Chapter 11
Tendencies and Trends

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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).
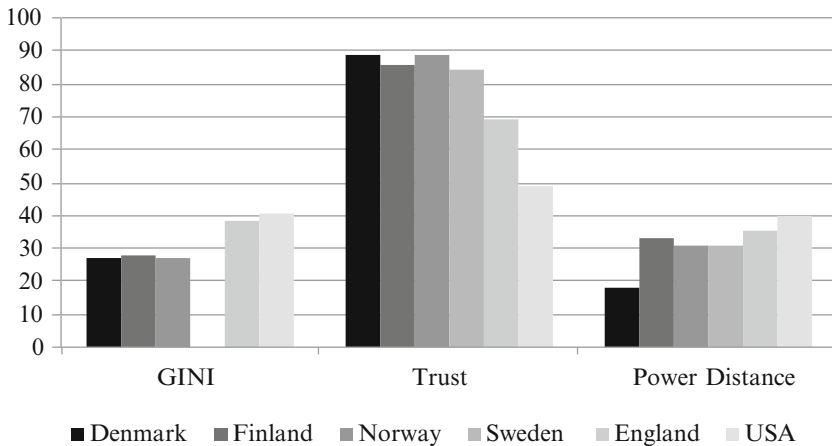
## 1.4 Comparing Public and Independent Schools

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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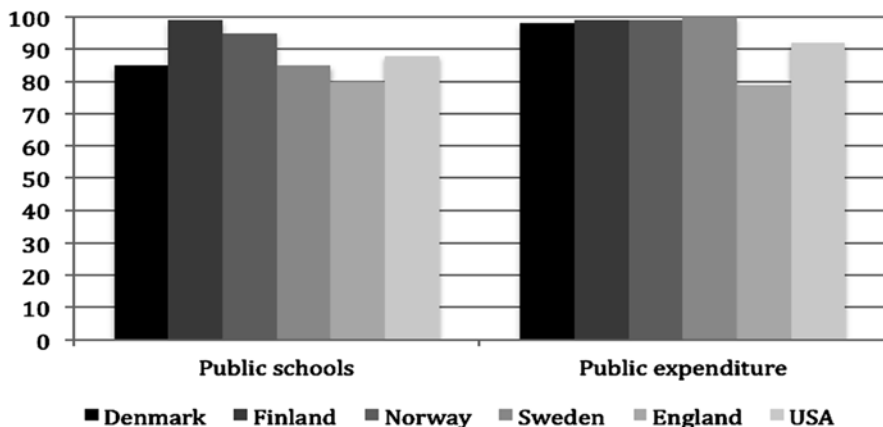
[1] It is worth noting that numbers are themselves subject to interpretation. The ones used here are taken from the World Bank tables, but if we use Eurydice (2012) we see that public expenditure in Denmark is 92 rather than 97. 5 % and in England 69 rather than 78.7 %. The numbers of course are based 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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