Chapter 3
Finnish Superintendents Are Striving with a Changing Operational Environment

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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

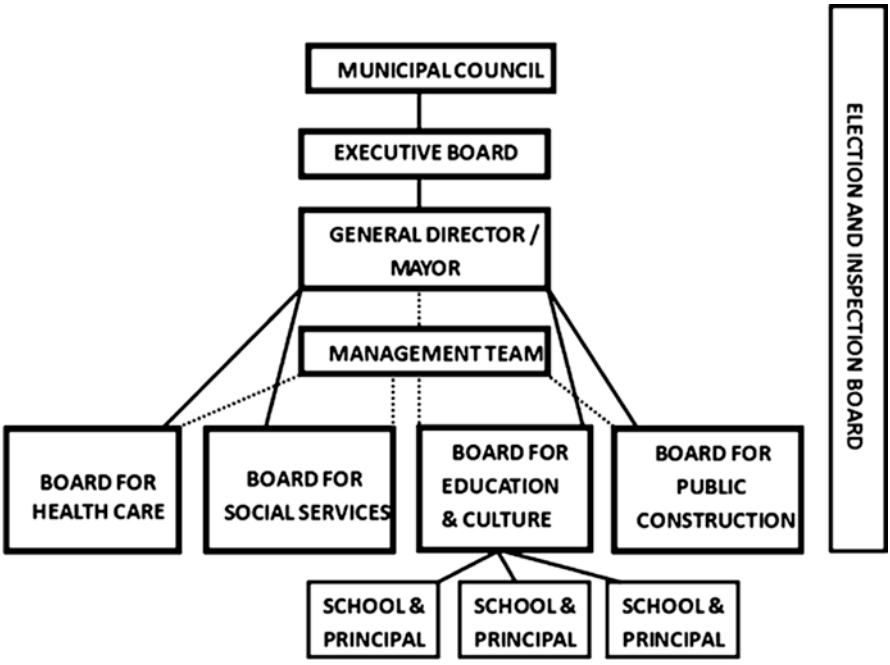

Fig. 3.1 A traditional basic municipality structure (Risku et al. 2014)

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 multiprofessional 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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