

School Governance in Switzerland: Tensions between New Roles and Old Traditions

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Abstract

This article analyses school governance in Switzerland. It elaborates on the different actors involved, their roles and functions, and how these change as school governance in the cantons changes. Quality management is identified as a core activity at all levels and for all actors involved in school governance. In these re-structuring processes, various conflicts and tensions between and within groups of actors become evident. In particular, the governing body experiences an overlap of its tasks with those of other actors. Models to modify the roles and functions of the school governing body on the meso-level are discussed as it becomes clear that all the other actors at both macro- and micro-levels are professionalizing and becoming more differentiated in their functions.

Keywords

administration, leadership, management, schools

Introduction

Over the past few years, issues related to school governance have become increasingly relevant in Switzerland. The Swiss cantons seek appropriate governing models through which the goals of the education systems can be achieved more effectively and efficiently. Numerous efforts aim at re-designing the governance of schools with its various levels and their interrelationships. The result of these efforts is a process—in some cantons a slow one and in others more fast-paced—of reconfiguring the leadership and management structures and processes across the macro-, meso- and micro-level of school governance. At the macro-level, it is the cantonal education authority, at the meso-level, it is the municipal council and the governing body of the school, and on the micro-level, it is the school leadership (principal[ship] and site principal[ship]) and its senior management team. Due to these restructuring processes, a number of tensions and frictions have emerged.

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The intention of this article is to analyse school governance in Switzerland. It first explains and analyses the different actors involved, their roles and functions, and how these change as the school governance in the different cantons changes. Quality management is identified as a core activity at all levels and for all the various actors involved in school governance. In this re-structuring, various conflicts and tensions between and within groups of actors emerge. In particular, the 'governing body' experiences an overlapping of tasks and responsibilities with those of other actors. The article then discusses models that modify the roles and functions of the school governing body at the meso-level as it becomes clear that all the other actors on the macro- and micro-levels are professionalizing and becoming more differentiated in their functions.

The analysis draws on a review of the relevant literature, presentations and discussion at three symposia with representatives of the actors of the various levels from different cantons of Switzerland, and a detailed case study of one canton undertaken by the author and colleagues and reported elsewhere (Feldhoff, Huber and Durrer, 2009), which used qualitative as well as quantitative data gathering and analysis (for example, two surveys, each of them specified according to the different groups of actors).

Actors in School Governance

The Swiss education system has a federal structure, with responsibility for the school system lying with the 26 cantons (Criblez, 2007a). Federal law relating to education is very limited and mainly refers to vocational education (Stöckling, 2006). There are therefore 26 education systems in Switzerland. Moreover, the cantons vary according to size and number of schools. Some have 20 schools, others have more than 400 schools (educa, 2010).

The cantons have laid down their own public school systems and established their own school laws. A number of cantons choose to pass on the duty of establishing and maintaining kindergartens and compulsory schools (1st to 9th grade) to the local municipalities (see, for example, Fend, 1992). In these cases, the municipalities have considerable freedom in decision making. This freedom might, however, in some cases be limited by financial and legal stipulations. There is no singular governmental unit, such as a federal ministry or department of education. However, the 26 cantonal ministers of education together constitute a political body that carries out the work that the confederation is charged with, for example launching inter-cantonal projects. The work of the CDIP is based on a group of legally binding, intercantonal agreements (known as concordats).

In May 2006, the Swiss population voted massively in favour of modifying the Constitution so as to oblige the Confederation and the cantons to coordinate their actions and collaborate more closely in the field of education from primary school to university. One key aspect was the will to fix the duration of each level of education and the specific objectives to be attained by pupils at the end of each level. (educa, 2010)

In each canton, there is a different number of levels of political decision making (Rhin, 1998; Rhin, Widmer, Roos, Niederöst, 2002; Oelkers, 2004, 2009; Trachsler, 2004; Büeler, 2007; Roos, 2007; Criblez, 2008). The canton-run school system is administered by the canton parliament with the government (in Swiss German: *Regierungsrat*). In some cantons, furthermore, a council of education (*Bildungsrat* or *Erziehungsrat*), which is elected by the canton parliament, has more specific responsibilities. All cantons have an education authority (*Direktion für Bildung/Erziehung*) with various offices for different school types (such as, *Amt für Volksschule* for primary education). In most of

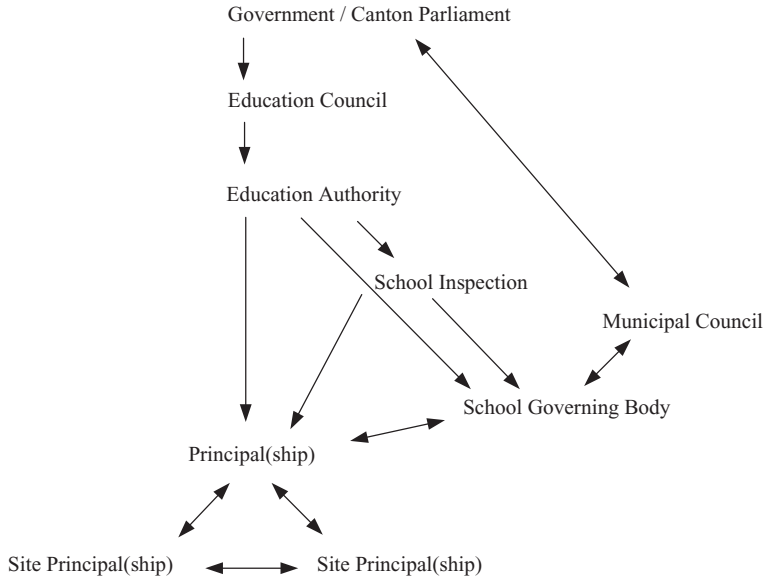


Figure 1. Various actors in school governance in Switzerland

the cantons, school inspection is being established, sometimes as part of the education authority and sometimes as a separate unit operating independently of the education authority.

At the meso-level, the municipality, it is the governing body (*Schulpflege* or *Schulkommission* or *Schulrat*), comprising local representatives and typically not professionals in education, that is responsible for the supervision of a single local school or several schools belonging to the municipality in most cases. The members of the governing body in several cantons are assigned to their positions via democratic election, in others they are appointed by the municipal council, and they work as honorary members. At the micro-level, the idea of having principals in charge of schools is relatively new in Switzerland. It has been implemented at various times and varies in different cantons and types of school. Principals and principalship were established fairly recently, within the last 10 years. One canton still does not have principals at all. The status of school leaders (principals and site principals and their deputies or sometimes senior management teams) varies considerably. In some cantons, the municipalities have a central school governance function, while the individual schools within those municipalities only have a school governing body but no principal(ship). This situation is changing now, but still, in Switzerland the role of principal(ship) is very varied (Maag Merki and Büeler, 2002; Huber and Wehrli, 2011).

In the following sections, more detailed information is provided about the different actors, such as the education authority, the inspection of schools, the school governing body, the municipal council, school leadership (which in Switzerland refers both to principal[ship] in charge of several schools and site principal[ship] in charge of only one individual school [site]), and the tensions among these groups of actors (Criblez, 2007b; Altrichter and Maag Merki, 2010).

The Education Authority

The state-run supervision and inspection of schools is usually exercised by the cantons via the education authority. In each canton, the education authority is organized differently. These education

authorities vary with regard to their designation, role, function, responsibilities, organizational forms, structures, processes and tasks. The education authority is generally responsible for the supervision of teaching practice and the application of the teaching curriculum as well as for guiding the processes of school reform or school development.

From a legal perspective, the tasks of education authorities generally include the supervision of schools and teachers as well as the legal control of the municipality's involvement (Avenarius and Heckel, 2000). According to Strittmatter (1995), in Switzerland, historically speaking, four basic functions may be defined as the main tasks of the education authority as follows.

- (1) Rules and regulation control—ensuring that the people responsible for the schools comply with requirements, writs and laws.
- (2) Employment matters/human resources—dealing with issues of personnel selection, promotions, employee appraisals, relocation or the erratic behaviour of officials.
- (3) Systemic quality evaluation—to improve and develop the quality of educational work at the individual teacher's level, sub-systems in the school and the school system as a whole.
- (4) Encouraging individual learning processes—to support the personal development and the career planning of the individual teachers.

It is argued by Trachsler and his colleagues (Binder and Trachsler, 2002; Trachsler 2007; Trachsler and Nido, 2008) that the education authority focuses more on administration and control than on the (educational/pedagogical) support of individual schools and teachers. The education authority acts mostly by means of instruction and control. Consultation and cooperation thereby play a subordinated role. The main processes are bureaucratic and administrative actions.

Over the past couple of years, the purpose of the education authorities of the cantons has begun to change. Education authorities as actors in school governance processes have increasingly become the focus of professional, and also to some degree public, concern and attention. They are in transition as far as their designation, structures and key processes are concerned. These changes are influenced by reforms encompassing increased decentralization and deregulation, not just at the meso-level but at the micro-level as well. More important is the shift from governance structures focusing on input and throughput to those focusing on output: new public management (Ferlie, Ashburner, Fitzgerald and Pettigrew, 1996) is high on the agenda in several cantons and is already implemented to a certain degree in some (Maag Merki and Büeler, 2002; Büeler, Buholzer and Roos, 2005; Criblez, 2007b; Oelkers, 2009).

The challenge for the education authorities is to combine different purposes and tasks, among them their functions of administration and control, but also guidance and support. In Switzerland, it is becoming increasingly common to see education authorities developing in ways that include the aspect of consultation with schools and their professionals (principals and teachers).

Brockmeyer (2007) describes the current educational situation in Germany, but it fits the Swiss context as well. He observes an ambivalence: on the one hand, there exists a flexibility of organizational and curriculum matters and educational work in general in the schools, but, on the other hand, there is a rigour of structures and procedures in the school system. These two realities have the greatest potential to clash when it comes to school inspection and the support of schools.

Arguably, schools, particularly in a system with a greater degree of self-governing, need professional support. Rolff (1998) regards the development of the education authority as a service within which a support system is a central feature. Brockmeyer (1998) describes the consequences of this need as follows: new forms of competences and professional behaviour have to be

developed. As a consequence, new structures and processes are needed for this support function. Gampe and Margies (1997) observe that the executives of the education authority are engaged in tasks of individual consultancy work and of organization/system counselling.

In practice, the support function focuses more strongly on the school as an organization, rather than on the individual teacher. In this context, exercising the function of support requires management know-how and leadership qualities in order to maintain and strengthen the school's capacity for internal self-reflection and problem solving. As a consequence, adequate professional development opportunities are necessary for all actors involved, including the education authority because the most important 'tool' of the education authority is support (Avermarius, 2001, cited by Weitzel, 2002: 332). Within the framework of some projects for example, approaches to school development processes by the education authority were the focus of attention. However, it has become evident that while the schools needed support for the organization of school development processes, first the actors of the education authority involved would have to develop competences and gather experiences in forms and processes of guidance and support (Buchen and Burkard, 2002).

School Inspection

In several cantons, the function of school evaluation or school inspection is segregated from the education authority. A separate department was established to inspect schools. In other cantons, school inspection is still integrated in the education authority, but some separation remains as different people are responsible for the different tasks. However, sometimes, particularly in small cantons, the same people exercise both, potentially, conflicting roles.

In the cantons that have established a separate unit of school inspection, it is argued, that owing to the new governing requirements there is a need to formally differentiate between, first, the traditional function of administration, second, the recently increased function of support, and third the new inspection and external evaluation. Thereby, the school inspection is part of the introduced shift from input and throughput-oriented management towards the new public management with output-oriented governing. Moreover, compared to the previous method of school supervision, schools in these cantons now are only evaluated as a whole, for which the focus has shifted from the individual teacher to the school as an organization. There are still classroom visits, but the teachers are not evaluated individually in great detail.

The following functions of school supervision can be exercised by the school inspection (Brägger et al., 2005; Brägger, Bucher and Landwehr, 2007; Oelkers, 2009):

- (1) Monitoring school quality for accountability. A system for monitoring the quality of the schools and the system has been established for the purpose of accountability using systematic external evaluation conducted according to research-based criteria. The monitoring function has two levels of focus. The first level is the school itself. The evaluation of the school provides information about the school's quality according to defined areas using a quality framework model. The second level is the system. By aggregating the results of the individual schools on a cantonal level, system monitoring is an instrument for accountability, which provides information on the quality of the entire public school system in the canton to professionals and the public.
- (2) Providing feedback for improvement. By reporting the results of the external evaluation back to the schools, information is provided about their level of performance, focusing on the school's strengths and weaknesses. Through this process, so-called 'blind spots' may be uncovered that

a school was unable to identify by means of an internal evaluation. Moreover, in some cantons, schools gain information about where they stand compared to other schools. Thus, the individual school is offered external information for quality development that adds to the internal quality assurance. Ideally, this feedback results in an internal quality improvement process that is integrated into other school development processes. The education authority can also use the resulting data to support individual schools. By aggregating the monitoring data, the education authority also gains information, which it can use to improve the overall school system.

As a result of the introduction of the external evaluation, the tasks of the education authority have also changed (Binder and Trachsler, 2003). One of the new tasks is to provide guidance and support to the individual school and the governing body about establishing an internal quality management system for the school and about systematic school development. In some cantons, after the external evaluation, the education authority sets goals for school development activities together with the schools, in order to improve identified weak areas. This goal-setting shifts the focus from the process towards the outputs and outcomes and changes the range of actions of the education authority. They became more complex (Dubs, 1995, quoted by Brägger et al., 2007).

The Governing Body

In Switzerland, the municipality has traditionally played an important role in public schooling. Today, it is still taken for granted that the public schools are also financially supported by the municipalities. Because of this relationship, there was a need to establish a governing body at the municipal level whose role is to protect the interests of the citizens in the municipality (Kussau, 2005). The governing body is therefore established with representatives of the local public as members, in some cantons elected by the public, in other cantons appointed by the respective municipal council. The governing body executes the requirements of the higher levels of school governance and mediates between the canton's, the municipality's and the school's interests (Büeler et al., 2005; Huber and Feldhoff, 2009; Feldhoff et al., 2010). Moreover, the governing body is expected to ensure that teaching in schools is not influenced by individuals with possibly competing interests. Furthermore, it has to ensure that classes proceed independently of the competing economic, political and also religious interests in the municipality. However, one has to bear in mind that governing bodies themselves tend to be politically oriented and sometimes politically driven. Depending on the political situation, particularly within smaller and more rural municipalities, there may be a tendency towards conservative politics, which can spill over into the school systems. Conversely, in some municipalities, a strong effort to bring in leadership competences from other areas, such as the business sector, can be evident. Additionally, in many municipalities a full-time school secretary's office has been introduced to carry out administrative tasks that support the governing body.

A part of the governing body's responsibility lies in organizational and administrative tasks, which means that in many instances it basically takes over operative school leadership functions (Kussau and Rosemund, 2005). The members of the governing body, however, are often not educational professionals; they are sometimes supported by the canton's education council and the regional school inspection. By law, teachers have the right to voice their opinions. Parents' involvement is generally not that developed (with some exceptions, for example the canton of Bern). Notwithstanding, due to the model of direct democracy in Switzerland, citizens influence school matters at the municipal and cantonal level.

Owing to the new tasks and the external school evaluations as well as the changed functions of the education authority, the classic evaluation and conducting of classroom visits by an institution such as the governing body is no longer required. Furthermore, the governing body has handed over most of the operative leadership functions to the newly introduced principals (see below). Instead of these tasks, the governing body is now primarily responsible for the strategic leadership of the schools and the supervision of internal evaluations. Thereby, it holds the overall responsibility for the governing of the municipal school system. The relationship between the governing body and the principal(ship) experiences friction and tension (Wehner and Güntert, 2008). In many municipalities, it is still the duty of the governing body to make classroom observations for the purpose of strategic observation and involvement, but not in order to assess the individual teacher. Moreover, in some cantons the governing body is responsible for staff employment, student enrolment and, most importantly, the allocation and controlling of financial resources.

The Municipal Council

The governing body is located on the same governing level as the municipal council (*Gemeinderat*). While the municipal council represents the community regarding political matters and holds the decision-making power as to financial resources for the schools given by the municipality, the educational matters are the focus of the governing body. Legally, the governing body prepares the school budget. However, the municipal council has the power to object because it is responsible for the entire budget of the municipality. To a certain degree, the municipalities have to decide on their own the amount of financial resources that will be allocated to the schools beyond the cantonal contribution. Therefore, the governing body is under the influence of the municipal council. This power relationship might be perceived differently depending on whether, as in some cantons, the governing body was elected directly by the local public or, as in other cantons, appointed by the municipal council. In any case, there are sometimes tensions between these two actors.

School Leadership: Principal(ship) and Site Principal(ship)

The status of school leaders with principals and site principals varies to a great extent in Switzerland. Some cantons have an established strategy for school leadership, in the form of principalship, some have had it for 30 years, whereas other cantons have only recently begun to establish school leadership as it is known internationally. In large schools school leadership has been known for a longer time, whereas in small rural communities decisive school leadership functions have been taken over either by the governing body, or not at all, or by staff in a *primus inter pares* role.

Furthermore, major cultural differences may be noticed when comparing the German-speaking region of Switzerland and the French-speaking region. Western Switzerland is characterized by the French tradition, which is rather directorial and obtains a relatively high social standing for school leaders (*monsieur le directeur*). In the German-speaking region, the tradition is more characterized by a Germanic rationality. People tend to have less respect for school leadership, at least in terms of etiquette. This characteristic can be traced back to the old tradition of teacher autonomy. Many committed teachers therefore pointed out difficulties in accepting the establishment of school leadership; they feared a lack of capability among the post-holders, bureaucratic problems and a resulting loss of quality in the schools.

Notwithstanding, over the last two decades, and in some cantons recently, school leadership has been established. This first generation of newly established school leaders was lacking role models.

The new leaders prudently often focused first on administrative tasks, thus taking over work that the teachers used to do and making their job easier. Having gained more acceptance through this work focus, they gradually expanded their roles and increasingly took on organizational and educational leadership functions.

It is important to note that in Switzerland the term 'school' has different meanings. Many so-called schools have several sites. A school can be the organizational unit attached to a site (with a site principal, *Schulhausleiter*) but also to the community of sites that are linked together and governed by the same municipality as well as the same governing body (with a principal). Schools are granted further liberties in designing their internal organization. Their school leadership and teaching staff then work together in developing the school's profile, they acquire a higher standard of quality awareness and begin to develop a process of self-evaluation (Szaday, Büeler and Favre, 1996). The existence of a site principal is supposed to have a great impact on the development processes of individual schools (Bildungsplanung Zentralschweiz, 2000).

The school leadership is now responsible for administration and resources, in particular for the management of the staff. These are tasks that were traditionally conducted by the governing body (Rhyn, 1998). In some of the cantons the governing body may delegate some of these tasks to the school leadership or may negotiate with the school leadership who is going to perform these tasks.

The establishment and enhanced status of school leadership in Switzerland has become readily apparent. In local school development, the school leadership has been emphasized at the organizational level. In efforts towards professionalization, school leaders join groups that represent their interests and are offered school leadership training and development opportunities. Recently master's programmes at universities for school leaders (principals and site principals) have been developed.

Quality Management as a Core Activity

Quality management as both quality assurance and quality development is increasingly regarded as a key area in school governance in Switzerland. Hence, all school governing actors have a distinct role in the quality management of schools in the canton. Therefore, all actors have to develop profound competences in quality management.

At the school level, several initiatives have been undertaken in various cantons to equip their professionals to evaluate and modify their work through different exercises of school development embedded in new forms of school management. The school leadership (principal[ship]) and site principal[ship] is responsible for this task at the individual school level. At the system level, the education authority and school inspection play an important role, as described above, to support and control the individual school and the system as a whole.

According to Dubs (2005), besides the central function of development, quality management fulfils further functions, competing or conflicting with one another, namely to control the effectiveness of an organization and to ensure transparency of quality to the public. Weitzel (2002) argues that, in the German-speaking context, even though accountability is very important in a public school system, up to this point quality control has never been a significant responsibility of the education authority. It is the function of the education authority, however, to set mandatory quality standards. Hence, quality management must include both evaluating the quality and improving the quality, or in other words: quality assurance and quality development.

Quality assurance by means of several forms of evaluation is the focus of governing activities. The educational authority's work thereby is more and more understood as system guidance and support, meaning that the focus lies on the work of the entire school and not on the support of individual teachers. Thereby, the approach to quality assurance of the individual school, changes. This changed focus of the tasks of the educational authority, meaning evaluation of schools rather than observation of teachers, leads to more teamwork. (Translated quote, Burkard and Rolff, 1994: 225)

Thereby, it can be observed that the measurement of quality is seen as one task, and that processes of quality development, in other words guidance and support are equally important tasks. It is essential that the accountability system is built in such a way that it does not prevent development possibilities. Quality assurance has to lead to quality development. Behler (1998) therefore emphasizes that quality assurance, conducted by the education authority, has to be carried out according to the following elements:

- Supporting an assessment of the development of the schools, and guidance and support of those schools—that is, school development planning.
- Supporting the school's internal quality assurance—that is, school internal evaluation.
- Conducting external evaluations, organized jointly with the school, especially by the analysis of achievements, both within the individual school and across schools, the interpretation of these results and the agreement on development projects derived from the evaluation results.

An important question is: How is it possible for the education authority to establish a system, aside from administrative tasks, that achieves quality assurance as well as quality development? Arguably both are core functions of the education authority. So, how can this be achieved? A pure diagnosis surely is not enough. In order for schools to improve their quality, they have to be supported. The schools are asked to connect quality assurance with quality development and the education authority functions as an active support. The support of the education authority is realised through the provision of: time resources, subject resources and financial resources; knowledge in the form of school-based professional development; guidance and support for school development on site; school networking so that schools can learn from one another and support each other.

Rolff (1998) comes to the conclusion that the education authority has to be understood in a broader sense, namely as the realization of public responsibility for the condition and development of the public school system. The education authority provides supervision, administration, planning, guidance and support at the same time (Rolff, 1998). Many actors emphasize that the Swiss cantons are trying to develop the ideal of a professional working relationship between school leadership and the representatives of the education authority.

To sum up, quality management is regarded a core activity in school governance by all actors. Within these tasks various tensions become evident, namely, the tension between internal and external evaluation and the tension between evaluation and development. It is basically the tension between accountability and improvement. Questions arising in this context are: to whom is the accountability system accountable, and who inspects the inspections or what is the contribution of an external evaluation system to school improvement?

Tensions within and between Groups of Actors

Due to the changing roles and functions of the various actors involved in school governance, tensions between and within the groups of actors become evident. These tensions relate to the desire to

maintain the status quo and the traditional task division, particularly by the governing bodies but also to a certain extent by representatives of the education authority. Hence, all the different relationships—no matter whether they are characterized by top-down mechanisms or by professional cooperation and bottom-up initiatives—have to be redefined and new processes have to be established and exercised over a period of time in order to become professional patterns and efficient processes. There is a need to clarify roles and responsibilities, and to agree on the procedures of cooperation.

According to Burkard (1998) a key question in the re-structuring of school governance is whether to divide or combine its guidance and support or controlling functions. One difficulty is that the supporting and controlling tasks cannot be executed by one single person at the education authority. Burkard (1998), as well as Strittmatter (1995), state that that clearly leads to role and functional conflicts. He argues that it is not possible to connect the concurrence of controlling and supporting tasks of the education authority for the schools in an acceptable and helpful way. But also from an institutional perspective: How can school improvement be supported and controlled by the education authority, what possibilities of actions are available in order to assure quality and support the schools? Rolff (1998) argues that in order to execute control and support as one function, a professional understanding of supporting has to be developed and appropriate resources have to be allocated not only for control but also for support.

According to Dubs (2009) controlling and supporting tasks work hand in hand. From his perspective, the criticism of combining the conflicting tasks is weak. Support requires evaluation by means of observation, data and documentation, thereby tightly linking the tasks of controlling and supporting a school. Dubs notices a widespread insecurity regarding the role of the education authority. The partly self-governing school with greater freedom requires a new clarity in the allocation and separation of tasks and competences between the education authority, the governing body and the school leadership. In most countries self-governing is not defined explicitly. That is why problems occur regarding the distribution of tasks, especially for aspects of quality management. As a possible solution, Dubs presents the model of a self-governing school in which the scope of decision making is clearly defined: strategic leadership of the school by the governing body, operational leadership of the school by the school leadership.

In the study looking at the existing governance mechanisms and those favoured for the future undertaken by Feldhoff et al. (2009), representatives of all the actors in one canton were surveyed. All the groups of actors (for example, teachers, principals, representatives of governing bodies, the education authority) claimed to have and to exercise an influence on the way schools are governed. All of them, perhaps not surprisingly, stated that they wanted their influence to increase. The survey clearly shows there is an asymmetrical relationship between a professional principalship and a (mostly) non-professional, yet, in terms of hierarchy, superordinate governing body. This arrangement has potential for conflict. In addition, the relationship between the governing body and the municipal council is potentially conflictual with regard to the duty of accountability and the increasing cuts in public expenditure.

Even though school governance differs from canton to canton at the macro-level and even sometimes within cantons at the meso-level, as well as at micro-level, the school level, certain trends can be identified across the Swiss cantons:

- principals expand their roles and functions;
- education authorities expand their roles and functions;
- governing bodies are being sandwiched between the expanding roles and functions;

- there are overlapping roles and functions, which leads to conflict over decision making power as well as the division of concrete tasks, particularly within the field of quality management.

Overlapping roles, functions and tasks creates conflict as much as changes to roles and functions do. Clearly, the success of these transitions also depends how the individual actors themselves as professionals fulfil and live up to the potential of their roles and functions. Figure 2 shows the changes in the roles and functions and the increase in overlap with the governing body.

According to Trachsler (2010), school systems are exposed to pressure to adapt and pressure to perform. They react to this pressure with internal differentiation. Specialists replace generalists. Organizational complexity increases and so does the effort required to achieve internal coordination and cooperation. At the same time, there is a pressure to develop more efficient school governance structures and processes. The current pressure to save costs additionally aggravates the situation of school governance.

Moreover, Trachsler (2010) states that the reforms of school governance based on the theory of new public management models are bringing about a situation where the balance of autonomy and control has to be evened out anew. The consequences on the side of the education authority are to pass decision making capacities and the scope of action on to the schools and at the same time intensify measures of control. The schools have to pay a price for their increased autonomy, namely increased external control and accountability. A development towards even more autonomy for the schools and/or more control by the administration appears problematic. The restructuring of school governance appears to have hit an impasse. New models are needed. He argues that today's general climate is rather disadvantageous for further structural reforms.

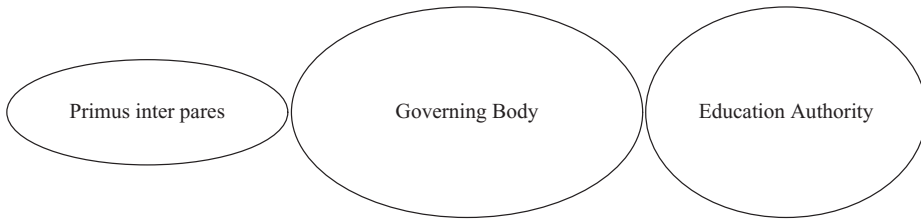
Steps towards a professionalization of functions in school governance are evident. Trachsler (2010) claims that at the moment critics fear that the professionalization of functions poses the danger of developing towards an 'expertocracy' exercised by a great number of 'armchair strategists' and 'bureaucrats'. The professionalization of functions of school governance does not first and foremost serve the purpose of developing certain positions towards 'professions', but rather to keep the internal balance among the different cadre positions (authority, support, evaluation and finance) as well as serving a legitimizing purpose towards the community and society. Other motives for professionalization are a personal interest in one's professional development and one's individual career plans.

Models to Modify the Roles and Functions of the Governing Body

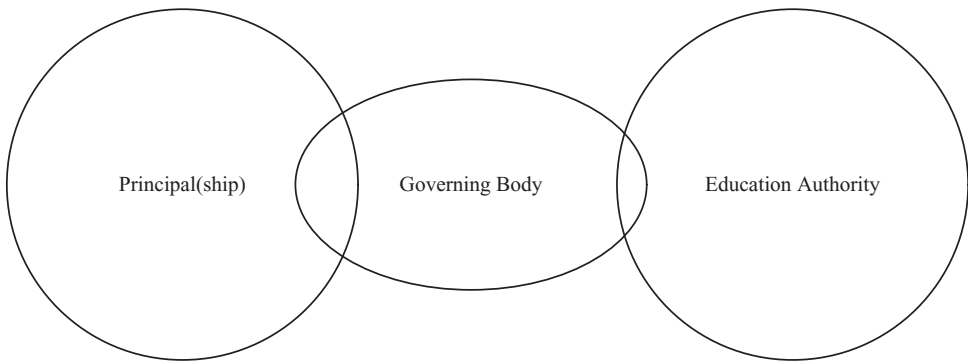
Given the manifold tensions, there is a need to focus on the governing body when making further efforts to re-structure the governing of the public school system. Many cantons are well aware of this need and consider various cautious or more radical strategies of reforming the role and function of the governing body. Some suggest optimizing it (Stadelmann, 2007; Wehner and Güntert, 2008), and others re-designing it completely (Binder and Trachsler, 2003).

In the following four sections ideal models for modifying or re-designing the governing body are briefly outlined, which take into account the tasks, functions, steering-models, problems and tensions as well as recommendations, ideas for optimizing and reforming the governing body as well as international research (Büeler, 2005; Feldhoff et al., 2009; Huber and Feldhoff, 2009; Feldhoff et al., 2010; Huber, 2010; Trachsler, 2010). Generally speaking, it has to be taken into account that no single model fits every governing structure. According to Mintzberg's (1992) situational approach, the governing structure and processes have to match the situation, that is, in this setting, the context

The old model



The new model



The very new model

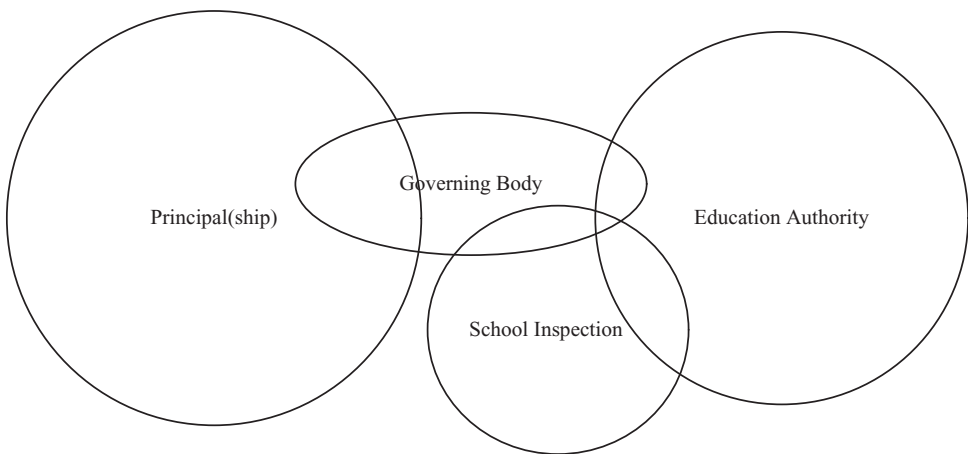


Figure 2. Changing roles and functions of the key actors of school governance in Switzerland

of the canton and the municipality. These contexts are varied since school governance is different from canton to canton, due to their sizes (or those of their municipalities), their history and traditions, and their specific (educational) challenges.

Model 1—Professionalization of the Governing Body

According to this model, the governing body is professionalized. It is chaired by a team of professionals with competences in strategic leadership, knowledge of and experience in education, either having a teaching license or/and a degree in education or similar expertise. They are paid by the municipality, yet they are not subordinate to it, as they are elected directly by the local public. Two or three non-professional members of the governing body support them, have the veto right, and ensure that the governing body is rooted in the community. The body is in charge of: appointing the school leadership (the principal); strategic leadership in terms of mission statements, school programme, goal setting, concepts of quality management, internal evaluation (in cooperation with the school leadership) and the budget; and is accountable to the municipal council. This model meets the demands of professionalizing all actors in the school system, making the governing body a competent partner for school leadership, yet still maintaining its roots in the municipality and its democratic tradition. Yet, within the governing body, the professionals might dominate the non-professionals too much and the position of an elected member will probably not be very attractive. The overlapping of duties with the municipal council, and more importantly with the education authority and school inspection, is only reduced, not eliminated. Therefore, a very good coordination of actions is essential.

Model 2—The Governing Body as an Advisory Board

Here, the governing body remains a committee of non-professionals and concentrates on advisory tasks in terms of providing a ‘think tank’ for the school leadership, thus supporting the school, and developing strong links between the community and the school. Strategic work is restricted to appointing the school leader. The decision-making power rests with the school leader. The budget, for instance, is set up by the school leader, agreed on by the governing body, and approved by the municipal council. Beyond exercising this responsibility, the governing body has no further powers. The tasks of the governing body do not demand professionalization, and the duties of the school leadership and those of the governing body are clearly divided. The need to coordinate actions is reduced. However, becoming a member of the governing body may lose even more attractiveness, as its tasks shift from leadership and supervision to guidance and support.

Model 3—Integrating the Governing Body into the Municipal Council

In this model, the governing body is no longer an independent committee, but is a department of the municipal council. As a consequence, the governing body is supported by or even becomes part of the municipal administration. With this model the democratic roots of the school in its municipality are preserved, there is a clear divide between the tasks of the school leadership and those of the governing body/the municipal council department, and the complexity of coordinating action among the different actors is reduced. The focus is on administration, particularly financial aspects. The governing body does lose its independence and its link to the local public and may eventually risk being abolished completely.

Model 4—Hybrid Model: Optimizing the Governing Body

This model suggests that the existing governing body is optimized by improved training (professionalization) and monitoring of its new members, intermittent supervision of the local task profiles of the members by the education authority, obligatory monitoring of the education authority's reports regarding school controlling and further steps gained by system evaluations. Thus, the remains of an understanding of 'the educative' as the 'fourth power in the state', an idea that is deeply rooted in Switzerland, may be maintained, not for nostalgic reasons, but for safeguarding the public school system as 'schools of the people for the people'. This model seems to be the most pragmatic and realistic one. Divisions and differentiations of functions should be defined more clearly by means of job descriptions and other instruments such as schedules of responsibilities (organizational charts) on the cantonal or municipal level.

Conclusion

In Switzerland, the state of school leadership is very different to that of many other countries. While the role and function of school leaders have been emphasized as important for the quality of schools, many cantons had not until recently explicitly had a school leadership (with a principal), and instead the governing body with its non-professional members both managed and governed the schools.

In Switzerland, governing bodies were set up long before other countries established similar leadership committees or boards of trustees. By establishing school-based or school-site school leadership and management through launching projects such as self-governing of schools (projects such as *Geleitete Schulen*), tasks and functions that used to be exercised by the governing bodies are now assigned to school leadership personnel (principals and site principals). This change has led to a shift regarding the tasks of the governing bodies. Tensions and frictions have resulted. In addition to these changes, school leadership by principals and site principals is becoming increasingly professionalized by extensive training and development programs including certification by universities of teacher education. Tensions become increasingly evident in relation to decision-making power. This new way of assigning tasks is based on an assumed division between strategic leadership (at the level of school governing bodies) and operative leadership (at the level of school-site leadership and management). However, it is often subject to interpretation and argument about what is 'strategic' and what is 'operative', and this is perceived differently by the different actors of the local leadership and management and the school governing body according to the topic and its importance. These varied interpretations may in part lead to an ambiguity of roles and to conflicts between and within the (groups of) different actors.

In Switzerland, as in many other countries, the education authorities clearly divide up the various functions and tasks they are responsible for. In particular, school inspection has become more and more expanded. An overlap has been created between the education authorities, which have taken on increasingly diverse tasks, and the professional school inspection, resulting in a reduction in the function of governing bodies. The governing body also loses a certain degree of its former controlling function. Within this general re-structuring of the governing in the Swiss cantons, the school governing bodies experience far reaching pressures regarding both their political and educational function. The cantons are faced with the question of whether the school governing bodies as elements of a political and social system with direct democratic roots in social institutions are historically outdated or whether they can be given new relevance and functions by yet another re-structuring.

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