superintendents, by contrast, report that they are very autonomous, acting more like policymakers than 'implementers,' as they can influence the decisions of the school board. This is because they have, of course, the power of implementation and are at the same time the most important channel of information to the board. They also exercise influence in writing the agenda for the

board meetings, or for other meetings that produce strategies on the municipal level. Almost half the superintendents surveyed in …. have this role.

Relations between the school board and the school itself are indirect, operating via the superintendent, middle leaders or other administrative staff, because no board members have a formal relation to the school. Board members occasionally visit schools, but not in a formal capacity. They may also visit 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; rather, they are on a political–administrative level.

This trend was underlined when board members were asked about their role in relation to school leaders. Generally, they do not prioritise these relations highly. On the contrary, they view them as fairly unimportant. This might 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. If the school board does not drive a specific school's agenda, board members can act more objectively thinking about the whole provision.

A review of the issues identified by board members as the most important on their agenda reveals that finances and cross-institutional structures and quality systems are top of the list. These issues can be characterised as regulations in Scott's model of pillars. That leaves room for superintendents, school administrations and school leaders to make decisions on curriculum and school development, but within the national frameworks and aims, standards of learning and accountability of outcomes. In Sweden, the state inspectorate to some degree bypasses municipal influence. Here again, Finland can be seen as an outlier. There, for both superintendents and school leaders, decisions by the municipal council and school board seem to be their most essential framework. This may at least in part be because in Finland it is not legislation, but the municipal council, the supreme representative of the municipality, that directly issues instructions to teachers, school leaders or superintendents.

10   Superintendents and Municipal Administration

Danish, Norwegian and Swedish superintendents meet frequently – once a week and once a month – with colleagues and superiors in the municipal administration. The main issues at hand are cross-sectorial, discussing issues in relation to schools and other institutions managed in the same administration: strategies, collaboration and coordination, and political leadership. When superintendents were asked to prioritise a number of issues on the basis of how important, interesting and time-consuming they were, the following image emerged for Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Finland, once more, appears to be a little different.

Table 10.3 Tasks ranked by importance, interest and time consumed

Most important	Most interesting	Most time-consuming
1. Educational development	1. School development	1. Budget and finances
2. Leading school leaders development	2. Planning and goal setting	2. Political issues
3. Secure political goals	3. Political issues	3. Planning and goal setting
4. Give advice to politicians	4. Educational leadership	4. Schools development

There is a nuance in the picture displayed in Table 10.3 when it comes to Norwegian superintendents, since they tend to rank budget and finance as higher in importance. This can be explained by the fact that in the Norwegian system there is no layer between the school administration and the top management, which means that superintendents have a tighter responsibility for financial management for their sector.

There is a general divergence in the case of Denmark, Norway and Sweden between importance and interest on the one hand and time spent on the job on the other. Superintendents report spending most time on tasks with regulatory direction: budget, finance, politics, planning and goals can be seen as issues that are decided by the board and administration and disseminated to institutions, while the development of education and leadership, securing policies and advising are more in a cultural-cognitive direction in respect to school leaders. Top-rated in importance are tasks in direct relation to schools and school leaders, while the most time-consuming tasks concern the administration and the board.

Ion the case of Finnish superintendents, one can recognise the demands of the changing operational environment. Management of the everyday is given the highest priority, and that function also seems to take a lot of superintendents' time. As their most important tasks superintendents report mention managing the budget, ensuring and managing services, administration, and the development of services. Management appears to be conducted in collaboration with the educational staff, the management of which also seems to take most of Finnish superintendents' time, followed by budget management and administration. The tasks that appear to motivate Finnish superintendents most highly are developing the education system and serving others in providing services.

The table illustrates the position that superintendents occupy between political and administrative regulations on the one hand and cultural-cognitive translation processes on the other. Sense-making processes are of course also at play in relation to the board, such as advising and securing (and thereby interpreting) political goals under importance, and issues under time consumption.

Superintendents indicate that their administration is very competent in the analysis of national test results, in educational politics, and in curriculum planning. However, in Denmark and Finland there are for the most part very few people employed in the administration with the task of working on the quality reports. The Acts instituting this relatively new social technology, from 2007 in Denmark and 2011 in Sweden, prescribe schools to produce strategies and report on progress to

the municipal authorities as a foundation for the process of dialogue between administration and schools, and thus to act as a cultural-cognitive instrument for sense-making and translation of governance from the ministry to institutions.

11 Superintendents and School Leaders

The Danish, Norwegian and Swedish superintendents in our survey represent both the traditional model of superior superintendent and the emerging model of director plus subordinate superintendent described in Chap. 1. The director has a wide field of responsibility and will thus have a tendency to be more distant from institutions and to make use of tools like managing by objective. Most respondents in the survey, however, responded as superior superintendents with close links to schools. In Finland the existence of two models can also be recognised. However, as most municipalities are still rather small, the model including the superior superintendent is strikingly dominant. If municipal mergers increase according to government policy, the director model will most likely become more common in Finland as well. The Finnish superintendents' field of responsibility is very broad and is expanding even further, as early childhood education has been transferred from social to educational services and student-welfare services have been extended.

Superintendents indicate that the by far the most important leadership group for them is the group of school leaders of schools and other educational institutions. They are more important than leadership groups in the school administration, and they meet as frequently as once or twice a month.

In the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish country reports we described how superintendents prioritise face-to-face interactions with school leaders in tasks such as communication and sparring, but also in respect to the school and municipal organisation and the quality report. In many cases this communication is taken care of by school middle leaders. The communication builds on both parties being educational professionals. Superintendent respondents were asked to name *the three most important tasks in their work with school leaders:*

- Priorities 1 and 2 far surpass the rest. Here the focus is on communicating with school leaders and on their development. The main activities are negotiations, sparring, strategy and development.
- Priorities 3–6 are high priorities. Here the focus is on developing the school organisation and the school district, attitudes, and resources. Working on the quality reports comes in sixth place.
- Priorities 7–11 are mixed middle-tier priorities. These include working environment, political decisions, strategies, decision-making and operations. These are issues of importance to school leaders on a general level: what can the municipal administration do to support development in schools?

Generally we see that superintendents underline a number of communicative activities in relation to institutional leaders: meetings, negotiations, sparring,

strategy and development, coordination and collaboration, creating shared attitudes, operations and development, sparring and exchange of experiences, and development of learning and teaching. They also describe other issues as of importance for interactions with institutional leaders: strategy discussions of national initiatives, finances, student outcomes and education initiatives in respect to that.

One gets the impression that superintendents have clear and high intentions to establish relations with school leaders with a high content of sense-making, and they aim to do this through sparring, exchange of experiences, discussions of strategies, coordination and collaboration. When superintendents take on these tasks, it could well be an act of trying to translate external demands into internal sense, so that school leaders will be able to adjust their patterns of perception and actions to the new situation created from the outside. In sparring and negotiation, superintendents enter into close relations, targeting the narratives and also the actions of school leaders and building on a shared professional and educational understanding. When they encourage school leaders to exchange experiences, they absorb school and local views and experiences into a dialogue as between equals in the profession and on local issues. This situation and constellation can produce a higher degree of consensus between superintendent and principal and thus improve the translation of ideas and initiatives.

Sparring and the exchange of experiences and knowledge can be seen as social technologies, in line with coaching and negotiations for membership in communities of practice (Wenger 1999). Those are social technologies whose purpose is to empower individuals to take responsibility for governing themselves as they take on more of the understanding and the strategies of the actual community. Those objectives of the social technologies are nicely summed up in the priority of leadership development and of the 'creation of shared attitudes.' Our study reconfirms Coburn's findings, mentioned in the discussion of sense-making. School leaders do, however, report that meetings about education, competencies development and quality development are called only once per semester or half year or less, giving less time to these activities. On the other hand, meetings where superintendents focus on giving information to school leaders are much more frequent, between four and ten times per semester.

The above technologies are founded on frequent face-to-face meetings between superintendents and institutional leaders. As most political boards and administrations acquire more overarching areas of responsibility in the restructuring process, including for many institutions of diverse kinds, there is also a tendency for distances between superintendents and institutions to grow, and accordingly for fewer face-to-face meetings.

Superintendents claim that schools' work on quality assurance and development influences their decisions more than do municipal and national quality work. In most Nordic countries, the information that superintendents receive on school quality work comes in the form of test results and quality report self-evaluations. And they come in written form. Parallel to this, superintendents claim that the views of the following groups are given most weight: (1) the school board, (2) the board

Table 10.4 Perceptions of expectations D&N

Ministry expect school leaders to:	School board expects school leaders to:	I expect myself to:
1. Implement school legislation *(F: educational leadership)*	1. Keep to budget *(F: budget)*	1. Lead education at my school
2. Implement revised curriculum *(F: support special needs)*	2. Implement school legislation *(F: educational leadership)*	2. Organise the internal work in the school in ways so as to boost performance
3. Lead education at my school *(F: improve learning outcomes)*	3. Lead education at my school *(F: support special needs)*	3. Find adequate support for students with special needs
4. Find adequate support for students with special needs *(F: budget)*	4. Organise internal work in the school so as to boost performance *(F: improve learning outcomes)*	4. Support high-performing students to work even harder

chair, and (3) school leaders. Finland presents a somewhat different ranking: (1) school leaders, (2) municipal central administration and teachers, and (3) school board/parents/other superintendents.

School leaders indicate that the school administrations, even as they are cut back in many places, have the greatest competencies in education policies, legal issues and leadership development, and rather low competencies in the areas of analysis of student outcomes and leading curriculum development. The superintendents rate their administrations much higher on those latter two issues than school leaders do.

Table 10.4 gives an indication of the mixture of influences from one level to another. The table shows school school leaders' perceptions of other actors' expectations of their work as school leaders. The results for Finland are in italic. It is noteworthy, considering what school leaders expect from themselves, that school leaders in all Nordic countries (including Finland) have the same ranking:

Issues that were not included in this count were, for example, making sure that teaching is based on academic scholarship, and school involvement with the local community.

Generally there is a fair agreement between expectations as perceived by school leaders. This could point to legislation at national level and policies at municipal level that are in agreement with school leaders. The images could also be very much influenced by the fact that respondents were asked to prioritise between prescribed issues, meaning giving their opinion within the world view and terms of our project.

We get the same impression from answers to questions about value conflicts. The translation of ideas is quite successful.

It is noteworthy that school leaders place implementing legislation up front for other agents, but lower when indicating their own prioritisation (where this expectation came in sixth place).

12 Superintendents and the National Level of Governance, the Ministry

Danish superintendents indicate that the most important social technologies, issued over the past decade, are:

1. Quality reports. As mentioned, the frameworks and aims are set from the top, except for a few issues left open to individual schools. The strategies are produced by the school and evaluated in self-evaluations in reports to the municipal administration. This in turn issues summaries of all schools to the ministry.
2. Student plans are also framed with objectives by the ministry, with detail to be filled in at municipal level. Each teacher, in collaboration with individual students and their parents, produces plans with learning aims for all subjects.
3. National tests. The number of national tests increased by a factor of 10 in 2006. There are tests at all grades, and school results are published.

The ranking above corresponds well with the perceptions of Norwegian superintendent, with the exception of student plans. In Norway, national tests were implemented in 2005 and have been accompanied by standardised surveys on student satisfaction, teacher job satisfaction, and organisational survey schemes for schools – most of these surveys integrated into a database system that allows matching and comparisons of standard performance indicators. Moreover, most municipalities have implemented a database system that enables school owners and school leaders to track their students' educational performance path, by means of longitudinal data sets, several years after leaving the lower secondary level. For example, it is possible to track the completion ratio or dropout ratio in upper secondary education for a specific cohort 5 years after it left lower secondary school.

These social technologies played an important role in laying the foundations for the Danish school reform of 2012, because they paved the way for understanding a school as managed top-down and regulated through 'management by objectives', now named 'clear, national learning aims.' The school reform must be seen in connection with Act 409, which changed the law on teacher working conditions, pay negotiations and full-time hours presence in schools.

These changes leave in place a school that is very clearly regulated, through budget regulations and framing and through national standards and tests, yet at the same time governed via network governmentality through social technologies.

In Finland, decisions by the municipal council are considered to be the most significant by superintendents, followed by national legislation. Local evaluation also appears to have quite a lot of significance. We did not ask superintendents, but according to school leaders, local evaluations are considered to give a realistic picture. Other studies (e.g., Lapiolahti 2007) indicate that local authorities have not been very skilful at using local evaluations in decision-making.

13   Superintendents' Room for Manoeuvre: Governmentality

Looking at the superintendents' overall work picture, it can seem structured by pre-defined regulatory tasks such as budget, strategies and 'management by objectives.' The superintendents indicated in the survey, however, that their interests are more comprehensive than this. Their most important networks, they reported, are those with school leaders and with school boards. In the work with school leaders, tasks were prioritised in importance as follows:

1. Communication and sparring.
2. Developing schools and district.
3. Working on working conditions, political decisions, strategies and schools' operation.

These top priorities give an image of superintendents who see their primary job not as issuing and monitoring regulations and social technologies, but as communicating and entering into dialogue with school leaders. The fact that they describe their relations with school leaders as networking, and that their first priority is communication and sparring, sheds additional light on their second and third priorities: developing schools and working with political decisions and strategies are to achieved primarily through dialogue. The general image is that superintendents make use of regulations and social technologies, and translate and make sense of those external expectations through communications and dialogue. The preferred mode of sparring is face-to-face encounters; however, the new structures of municipal administration – large bureaucracies with more numerous institutions and a greater distance between administration and schools – may change this. When superintendents select policy aims and objectives from the national reform agenda and further translate these into dialogues with their school leaders, they typically operate in a "modification modus," in Røvik's terminology, by means of "adding" and thereby expanding the scope of leadership practices. We also see cases of "subtraction" practices, in terms of superintendents buffering and sheltering their school leaders from some demands. In a wider sense, the analysis suggests that Nordic superintendents use their degree of autonomy as active players to support their school leaders in developmental areas of pedagogy.

Superintendents report that they interpret school boards' expectations of them as follows:

1. Taking care of complaints.
2. Giving clear and worked-through descriptions to the board.
3. Giving an orientation of what is going on in education.
4. Establishing links between politicians and citizens.
5. Loyally implementing political decisions.

Except for the first priority, sheltering and fencing in the school board from the outer world, the following priorities give room for much interpretation and translation of data and impressions from the education reality to the decision-makers on

the school board. Specifically in their relationship with the school boards, superintendents seem to be uniquely positioned, due to the asymmetrical distribution of critical knowledge, to employ a translation modus characterised as "radical" by Røvik and colleagues (2014). This means that superintendents can affect the board's agenda significantly and thereby act as radical translators. When most of the school board's knowledge is channelled through the superintendent, the latter acquires a great deal of influence over the decisions: it is the superintendent who constructs the major premises for decisions and the major part of the couplings of decisions with practice in the system. Modes of translation and practices of sense-making are important working modes for superintendents. It seems that this is not just because they are given their own room for manoeuvre, but perhaps also because the regulations and social technologies are constructed in ways that transform the logics of meta-governance into self-governance. Actors at all levels are requested to enter into responsibility-creating relations, governmentality. A system therefore manages or leads not solely through regulations and social technologies, but also, and perhaps more importantly, through consciousness- regulating processes.

Once more, the Finnish case is somewhat different. Finnish superintendents tend to believe that school boards expect them to act particularly as administrative managers and developers of their provisions of education. They do not report being expected to collaborate with the school board and the surrounding community. Board members themselves, however, report that superintendents are their main sources of information, and appear to place a lot of trust and importance in the superintendents' collaboration with them.

14   Conclusion

Generally we see that the governance of the public sector in general and the educational sector in particular in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland is moving away from its traditional hierarchical structure, with government as the principal to local authorities that were acting as school leaders to schools. At the present time there is a strong tendency to soften up this structure and for the education ministries to bypass the local level by accepting freestanding schools and by governing directly through national indicators, aims and standards, and measures of outcomes. Instead, governing through networks is gradually taking over, leaving room for some discretion in formal as well as informal networks of stakeholders at various levels.

This movement is often seen as a meta-governance and/or self-governance tendency. At the meta-level, the national level, aims, frameworks and strategies are developed and given effect through regulations, normative and cultural-cognitive means (e.g., social technologies of numbers, measurements, comparisons, indicators and standards). But most importantly, this form of governance fom intends to have the lower levels accept and embrace the meta-aims by taking responsibility and accountability for them. In making them 'their own,' they make them work.

It is in this space of governance that superintendents work. They must receive and accept ideas and initiatives from government and from the municipal policy level. We see that the bypass tendency has left the tasks of operational and resource management to municipal and school level. But we also see that a large area of implementation is still left at the local level: working to have institutions and their staff accept and acknowledge the national aims and frameworks. Here is where the work of translation, of brokering and of being intermediaries between levels comes.

We find that there is still some room for sense-making processes between super-intendents and schools: both sides are able and empowered to enter into dialogue, negotiations and sparring processes. However, one aspect of sense-making, the 'enactment' processes, is more difficult to carry through, because it demands a kind of virtual interaction in which superintendents meet with school leaders, individu-ally or in groups. As enactment is pivotal for making sense of such highly complex matters as the practices of education, leadership and educational leadership, this may eventually lead to a decrease in shared understanding and in the acceptance of practices and purposes.

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Chapter 11
Tendencies and Trends

Lejf Moos, Elisabet Nihlfors, and Jan Merok Paulsen

Abstract When we look for general tendencies in the development of the role of Nordic educational superintendents, we find that social technologies have become fundamental features of contemporary governance, education and comparisons. Social technologies are procedures, recipes, manuals, methods, indicators etc. that are produced and implemented for the use of authorities to govern institutions and individuals. Contemporary social technologies are to a high degree formed by neo-liberal marketplace discourse and thus by 'new public management' ideologies: they are basically intended as a tool to further collaboration, trade and exchange across national borders when building a global marketplace. Therefore we also see that they mostly context- and content-free, but nevertheless pursue marketplace homogenisation. We see that the most important social technologies in educational leadership and governance are evidence-based decisions, best practices, governing by indicators, standards and numbers, accreditations and certifications. We therefore rename the New Public Management (NPM) into New Public Governance (NPG). We see the same tendency at the very core of education: prescribing national or international indicators, standards and procedures like best practice, shifting the focus from education and teaching to effective learning that is to be measured with international tests and without discussion of the purpose of the activities, nor of the circumstances and relations in which education and learning take place. It seems to us that these tendencies will become the trends of the future, unless directions and means are changed dramatically.

Keywords Tendencies • Comparisons • Neo-liberal discourses • Social technologies • New Public Governance (NPG)

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1 Comparing Research on School Superintendents

The reasons for our discussion of comparison in education, governance and research are manifold. This research project is in itself transnational, addressing the current situations in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Guided by tradition, which tells us that the Nordic educational system is very much the same across borders, the authors might have been tempted to take it for granted that the peoples of these countries do act and think in the same ways (Blossing et al. 2013b; Moos 2013d; Moos and Paulsen 2014b). We do to some extent, but there are differences also. Therefore the composition of this volume: country reports investigate the national systems, and thematic chapters try to tease out both similarities and differences.

Much of the research literature that we use is written in English and is produced in the United States or Britain, and we are often tempted to take arguments, theories and findings from this literature at face value, except for our awareness of the differences that exist between societies, politics, cultures and educational philosophies.

We need to be very conscious of the complexity of contexts when comparing educational governance across societies, systems and political regimes, because education and educational governance emerges from and is produced in those contexts in interplays with transnational influence. Contexts emerge historically and are socially and politically influenced, and that is how they become sounding boards for actual situations, interests and relations. Therefore we refer to certain important aspects of the background to the current situation. First, we touch on economic, social and labour market policies, and conceptions of structures of states and markets, such as the welfare state or competitive state thinking (Pedersen 2011). Second, we refer to aspects of cultural values and norms in human relations and education. Because they so often seem to be deeply rooted in traditions, they are 'slow changers' that continue to shape and form contemporary influences and ideas.

Much of the influences to which all Nordic as well as other countries are exposed are transnational, coming first and foremost from the OECD or the European Commission. The aim of those agencies is to further collaboration between nations and thus to develop shared language, norms and practices. The specific OECD ways of building a global marketplace seem to fit the UK and US contexts and societies better than they do the Nordic cultures. The messages from those agencies may or may not fit our national values, norms and discourses. They do affect them, however, even if we are not conscious of it. A major task for educational research is to uncover the influences, of whatever kind they are, in order for us – and our readers – to be able to judge and evaluate it.

1.1 Comparisons Are Tools for Governance

Comparisons are used as tools for research on governance, policy and education and also by policymakers themselves (Steiner-Khamsi 2010). Comparative researchers use comparisons to sharpen their view and get a clearer picture of practices and politics; policymakers refer to them when setting policy agendas based on international evidence, best practice or international standards (Moos 2013a).

It is very important to gain a better understanding of the institutional context and the historical and societal background in and against which educational governance is situated, since governance 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.

International comparisons act as mirrors for policymakers. Increasingly today, we see policymakers argue that we must comply with global or international systems, standards or best practices such as PISA (the Programme for International Student Assessment) or the 'Improving School Leadership' initiative (Pont et al. 2008). However, as Gita Steiner-Khamsi argues (Steiner-Khamsi 2010, p. 332), policy transfer is not a passive process. It is mediated, shaped and given form by local policymakers, so the travelling 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 travelling 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 policymakers and practitioners modify it – we have referred to the neo-institutional theorist Kjell Arne Røvik (2011).

We have used the concept of contextual comparison (Steiner-Khamsi 2010, p. 326), in which comparison is seen as a tool for understanding context rather than trying to abstract from it. Steiner-Khamsi argues that, when using ethnographical cases, we need to reflect on how the individual case is significant and what it stands for. Therefore we have written country reports in which both societal and historical aspects are included, as are the influences – the so-called global trends – of transnational agencies.

Stephen Carney (2008) combines horizontal (across states) and vertical (within nation-states) analyses in three contexts – Denmark, Nepal and China – and three levels of education within each context – higher education, general education, and

non-university-based teacher education. He wishes to recontextualise, as opposed to decontextualise, his investigations in order to analyse educational systems in their interrelatedness in a globalised world: *'denoting how the transnational flow of hyper-liberal policies permeates every level, transforms every aspect, and affects each actor in an educational system'* (Steiner-Khamsi 2010, p. 327).

Like Carney, we can describe the very core of the current mix of travelling policies as a 'policyscape': terms such as neoliberalism, global marketplace logics, individualism, new social technologies (to name but a few) are well analysed in Foucault's theory of governance and governmentality (Foucault 1991).

We use a double comparison in this project: a comparison between the Nordic systems and, in this chapter, we will touch on a comparison between Nordic and other systems. In the light of globalisation, this double comparison is intended to recontextualise educational governance discourses and practices. This was done in thematic chapters comparing theories and practices between Nordic countries. In this chapter we draft a comparison with the Anglo-American systems. As a general aim, we outline similarities and differences between Nordic cultures and structures, and compare these to general trends in Anglo-American societies and cultures.

1.2 Images of Two Distinct Cultures and One Global Unit of Measurement

In order to construct a clearer image of the Nordic situation by contrasting the Nordic situation to one that is very different, we decided to construct an image of the Anglo-American situation and history. We selected this territory – despite the variations that exist within it – because it remains the main source of neoliberal policies and public management between the 1970s and 1990s. Furthermore, within our field of research – educational governance – most theories have their roots in Britain or the United States and are published in English. Many of the researchers in the working group have been or remain engaged in international research projects with researchers from Britain, Australia and the United States (Nir 2014).

The themes selected for initial comparison were social relations and policies, and cultural and educational values. These themes were considered to be central aspects of the foundation for educational governance: societal and institutional structures, relations and values are the foundation for education and schooling (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) and thus for educational leadership and governance.

It is true that Anglo-American trends are broad in scope and, therefore, that our choice of comparison could be contested. However, in the sphere of society and education, the Anglo-American region displays clearly identifiable and illuminative patterns. When comparing Anglo-American tendencies with those in Nordic countries (prior to the increasing transnational influences in the 1980s), the following trends emerged (Moos 2013a):

Social relations Social relations were becoming gradually more equal in the Nordic societies, whereas social divides were large and increasing in Anglo-American societies. Trust was higher in Nordic societies than in Anglo-American communities.

State–market relations After World War II, the Nordic welfare state was constructed on the basis of a strong state and strong local communities, such as municipalities. A Nordic welfare-state model with 'flexicurity' relations between the labour market and the state has been a cornerstone of the Nordic nation for many years (Andersen et al. 2007). We can see that, during the same period, the Anglo-American liberal state prioritised the values of individual rights, a strong market, and a weak state.

Education A firm belief in comprehensive education was present in the Nordic systems. The main aim of the so-called 'progressive education' was to educate for participation in democracies, often labelled 'democratic *Bildung*.' Inspiration was initially found in the theories of John Dewey, Georg Kerschensteiner and Maria Montessori: 'Vom Kinde Aus' (The child in the centre). Strong trends to emerge in the Anglo-American approach to education were the ideal of an academic curriculum and a focus on national goals and measurable outcomes. The main aim was to educate for the labour market. Inspiration for this approach came from Ralph Tyler and Franklin Bobbitt (Blossing et al. 2013a).

Professionals In the Nordic countries, many curriculum decisions were decentralised to schools, school leaders and teachers in order to further democratic education. Professional relationships were built on trust in professional experience and expertise. In Anglo-American educational systems, less discretion was awarded to local agents in schools because the prevailing academic approach favoured national standards and monitoring.

Comprehensive schooling or selection In the Nordic systems, streaming was gradually abolished in the period after World War II. In contrast to this, Franklin Bobbitt and Anglo-American systems believed in streaming and grouping by ability.

Taken as a whole, it is clear that the Anglo-American societies and systems were well prepared for their own inventions: neoliberal policies based on marketplace logics, economy, free choice, rational thinking, competition and comparison, scientific management theories with performance and standard as cornerstones, a strong top-down model, and a Principal–Agent theory with national aims and tight accountability.

1.3 Societal Bases for Comparisons

Proponents of the Nordic welfare states believed in a strong social democratic state and a well-regulated marketplace. The UK and the US believed in a liberal state in which the market was only minimally regulated by the state. This can be seen in the construction of education and educational governance. We have chosen the

following indicators of prevailing values to illustrate Nordic similarities and US/UK differences:

The *GINI* index measures the extent to which the distribution of income or consumption expenditure among individuals deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. Thus a GINI index of zero represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality. The Nordic GINI is 27 out of 100 (Denmark: 27, Finland: 28, Norway: 27), meaning high equality. The UK/US GINI is 38–41 out of 100 (England: 38, the United States: 41), meaning low equity (World Bank 2015).

Trust data are based on the question: 'Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?' Trust thus reflects people's perception of others' reliability. The Nordic trust in most people was 84–89 % (Denmark: 89 %, Finland: 86 %, Norway: 88 5, Sweden: 84 %); in the UK/US it was 49–69 % (the UK 69 %, the US 49 %) (OECD 2011).

The *power distance* in Denmark: 18, Finland: 33, Norway: 31, Sweden: 31, England: 35, the United States: 40 (all out of 100 for greatest power distance) (Hofstede 1980).
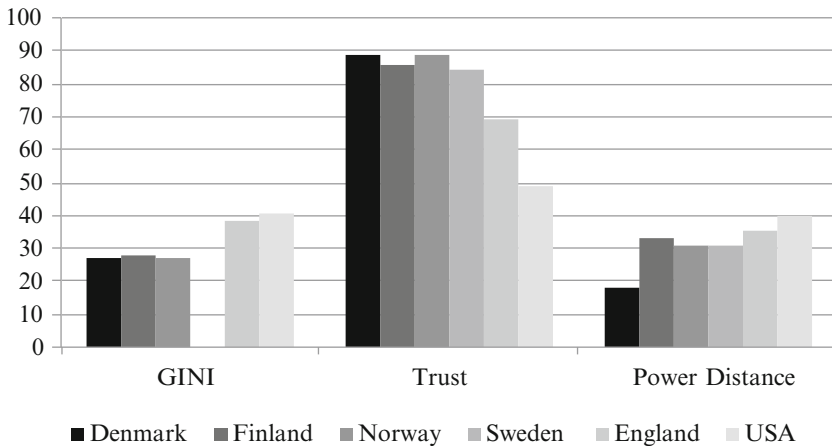

1.4 Comparing Public and Independent Schools

Superintendents' positions and working conditions differ from country to country, from one education governance system to another. If we want to compare positions and working conditions across systems, we need to be aware of those differences. One fundamental difference between systems is the degree to which educational systems are public or independent (in the following we use 'independent' to mean a

free-standing, private or independent school). We give below a short summary of the Nordic countries' current situation on this parameter, with the addition of figures summarising the English and US systems. Those systems have been included because they are mature in their neoliberalism: they have already been governed by neoliberal logics such as 'new public management' for some time. The Nordic systems are not so mature, although, as shown in the preceding chapters, they are catching up. Another reason for comparing Nordic and US/UK systems is the anecdotal one that, having been involved in international projects including both Nordic and US/UK participation, the authors have found these comparisons eye-openers for their understanding of and focus on their own Nordic phenomenon (Moos 2013b, c, d; Moos et al. 2011; Moos and Paulsen 2014a).

1.5   A Numbers Overview

The majority of students in basic schools in both systems attend publicly governed schools: in Finland almost 100 %, in Norway 95 %, in Denmark and Sweden around 85 %, in England around 80 %, and in the United States some 88 %.

The relative proportion of public and private expenditure on educational institutions is: Denmark 97.5 %, Finland 99.2 %, Norway 99 %, Sweden 100 %, England: 78.7 %, the United States 92.1 % (OECD 2012).[1]

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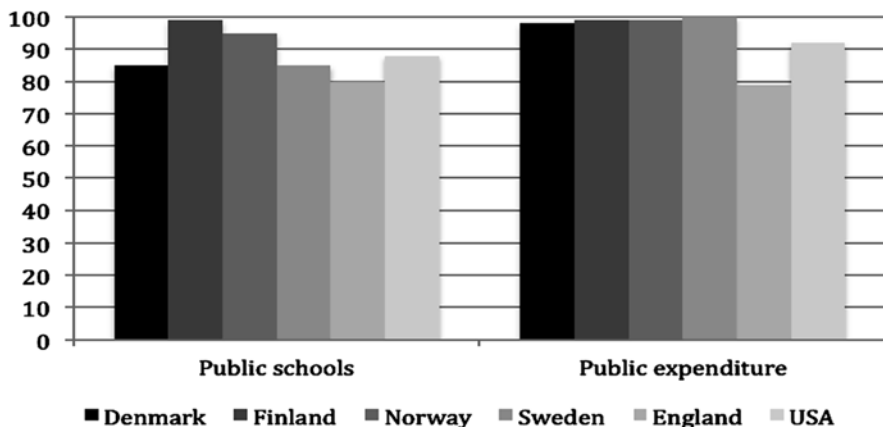
[1] It is worth noting that numbers are themselves subject to interpretation. The ones used here are taken from the World Bank tables, but if we use Eurydice (2012) we see that public expenditure in Denmark is 92 rather than 97. 5 % and in England 69 rather than 78.7 %. The numbers of course are based on different data, but for comparative use it makes sense to use numbers produced in the same way from the same source.

The proportion of independent schools in Denmark is 16 %, and has been at that level for many decades since the mid-1800s. The independent schools have a long history of reflecting low citizen trust in a national government and high trust in local communities (e.g., cooperatives and municipalities). Individual school boards of parents govern independent schools. Public schools are 100 % state-funded, while independent schools are 70 % publicly funded. Parents have to find the rest of the funding.

The Swedish situation is different. Up until 1990 there were only very few independent schools, but when they were allowed to generate a profit and take it out of the school, even though the schools were still 100 % publicly funded, the interest rose considerably. Today, independent schools have 15 % of basic school students.

In Norway the proportion of independent schools is only around 5 %, and in Finland even less, only 1–2 % international and ideological schools.

In England, the picture of educational governance is very complex (Wood and Roberts 2014), as the 152 local authorities have been losing power to the central government since the late 1980s, and more recently to the schools themselves. Public schools are still 100 % state-funded, but are encouraged to transform themselves into various kinds of academies that are independent of local authorities, a range that includes sponsored or converted academies and 'free schools'. In 2013 the number of academies had reached 3000 and ascending, and around 20 % of students. This development has invited new stakeholders into the running and governing of schools and then also diverse forms of governance.

Public school funding in the United States comes from federal, state, and local sources, but because nearly half those funds come from local property taxes, the system generates large funding differences between wealthy and impoverished communities (Bjørk et al. 2014). Such differences exist among states, among school districts within each state, and even among schools within specific districts. The basic education requirement can be satisfied in public schools, state-certified private schools, or an approved home-school programme. Eighty-eight percent are public schools.

Please also note In 19 states of the United States, corporal punishment is legal and is in use. In the Nordic countries it is not. We have here two very, very diverse understandings of the traditional concept of *in loco parentis,* in the parents' place. Nordic values are more concerned with respect for children, than many US states are.

1.6   *Public – Independent*

Generally we see two rather different images. One group has of high percentage of independent schools (numbers are rounded): England with 20 %, Denmark with 16 %, Sweden with 15, and the United States with 12 %. The second group has few independent private schools: Norway with 5 % and Finland with 1–2 %. Measured

in this way, Denmark and Sweden are getting to look more like the US/UK neoliberal systems then Norway and Finland are. But more parameters need to be taken into account.

When we look at the boards governing public schools at the local district or municipal level, we get three categories. The municipal council elects a board, from within the council or outside it: Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. The board is elected and composed of parents in the district: the United States. England seems to constitute a system of its own: up until the 1990s, public schools were governed by elected boards with no direct link to the municipal council, but those boards have lost much influence to government and schools. They may perhaps still function as a weak guard against total marketisation.

The governance of independent schools is given to boards elected in the same way as the boards of private enterprises. The main feature here is that the local level is bypassed and schools are given independence from state regulations. This has been the case in the United States for many decades, in England for at least three decades, and in the Nordic systems for one–two decades, following the general tendency of globalised neoliberalism, focusing on free choice and competition in the marketplace with high state funding and a strong belief in state governance in management by objectives, etc.

2   From Political Culture and Education to Economy

Changes towards a culture inspired by economic norms and values, as highlighted in the new public management ideology, have evidently been influenced by theories like public choice, Principal–Agent models and transaction costs theory. As noted by Christensen, Lægreid and Olsen, the transformation of the governance systems of public sectors in order to fit new public management principles implies conflicts and tensions with traditionally legitimate norms and values (Christensen and Lægreid 2001c; Olsen 1988). These tensions are not at least manifested in the new public management orthodoxy of administrative leadership values, highlighting flexibility, devolution, autonomy and discretionary power for managers.

However, as noted, the price of these principles is a more formal, rigid, hierarchical control system that makes extensive use of contracts (Christensen and Lægreid 2001b). Specifically, through public management contracts, administrative leaders at all levels in municipalities are supposed to specify their targets and objectives more clearly, and organisational performance associated with these targets is to be controlled by use of quantitative indicators for monitoring results (Christensen and Lægreid 2001a).

The changes in policy cultures also have implications for politicians' modes of leadership. Through these same public management contracts, political leaders are also expected to make their goals and objectives more specified and measurable by means of quantitative indicators or 'benchmarks' for assessing the effectiveness of the polity system they are elected to govern – all at the expense of democratic nego-

tiations (March and Olsen 2004). Moreover, the audit explosion seen in public sectors in the Nordic countries during the last two decades has strong elements of political control based on standardisation (Brunsson 1998) at the expense of informal political control based on trust (Christensen and Lægreid 2001a).

Our chapter on political culture analyses the tendencies in Nordic municipal governance cultures. Reading the analyses, we can see the following general tendencies:

- *Openness* is understood as the broad availability of participation. In municipal governance, this is seen as an issue for politicians and professionals only, not for the general public.
- *Decentralism* is defined as the distributed power sources. This is found in some areas of responsibility and not in others, as shown by the analyses of school and local autonomy and analyses of decentralisation and re-centralisation tendencies.
- *Egalitarianism* is described as the redistribution of resources to minimise disparities. This is a prominent feature in the analyses, but the concept is however changing from equality through equal opportunity to equality through equal outcomes as measured by numbers.
- *Efficiency* is defined as the economic cost–benefit and emphasises the returns on public investment. In the municipal accounts, this is exclusively an economic and marketplace term, attained through 'governing by numbers'.
- *Quality* is understood to be the focus on excellence and improvement and the major goal. In the neoliberal systems, this is seen as a benchmark for efficiency, national standards and outcomes as measured in tests (Management by Objectives).
- *Choice* is defined as the opportunity to make policy decisions on multiple levels. In municipal governance, this is moving from the area of political liberalism towards that of economic neoliberalism: from political choice to economic choice.

Interpreted in this way, we see that the political culture is transforming itself to an economic culture, leaving less room for political decisions and processes, and more room for economic reasoning and measuring. This is much in line with European Commission thinking, as expressed by then EU President José Manuel Barosso in Europe 2020 (Barosso 2010), a strategy for developing the EU societies, substituting societies with 'economies.'

The categories in the project analyses were originally constructed from the observation that new educational initiatives are filtered through a long-standing and unique national culture (Louis and Velzen 2012). The categories were originally seen as a corrective to the new public management model's relatively narrow array of agreed-upon outcomes. Using the categories on the municipal governance level,

however seems to lead us back to the deep-down basis of economic logics in contemporary public management – and also in Nordic governance.

This may be because the analyses dig deeper into the substance of governance. As an example one can see that the category of egalitarianism is still a major characteristic within Nordic education and educational governance. Governments strive to give all children the same education through equal opportunities, but the opportunity perspective has been changed into an outcomes perspective. This in itself does not render the efforts to be promoting inequality. But we need to look at the details. The ways in which initiatives are measured is exclusively built on measuring by numbers, and thus takes this basically political category – the social category – into a non-political sphere. Statistics and comparisons become the science of the 'numerical study of social facts' and the foundation for the emergence of '*governing by numbers'* (Nóvoa 2013).

Our analyses support what we find in the chapter on democracy through the filter of logics. These logics are seen as good and adequate signifiers of core relations and interests in the educational settings and institutions. The relative weight, the mutual balance, between the logics is, as shown, changing in contemporary and neoliberal organisations and governance. The *marketplace* (with a focus on consumer choice, competition, service provision, and efficiency) and *managerial logics* (which focus on strategies, planning, monitoring and management) have been made much more central in municipal governance, while the *professional (*that is, committed to professional education, experiences and values) and *public logics* (most interested in political negotiations with community and parents) are being pushed into invisibility and the *ethical logic* (with a special responsibility for children's care and upbringing, being *in loco parentis*) has disappeared from view. The main perspective of municipal governance is shifting from the comprehensive *Bildung* and its emphasis on the development of personal, academic and social competencies and also on awareness of the contexts of learning and teaching as equally pivotal with the academic content, towards a focus on back-to-basics, national standards and outcomes as measured by national and international tests – management by objectives. The professionalism of municipal governance is questionable if it governs contrary to the main purposes of education.

As shown in the analysis, superintendent and politician competencies seem only to a small degree to perform in accordance with the purposes of education, and much more in accordance with economic and management logics. Superintendents and politicians use most of their professional time on budget management matters and very little on educational matters, even if they themselves feel that this should be their main interest. The governance and management systems in which they work prevent them from doing what they find important. It seems inevitable that politicians on the municipal boards and professionals in the administration over time will acquire and develop suitable qualifications in economics and management. The need for qualifications in education is being made irrelevant.

3   Network Engagements and Distributions of Leadership Capacity

The network analysis in this volume reveals various different kinds of power relations that are shaped through formal and informal access to people and information as well as through capabilities and expertise. In the Nordic countries, we see increasingly clear yet differently shaped trends, whereby schools superintendents are linked to the top apex of the municipality organisation, at the same time as some superintendents are connected to their school leaders through strong, dense network ties that are embedded in personal relations and in municipal school-leader groups. Other superintendents have weaker network ties and see themselves more as coaches than leaders of school leaders. Yet there are differences across the Nordic countries when it comes to intermediate leadership layers. The main trend is that superintendents are favourably positioned to exert some influence in the school governance chain. Further, the strength of their position is amplified by the linkages to their peers and by the asymmetrical power position held by the superintendent in relation to the school board. School boards are clearly not powerless as network agents, but their strength consists in their relationship with the municipal council and municipal board. School board members seem only weakly connected to the educational core business undertaken by school leaders and their teachers.

Our analysis of network engagement chains also highlights a debate over the distribution of actual leadership capacity in Nordic school governance chains. A distributed perspective places emphasis on the 'co-practice of routines' and the 'co-sharing of leadership' (Spillane 2006), which, it could be argued, creates a cohesive culture (Rosenholtz 1989). The network analysis in this volume shows a broad distribution of leadership capacity among superintendents, peers, top managers, school leaders, school board chairs and school board members. Moreover, the analysis indicates that the roles and functions that go along with superintendents in the municipal governance line contribute to a higher level of cohesiveness through the co-practice of routines, dialogue and support.

4   Blueprinting or Bypassing National Policies at the Local Level of Implementation

Despite the fact that school board members are educated above the population average, in addition to being experienced politicians, they seem to be at an arm's-length distance from the pedagogical discourse in schools. We assume this is due to board members' status as 'leisure politicians' with a systematic lack of the specialised expertise that agency in the educational discourse requires. In that respect, school governance, including at the local level, is increasingly becoming a field for professional experts. A complementary explanation is found in the 'blueprint hypothesis.' Grounded on a considerable bulk of empirical evidence, it has been posited that the

state's steering of schools has increased significantly and that its hand has never been stronger, due to the up-scaling of the national quality assurance systems through inspection, standardisation of tests, monitoring of results and state supervision (Engeland and Langfeldt 2009; Helgøy and Homme 2006). As a function of the mass of standardised performance tools implemented towards school leaders and teachers from state bodies, local school policymaking then becomes more of a 'blueprint' of national pre-defined categories (Paulsen and Skedsmo 2014).

Another perspective on similar relations is the 'bypassing' of municipal authorities, and thus the breaking of part of the chain of governance that connects parliament and ministry to local authorities and further on to institutions and leaders. Ministries in all Nordic countries are re-centralising authority and influence from lower levels to the top. Less so in Finland, but even there we see that more detailed indicators and standards are issued by the ministry, and monitored and measured at the state level through national tests and other demands for documentation, accreditation and certification. This tendency shows in the weight attached and time spent by municipal school boards and superintendents on budget and management issues, and the dearth of it spent on educational and learning matters (See the Sect. 8).

5   Translation in Words and Action

In the chapter on translation we introduced the concept of sense-making: *'An organisation is a network of intersubjectively shared meanings that are sustained through the development and use of a common language and everyday interactions'* (Moos 2011 p. 38; Walsh and Ungson 1991; Weick 1995). Agents negotiate membership in a community as they share the meanings of relations and tasks. Community and affiliation emerge in day-to-day interactions and communication.

The sense-making processes between superintendents and school leaders are pivotal, because they can and should serve as models for the sense-making processes in the whole education system. Sense-making takes place in many forms of communication, spoken communication and behaviour. It seems to us at this stage that the sense-making focus on language, in a true social constructivist manner, should be supplemented. We need to focus more on what Weick (1995) describes 'enactment': the notion that when people act, they bring structures and events into existence and set them in action. Weick uses this term in the context of sense-making by managers or employees. He also describes how they can enact 'limitations' on the system to avoid issues or experiences. This too is seen as a form of social construction by focusing more on the actions we want to take in a given situation (Spillane distributed) and the materiality of them – e.g., an agent's mimes, body language – as well as the purposes and organisational context of the interaction in which the communication takes place and the content of the communication. Is this, for example, related to management, to education, to economy or to ethics?

According to Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005), sense-making is communication in words and action that builds on the interactions that superintendents and

school leaders have experienced and undergone – when 'the flow of action has become unintelligible' (2005, p. 409), and when external expectations seem strange and unintelligible and there is a need for explanations and defence: What happened? What did I/we do? How can this be interpreted and understood?

Politicians, administrators and professionals can make different sense of the same situation because they experience it from different perspectives. The basis for sense-making and for enactments is the life-world (Coburn 2004) of each group and individual. Life-worlds differ because of differences in background, experience, position and interests. This means that the position, training and prior experiences of superintendents matter. If they are professionally socialised in educational environments like schools, they will see the situations differently from superintendents who are trained to see most features of life as expressions of legal and economic logics.

Weick's concepts of sense-making and enactment (Weick 2001) are often linked to face-to-face, real-time interactions and communications. When people experience confusing situations or situations that need explanation or direction, they communicate and act to find their way. This often takes place in interactions and communities. As the distance between agents grows bigger so that they seldom or never actually meet, they find it difficult to relate their understanding to other agents and communities and correspondingly have a greater need to relate to regulations, norms, manuals etc. that are transmitted in writing. This means that they have to operate at a more general level. They cannot, as in face-to-face encounters, describe particular or specific situations, contexts and contents. We therefore see the introduction of numerous social technologies that are intended to guide and lead agents to act and think along prescribed lines – models of classroom management; models of learning instruction that exclude teachers and facilitate individual students to learn at their own pace and in their own fashion; models of conflict solution and peer support, like supervision and mentoring schemes; comparisons made by translating learning outcomes to numbers.

6   Homogenisation in a Transnational Perspective

Our analyses point to the ascendancy of governance by numbers and by comparison and competition in municipal governance – governance technologies that the municipalities are both subject to and use themselves in relation to their institutions. The European Commission has chosen PISA as the European set of indicators for quality education at basic school level, as a means to promote educational outcomes. It is remarkable that a global measurement has been imported so prominently into the European space; however, it is not unexpected, as an OECD working paper shows (Wilkoszewski and Sundby 2014). This is a report on the use of a tool in the European Commission's 'open method of coordination' toolbox, the country-specific recommendations, presented in a comparison of three country

cases of 'Steering from the centre – new modes of governance in multi-level education systems.'

Collaboration between the two major transnational agencies in our part of the world – the OECD and the European Commission – is growing tighter. Both agencies are working within the same global trend to develop a new model and paradigm of education. The central theme is that policymakers and practitioners should build on the quantitative sciences (of which psychometric comparisons are seen as a part) rather than the traditional qualitative science of educational philosophy. These processes are named: 'The Political Work of Calculating Education' (Lawn and Grek 2012). Statistics becomes the science of the 'numerical study of social facts' and the foundation for the emergence of 'governing by numbers' (Nóvoa 2013). Desrosiéres (in: Borer and Lawn 2013) writes:

> The statistics were presented like an essential tool for the 'rationalisation' of the control of the human business, by substituting the reason of measurement and calculation for the arbitrariness of passion and the play of the power struggles. In social sciences or in the management of the social world, statistics were thus invested with a comparable role of 'de-ideologisation' and 'objectivisation,' making it possible to treat social facts like things (Desrosières 2000, page 122).

Over the past century, this development has been the background for the emergence of a group of experts in the educational field: experts in statistics and psychometrics. Politicians and policymakers are particularly interested in their work, as numbers are seen as the best and cheapest foundation for political and governance decisions. This trend is often named 'evidence-based policy.'

When we take these observations together with the observation that the major tool, PISA, is actually measuring, what is not taught (Labaree 2014). National tests normally attempt to measure the outcomes of teaching in relation to national aims and standards. PISA was constructed as a tool that could facilitate comparison of national outcomes across 20–30 different national educational systems. Each of these national educational systems had their particular and very different sets of national aims and standards: a unified set of aims was therefore impossible. Thus PISA constructed an independent, *transnational* set of aims: 'skills to meet real-life challenges.' Those aims are skills that productive workers anywhere in the advanced world would need. So the OECD reduced learning to the acquisition of economically useful skills – for employability. In order to be able to compare outcomes, a set of aims and skills was produced that are actually taught nowhere (Labaree 2014).

In an attempt to get around this problem, the Danish education ministry asked a group of statistical experts to compare the test. How good was the correspondence between the Danish test and PISA (Damvad 2014)? The group found that the results were comparable, and so was the level of predictability. So there is no problem exchanging one with the other.

Two observations. *One:* PISA is more economically focused than is usually acknowledged. This should be no surprise, as the OECD is the originator of the neoliberal new public management system of thinking and governance (OECD 1995). *Two:* Measuring outcomes, and in particular outcomes along one global set of criteria, is a very powerful technology of soft governance. As time goes by, politi-

cians, policymakers and professionals become accustomed to this, to thinking that this is the 'new normal.' As has already happened in so many ministries and local administrations, we will see a homogenisation of views on education, on the dominant discourses of education. This is like the old saying, You get what you measure – and only that. That is basically economically defined and excellently calibrated to a technocratic and economic administration.

For the sake of our youth, our culture and our society, we must hope that practitioners in schools and classrooms do not feel restricted to this very narrow view.

7   New Paradigms in Educational Governance

The governing-by-numbers tendency has fundamental effects on the 'How' and 'Who' of leading and governing education, as the task to set and measure targets shifts.

We have described several times in this volume how the traditional Nordic ways of setting and measuring targets were led by national governments, mainly through legislation and curricula. They were written in broad, soft brushstrokes, leaving room for interpretation to the local levels, the municipality and the schools. The agents were politicians, administrators and professionals at all levels.

In the last 20 years, this process has been supplemented and modified by the use of a large number of social technologies – the comparisons and the indicators and the rankings that are constructed transnationally by the European Commission and the OECD. Against this background, a relatively new group of experts in the educational field has emerged: experts in statistics and psychometrics. They have been taken to the forefront of educational discussions in government: politicians and policymakers are extremely interested in their work, which they see the best foundation for political and governance decisions.

PISA is only one of many social technologies employed by the Commission and the OECD, which are not the only agencies producing benchmarks and data. In parallel with the agencies mentioned above, EUROSTAT and Eurydice were established by the Commission with similar goals:

> The indicators are used to assess either quantitatively or qualitatively progress towards the benchmarks and the common objectives. Indicators should also help to stimulate exchange and discussion among member states about reasons for differences in performance… The European Commission has set up a Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks, which has developed 29 indicators in order to measure whether, and at what rate, the EU is progressing towards its common objectives and benchmarks (Lange and Alexiadou 2007, p. 349).

The PISA goals of 'real-life aims skills' are beginning to bypass national governments' core responsibility. One consequence of this can be seen in the reports produced for the Danish ministry of education (Damvad 2014), stating that Danish

national goals do not contradict the PISA goals, and thereby handing priority to PISA and to continuing to think in PISA ways:

'… the important here is to stress that while becoming essential as the bond which links the public policies on the one hand and their concrete realisation in teaching devices on the other, the evaluation became, much more than one external and ex post measurement of the educational action, a tool for modelling its form and its direction.' (Felouzis and Charmillots 2012 p.16) in (Borer and Lawn 2013)

Borer and Lawn continue:

In this way the data compiled, that were originally tools to compare national education systems and to create a 'common European area,' are gradually becoming the aim of each national school curriculum, and the means by which it is achieved. (Borer and Lawn 2013)

At the same time, we have found in our investigation that the educational aspects of governance are not at the forefront of municipal governance. Both political boards and superintendents use most of their time and effort on budgets and other economic matters. We have also shown that there are very strong tendencies towards the national level bypassing the local, municipal level, because regulations on standards, indications and outcomes tend to target schools and students directly.

Right now – except maybe in Finland – we see that national goals, standards and indicators are in fact increasingly being produced transnationally, on the basis of international tests and comparisons.

The consideration of national educational goals is being overtaken by work on 'Big Data' and its algorithms, the self-contained step-by-step sets of operations that perform calculation, data-processing, and automated reasoning, steering the analysis, capture, search, sharing, storage, transfer and visualisation of vast amounts of data.

We know Big Data from cognition research and artificial intelligence. We find these algorithms when we use websites like Amazon. The site remembers what we bought, and compiles lists of new titles to tempt us in a split second. These are powerful management systems that are currently used in numerous fields of business and public management.

The same technology is also being used to develop online testing systems for schools. Algorithm technologies work well, because they work independently, self-contained as they are. They are sensitive to the results entered into the systems, and on that basis they adjust the criteria for grading. In Denmark, we are familiar with the adaptive national tests (UNI-C 2012). They are self-scoring and adaptive. This means that the test scores student performance and adapts itself to the level of the individual student's performance. The students therefore continue to answer questions until the programme sees their score is stable. Teachers receive the results as percentiles – numbers – without the need either to formulate the question or to review the performance. They get a number, and they get to determine if that number is satisfactory or not.

We can see problems ahead with these developments – a democratic problem and an educational problem. Democratically, it is a problem that the criteria and targets governing the setting and measuring of directions are being removed from the

citizens and their politically elected representatives. Educationally, it could be seen as a problem that learning goals and outcomes of management by objective systems are being developed into strong technologies that are untouched – undisputed – by human beings. They are exclusively technocratic technologies.

One positive aspect is that these systems are extremely human-resource efficient.

8 Implications for the School Institution

The chapters in this volume have pointed to significant changes in the public school institution in the Nordic countries. In Sweden, Denmark and Norway, the governments have established and institutionalised comprehensive multi-level quality assurance systems that to a large extent are matched with transnational bodies such as the EU and OECD. Through the up-scaling of national inspection, state supervision, national test regimes and monitoring of results, the regulatory pillar of the school institutions has been altered significantly – from a focus on the input of resources and social redistribution to a focus on the control of outputs (Skedsmo 2009). As elaborated by Scott (2014), behavioural control and loyalty-based legal sanctions are central features of this part of the school system. We have named it the mixture of meta-governance with self-governance. Also as noted, there have been obvious changes in the normative pillar of the school institution, since regulatory control and normative control often work in concert: streamlining of in-service workshops, standardised training programme for teachers, administrators and school leaders and clear preferences for what kind of projects and developmental activities are to gain support from the governance system.

We also see these trends as changes in the legitimate belief systems of how to govern public sectors and school systems, conceived as the cultural-cognitive pillar in Scott's (1995) terminology of an institution. Common beliefs about how to govern schooling, shared by a dominant coalition within the same school, constitute a 'logic of orthodoxy' (Scott 1995) in which the legitimacy of steering schools by means of indicators is increasingly being taken for granted in the Nordic societies. This constitutes its own basis for compliance for superintendents, school leaders, local politicians – and teachers. Further, the observed changes can also be interpreted as a clearly reduced belief in the capacity of local politicians to use their formal legal autonomy to steer their own local schools. Similarly, we see clearly that the influence of the teachers unions in local policy processes in municipalities has significantly decreased. Although the teachers unions enjoy a high formal status in negotiations on teacher pay agreements and also in hearings on educational policy-making, our analysis indicates that they play the 'backbencher' role in local school governance.

9 Winding Up the Arguments

Much of the discussion and argument in this volume has focused on the increasing use of social technologies, e.g., of comparisons, evidence and tests. This may not be surprising, because that is often the result of analyses of public governance today: New Public Governance (NPG). In the previous pages we have pointed to some of the consequences of this development: challenges for democracy, for relations, for sense-making, and for education. We now return to this tendency and trend.

A general and ground-breaking analysis of education and student learning Rømer et al. (2011) distinguishes between pure education, found in, e.g., evidence-based and best practices, and on the other hand, impure education, described as follows:

> The impure education is an education, where methods of education cannot be separated from the content and the anchorage in cultural, ethical and political processes. (p. 7)

The argument is that in education one cannot separate form from content. It is an eternal and very old discussion in philosophy dating back to Plato and Kant. The proponents of impure education hold that one cannot separate the learning processes from the content, the object of learning. The separation of content from form is however very common in contemporary educational policies, where learning has become the individual student's endeavour to lead and monitor her/his own learning processes. This is often labelled meta-learning: learning to learn, which can be supported through various methods of cognitive empowerment. In this understanding, students do not need a teacher or learning material, like textbooks. They need to acquire only a set of cognitive learning strategies.

However, theories like those of Dewey (1929/1960) (Brinkmann 2011) hold that learning is not exclusively an academic, cognitive practice, but is also about establishing habits through non-verbal signals and concrete manipulations with real objects and people. One learns in the interplay between student, teacher and content. Here both academic and social learning take place, because all parties try to make sense of the information, the situation and the relations. Here students also form their social identification, as an aspiring member of the learning community of practice (Wenger 1999).

Making use exclusively of the social technologies mentioned will exclude both the content and the relational aspects of learning. The social technologies are describing procedures, in forms that are intended to be applicable in all similar situations. They do not therefore include the actual practice and situation, the actual people and learning objects involved in learning (Brinkmann 2011). The technologies in themselves make us forget that education, teaching and learning are, as leadership at all levels is also, very practical processes: students learn something when they manipulate objects and take part in communication as sense-making and enacting. School leaders and superintendents lead – they plan, they manage, they arrange, discuss, and negotiate real-life situations, challenges and problems. Budgets and strategies are not solely words on paper, but thoughts about actual schools, teachers and students. Therefore teachers as well as leaders need to be in close contact with

the objects of their practices, both students and staff, so that they can interpret and act on both clear and weak signals about the practice processes.

The discussion looks very similar when we talk about educating students, leading schools and governing school districts. Individualisation is spreading into more and more fields and levels. Both challenges and practices of course differ from level to level: what is meta-learning in the classroom is self-governance in schools and in municipal governance. But the basic understanding of what is needed is very much the same – or rather, should be the same – because all those three levels of education are working in pursuit of the general, overarching purpose of educating the next generation to take over, eventually. The superintendent strives to provide education in schools with the best of opportunities and frames. The school leader does the same within the school, as does the teacher with the class, groups of students and the individual students.

However, the use of these internationally inspired social technologies seems to determine the societal, cultural and political discussion of what they are there for. And the answer to that question is, for the purpose of schooling. But the upbringing and education of the kind of human beings that society and schools want to contribute to is often absent (Biesta 2009; Moos 2014; Rømer 2011) from discussion in the national contexts and obscure in the international context. The OECD has no public vision of a general *Bildung* with strong educational ties to history, ethics and culture; it issues directives only on the question of competencies required for the labour market. Up until one or two decades ago, discussing the purpose of education was encouraged at the local level, but with some governments (again excepting for Finland) bypassing the municipal level, this is no longer happening either.

Our expectations of the Nordic school superintendent – that they should acknowledge and promote educational leadership and education in their school districts – may produce schizophrenia in some of those superintendents, as they have embarked on using tests as high-stake accountability (Nichols and Berliner 2007). In such districts, student outcomes are used as the basis for school leader salaries. This is another move away from looking at schools and educational systems as educational, and further in the direction of seeing them as public service institutions.

10   Future Dilemmas

It is clear that our respondents' opinions expressed in questionnaires and in some cases in interviews, reflect decisions taken globally and nationally 20–25 years ago. Several of our countries went through economic crises because of the oil crisis and the globalisation that coerced governments to adjust incomes through taxes and thus to cut down on their public sectors. One tool that was employed in many places was new public management, leading to a wave of decentralisation and mergers among municipalities. Contributing to the need for change in the infrastructures were also

migration, demographic change, the growth of cities at the expense of rural areas, and changes in the production area. These were changes that made heavy demands on the municipalities as well as on the education system. These trends continue in place, and we have shown that the need for advanced knowledge, skills and competencies at the municipality level (both for politicians and professionals) correspondingly points to the need for infrastructures, between the municipalities local and/or regional, to fulfil their obligations in the provision of education that are laid down by law and in the curricula.

Together with this, we see in our data that even if PISA shows a drop in some results, the leaders of municipalities are not always worried about this, because the survival of the municipality is a higher priority than test scores. The interpretation of international trends varies according to the situation in the community. There are differences between the countries we have studied, but the differences are greater between the municipalities in each of these countries.

We have seen that in most places there are close relations between the superintendent and the chair of the board, and that raises questions about who is governing schools. The line between politicians and professionals has become increasingly blurred, leaving less influence to the politicians and more to the administrators, who often set the political agenda. The traditional role of the administrator – the civil servant – was to guarantee equity and equality in education. This role has changed. The administrator has become one among several administrators serving the politicians. For the superintendent, education is just one of several important areas.

When the line between administration and policymaking is blurred, and with the use of many more economy-based social technologies imposed from the top, it is difficult to see how democracy as a parliamentarian system for education is actually working today. Even if the current development is working on the municipal level, one may ask the question if it is a good model for education in schools. We agree with Dewey when he describes a living, participatory democracy:

> Democracy is more than a form of government it is primarily a form of life in association with others of common, shared experience. (Dewey 1916/2005).

It may be that the education system in the Nordic countries stands at a new crossroads, facing a choice between preserving and/or developing confidence and trust between different actors in the governance chain. The dilemma visible today is about how to maintain and develop equivalence in education across the whole country, from north to south, regardless of the size of the municipality. Statements regarding these dilemmas affect the perception of the whole mission of education and *Bildung,* in contrast to or in tune with the measurable results that are highlighted by international measurements. The view taken of the entire endeavour also reveals differing sets of values, both between political parties and between differing educational approaches and differing approaches to learning. The question is, which expectations will write the agenda for tomorrow.

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