

PRINCIPALSHIP IN AUSTRIA: BALANCING ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPROVEMENT

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Abstract. The Austrian school system has historically been characterized as highly bureaucratic and strongly regulated. Several policy approaches have been made to counteract the numerous parallel structures and too little congruence in task-orientation and responsibility. A shift towards more school-based innovation has initiated a slow movement towards more decentralization and deregulation, but principals are still confronted with restricted autonomy, which makes it difficult for them to empower their faculty for collective action. The introduction of national testing has led to some incremental changes. However, deep-rooted cultural mechanisms continue to successfully promote decentralization and stability as the most highly valued sources of educational quality. Austria's participation in international projects has given a lift to mobilizing research potential on school leadership. Recently, the transformation of school governance has become a major focus of educational reform, which has stimulated various investigations to explore and evaluate various national strategies of school governance with respect to their contribution to quality development of the school system. Research focuses on the role of principals as change agents, for example in evidence-based measures such as standardized testing or school inspection as an external evaluation.

Keywords: leadership development, system transformation, FieldTransformation³⁶⁰, leadership for learning, leadership culture.

THE FRAMEWORK OF THE AUSTRIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The beginnings of the Austrian school system go back to Empress Maria Theresa and the school reforms in 1774 which provided schooling for everyone for six years of compulsory education. The legal basis for the current school system derives from a comprehensive Education Act in 1962, which raised the period of compulsory education to nine years. The Austrian system has until now been a hybrid, neither centralized nor decentralized. However, the hybrid model still is highly centralized and hierarchically organised, when

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viewed from the perspective of an individual school or from the perspective of principals, and is still one of the few systems that is selective at a very early age. The federal system of education governance requires the national government to set the framework and provincial governments to enact detailed legislation. The federal government has full responsibility concerning the employment and conditions of teachers and other staff working in schools. However, responsibility for actual employment is more complex, with provincial governments responsible for staffing some schools (primary, general secondary, polytechnic, and vocational schools), while others (the general academic-track lower and upper secondary school as well as vocational upper secondary schools leading to the school-leaving Matura examination) are administered at the federal level.

Compulsory schooling starts in September following a child's sixth birthday and lasts nine school years. All children must attend kindergarten for at least one year before starting primary school. The education of children after the kindergarten is divided into three main categories; primary, lower secondary and upper secondary. After four years of primary school (Volks-/Grundschule), the lower Secondary education lasts for four years and is split between the Neue Mittelschule (general secondary; NMS) and Allgemein bildende höhere Schulen (academic secondary; AHS), the AHS is further divided into Gymnasium (general), Realgymnasium (science-based) and Wirtschaftskundliches Realgymnasium (home economics). After the NMS, a one-year polytechnic course may lead to school leaving age or students may go to a vocational school, including on-the-job training. Vocational Schools build on a dual system of education: apprentices split their learning time between studying in schools and the world of work. Upper secondary education lasts for four to five years and is divided into the following types of Allgemeinbildende höhere Schulen: Gymnasium, Realgymnasium, Wirtschaftskundliches Realgymnasium and Oberstufen-Realgymnasium. Vocational secondary education lasts five years. All streams lead to the school-leaving exam (Matura), which gives access to higher education (for example: university or teacher education college).

Principals of the schools, who are selected by either the region or federal level, have only limited authority over budgets, curriculum, and personnel (Schratz, 2012). As is the case with government administration in general, responsibilities for legislation and implementation in school education are divided between the Federation and the Länder. This division is made as follows:

- The Federation has exclusive responsibility for legislation and implementation with regard to the academic secondary schools and the

entire field of general upper secondary education, intermediate and upper secondary vocational education and training for kindergarten teaching staff and non-teaching supervisory staff, and with regard to the conditions of service and staff representation rights of teachers at these schools/colleges.

- The Federation is responsible for legislation, and the individual *Länder* are responsible for implementation with regard to the conditions of service and staff representation rights of teachers at public sector schools of compulsory education.
- The Federation is responsible for basic legislation, and the *Länder* are responsible for issuing and implementing laws with regard to the organizational structure of federal education authorities in the *Länder* and the external organization of public sector schools of compulsory education. External organization includes the development, construction, maintenance and approval of schools, but also the establishment of pupil numbers per class and teaching periods. All basic legislation has a framework character and is expressed through implementing laws promulgated by the *Landtage*, the legislative bodies at *Länder* level.
- The *Länder* are responsible for legislation and implementation as, for example, with regard to nursery schools.

Individual schools and their principals have little autonomy; they have some budgetary autonomy and they are allowed to adapt the curricula to their needs within limited boundaries. The teachers are responsible for the interpretation of curricular guidelines. Consultations play an important part in the Austrian school system. Through the *School Education Act* (*Schulunterrichtsgesetz*, 1974), the stakeholders – teachers, parents, students and the community – are invited to participate in decision-making. As part of social partnership, teacher unions, relevant organisations and groups have a strong influence on decision-making. Since the school year 1993/94, the 14th amendment to the *School Organization Act* [*Schulorganisationsgesetz*, 1993] has empowered the respective school partnership body (*Schulgemeinschaftsausschuss* [SGA]: a school committee comprising teachers', pupils' and parents' representatives or *Schulforum*: school forum in compulsory schools in which only teachers' and parents' representatives are involved) to issue its own curricular regulations autonomously by a two-thirds vote. This means that main focal points may be chosen within a given framework and schools can develop their own profile. Provisions governing school autonomy at pre-vocational schools enable a flexible response to the vocational interests of pupils and the respective demands of the particular region.

Nowadays, the challenges for educational development lie in the recent societal development – especially concerning culture, science, technology, environment, law, and economy. The number of immigrants with different cultural background has influenced the population at large and schools in particular. People have to learn to live in a democratic way and have to recognize and enact their social responsibility. To be able to develop these competences, self-assurance and self-organized learning and acting have to be encouraged. The pupils should acquire abilities and competences necessary for their further education and profession, for example the ability to cope with communicative and cooperative tasks.

Although Austrian schools have generally had a good reputation in the Austrian public according to yearly ratings, the results of PISA and TIMSS studies had brought about heated political and public discussions about the quality of schooling in Austria. As a consequence, similarly to other European countries, a stronger evidence-based governance system has been introduced and in the future a lot more accountability and reporting systems will be introduced. The discussion progressed from a strong idea of accountability and minimum achievement standards in the early 2000s towards a development-oriented approach from the middle of the 2000s, but more strongly since 2010. The focus was high on the subject of teaching and the school-level improvement and development. Currently, the well-established development-oriented educational standards system may be changing to a more performance-oriented standards system. In the near future, the new system will be tested on the level of individual student performance at different stages of the system and will not primarily address the level of teaching or schools anymore.

PRINCIPALS BETWEEN FEDERALISM AND CENTRALISM, BETWEEN CONTROLLER AND DEVELOPER

For a long time, the principal's role in Austria had been characterised by hierarchical positioning within a centrally governed school system. The role of the principal hinged largely on the school administration's governance concept at the time, which was marked by the school as a subordinate administrative authority. The school leader, as a "primus inter pares", served to implement official regulations as smoothly as possible (Schratz, 1998; Wiesner *et al.*, 2015). By the end of the 1970s, the epistemic interest of the principals was to focus on improving the quality of lessons and schools as an educational action-and-organisational unit (Fend, 1987). In those days, the individual school and its quality were seen as the "motor" or "driver" of

school improvement. Additionally the improvement systems were based on organisational development theories (e.g., Dubs, 1994; Scharmer & Käufer, 2013) and emphasis was put on the principal's leadership and personnel responsibility as central elements. The role of the principal changed to forming, developing and designing an organizational culture, which has a strong influence on the quality of organizational learning (Senge, 1990). Following the data-based paradigm after the first large-scale international comparative studies, principals became highly responsible for stability within the system and for the performance of their school in order to embed processes effectively and sustainably in output-measurements (Schratz *et al.*, 2016). The implementation of the national educational standards began in 2008/09 and their regular assessment in 2011/12. This formally marks the shift in policy towards a focus on outputs and school development and making it transparent that the required outputs comprise being able to use knowledge and competences. The feedback system through the educational standards broadens the scope of evidence-oriented quality development for schools and teachers (Schratz *et al.*, 2019). Now the principal has to advise the teachers and to monitor the performance of the pupils/students.

Nowadays principals in Austrian schools are either civil servants of the federation (academic secondary schools or secondary vocational schools) or of the federal state (primary, general secondary schools, special schools or vocational schools). The principal is the head of a school, and all teachers and other staff directly report to him or her. He or she is responsible for the running of the school and the interactions between teachers, parents, and pupils. Moreover, he or she has to communicate with superiors (e.g. inspectors) and stakeholders outside school. The principal is responsible for the quality and improvement of the school through quality assurance systems, for running the school like an organization, and for the school performance through the output of the learners. In other words, principals are in a hybrid position - neither controllers nor developers, but both.

Further duties of the principal are laid down in the *Civil Service Code* and the *Province Teacher Service Code*. He or she runs the school, corresponds with the school authorities, and advises teachers on their teaching and educational work. Principals may inspect instruction being given in the classrooms at any time, in order to monitor the quality of teaching. The principal is responsible for implementing laws and other legal regulations as well as instructions issued by the educational authorities. The principal prepares meetings with school partners and is responsible for executing the decisions made at these meetings. Principals have to adapt the annual budget to the needs of their school. In smaller schools, principals have a

partial teaching assignment, which depends on the number of classes at their school.

The duties and responsibilities of a principal are regulated through laws established by the Austrian Parliament. The principal has to arrange all matters regarding the federal law – except concerns belonging under the jurisdiction of other elements of the school system or of the supervisory school authorities. She or he is the direct superior of all teachers working at the school, and of all other employees. He or she is responsible to run the school and to cultivate the contact between the school, the pupils, the legal guardians, and (at secondary vocational schools) other staff with teaching duties. The principal has to advise the teachers concerning their teaching and their contribution to the education of the children; periodically he or she also has to monitor both quality of teaching and the students' performance.

In schools where a permanent deputy of the principal is appointed, he or she has to assist the principal fulfilling his or her duties. Individual duties incumbent upon this deputy head have to be determined by service instructions given by the Federal Ministry of Education. In schools in which a teacher is appointed for the assistance of the principal, the assistant has to fulfil all administrative duties linked with the pedagogical work in the school. The principal has to take care that all teachers working at the school fulfill their duties in a regular, appropriate, economic, and economical manner. He or she has to guide them, to give them appropriate instructions, to deal with occurring mistakes and grievances, and to see about the adherence to the office hours. The principal has to promote the professional advancement of the teachers, taking into account their performances. As a general rule, the principal has to be present in school during teaching hours. In the case of a temporary absence during teaching hours, he or she has to provide a substitute. At schools with teaching hours in the mornings and afternoons, the school board can shorten the compulsory attendance of the principal, in which case a substitute has to be provided. The principal has to establish a strategic plan for staff requirements and personnel development.

In order to be appointed principal of a school in Austria, a selection process has to be successfully completed for all types of schools. Because of public criticism on too strong an influence of political parties through their affiliated teacher unions policy measures have been undertaken, both on the national and federal levels with a view towards more transparency in the recruiting process. This has led to more competence-oriented selection criteria, such as assessment centres, potential analyses and similar. The introduction of such procedures, which are partly commissioned by private firms, has helped to raise the standards in the selection of school leaders,

but hiring firms or buying software makes the process costly. The new development has also motivated teachers to apply for positions; previously they would not have done so, believing they would not be recruited. Currently, a new, three-stage, nationwide uniform application procedure is being prepared and developed, to be used throughout Austria.

In the past, teachers had to complete a school-based part-time management course with 12 ECTS credits within 4 years after appointment, which should increase professionalism within three to four semesters. The courses are offered in each state by the university colleges of teacher education (Pädagogische Hochschulen), each of which developed individual curricula taking into account a framework set by the ministry in 2008. In the near future, principals will have to earn 20 ECTS credits through the university programme “Leading Schools Professionally – Prequalification” before they can apply for a position. However, the 12 ECTS Course will still be offered in some federal states. Starting in January 2023, from the date of appointment candidates will additionally have to take the university programme “Managing Schools Professionally” (40 ECTS credits), which has to be completed within four to five years. Five years of school leadership experience (as a temporarily trusted school principal) will count as 30 ECTS credits and could replace the prequalification course, while the remaining 10 ECTS will be credited to the course “Managing Schools Professionally”. After a five-year probationary phase school leaders will be appointed permanently. They usually stay at the same school or move up the career ladder by becoming school inspectors.

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL RESEARCH IN AUSTRIA

The research context

Although the national rhetoric in educational policies in Austria deals a lot with principalship and its important role in school improvement, research on school principals has not received a lot of attention in informing both education policy and practice. It seems, that “despite the well-known impact of principals towards school quality improvement, Austrian school research is not strongly developed in the field of school leadership research and therefore has little effect on policy and practice” (Wiesner *et al.*, 2015: 66). It was rather international co-operations which have given special impetus to leadership research. Accordingly, Austria’s participation in international projects such as Leadership for Learning (EU), Principalship Improvement (OECD), Central European Co-operation for Education (CECE), TALIS (Teaching and

Learning International Survey) and EPNoSL (European Policy Network on Principalship) among others, have mobilized research potential on principalship and offered a comparative context for principal research in Austria. A lot of the research on principals is implicit and backpacks on other topics as part of research on governance and school autonomy, school profile development and school development, school quality, and issues of equity (diversity, migration, but also school structures – e.g. early streaming/segregation) and inclusion.

Bryk (2015) argues that, while there are sufficient scientific findings for successful schools and effective teaching, there are few studies or findings on how this data, information and knowledge can be transferred into different contexts and diverse populations for them to actually have a sustainable impact in schools. For him, this dilemma is related to the often-unperceived complexity of our education and school systems, but also to the range of fluctuation in the results (outputs, outcomes) they produce. There have been some more or less promising concepts in the last decades in Austria, which are highly important for principals.

Concepts and findings on principals' role, work and development

Key competences for effective principalship

“What makes a principal successful in the 21st century?” was the fundamental question that researchers investigated in a EU-supported CECE¹ project, in which Austria took part (Révai & Kirkham, 2013). The study with four neighbouring countries focused on the competences principals will need in the future and their development (preparation and training) in five countries (Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia). The result of the 3-year-long co-operation is the first cross-border competency framework based on the research into the expectations of key stakeholders such as principals, teachers, and trainers of principals, educational experts and policy-makers, called Central 5 – the *Central European Competency Framework for Principals*. It defines the knowledge, skills and attitudes a principal is expected to possess in order to be successful in a turbulent and fast-changing world. As such, it encompasses the art and science of leading a school and captures the complexity of their role in the following five domains:

- leading and managing learning and teaching
- leading and managing change

¹ Central European Co-operation for Education

- leading and managing self
- leading and managing others
- leading and managing the institution

The competency framework is based on investigation into principals' opinions and experiences of managing and leading schools. The five domains relate to specific areas of principals' work and integrate competences which are presented as knowledge, skills and attitudes. Knowledge in this competency framework includes facts, information, descriptions or skills acquired through principal education and training or experience. "It can refer to the theoretical or the practical understanding of a subject. Knowledge can be explicit (as with the theoretical understanding of a subject) or implicit (as with practical skill or experience) and can be more or less formal or systematic. A skill in this competency framework is the learned capacity to carry out pre-determined results often with the minimum outlay of time, energy, or both. A skill is the ability that one possesses. General skills would include teamwork, time management, leadership and self-motivation. Specific skills are related to a certain job, e.g. in school management. An attitude is positive or negative evaluation of people, objects, activities, ideas etc.; it is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour." (Révai & Kirkham, 2013: 44)

Positioning leadership in a culture of "Führung"
(Culture of Leadership)

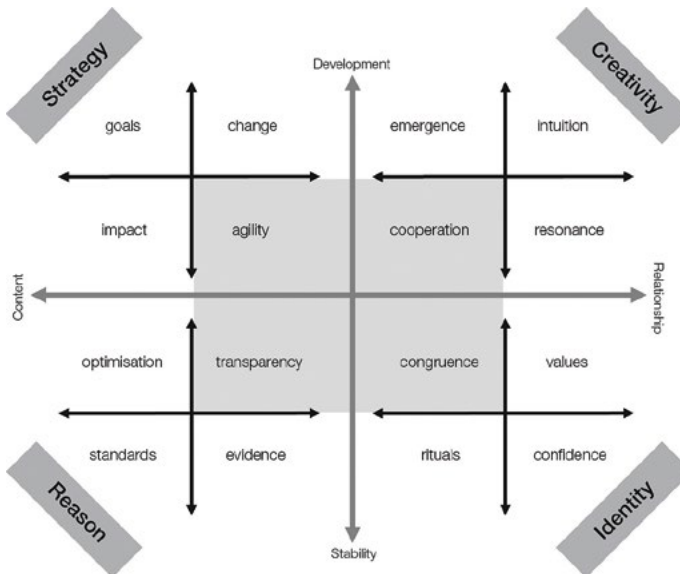
In 2004 the Minister of Education, Science and Culture founded the Leadership Academy (LEA). The original intent was for the LEA to prepare principals "operating outside a hierarchical, bureaucratic structure, with the capacity to act more independently, to take greater initiative, and to manage their schools though the changes entailed by a stream of government reforms" (Stoll, Moorman & Rahm, 2008: 16). Previous research on the role of principals in Austria (e.g. Fischer & Schratz, 1993; Rauch & Biott, 2003; Pool, 2007; Schratz & Petzold, 2007) indicates that competences related to management and leadership form an important foundation for the qualification and professionalization of principals. So the LEA programme was based on theories of action about effective learning-centred leadership, about effective learning of leadership learning, and about effective systems change. A tailor-made research model and instrument, *FieldTransformation*³⁶⁰ (FTF³⁶⁰), has been used in the Leadership Academy (Schley & Schratz, 2010; Stoll, Moorman, & Rahm, 2008; Wiesner *et al.*, 2015; Schratz *et al.*, 2016; Gregorzewski, Schratz & Wiesner, 2018; Wiesner, 2019) to monitor development

of individual progress in the participants' competences and personal mastery. According to Senge (1990), personal mastery is interpreted as a value-based, intrinsic and motivational understanding of individual as well as organizational life. Consequently, personal mastery in the FTF³⁶⁰ aims at the professional self – not just with respect to professional knowledge, but also with respect to one's own understanding as a whole and to self-awareness (Schratz, Paseka & Schrittmesser, 2011).

This culture of leadership in education can be defined as the basis for successful leadership in practice. In the educational context of schools, a "culture of leadership" is understood to be a visionary style of leadership embracing all leadership responsibilities, in which responsibility is shared in order to fulfil and achieve mutual tasks and common goals through personal, social, organisational and systemic as well as value-based, purpose-based emotion, thought and action.

This approach covers a wide range of competences for social and situational actions. FTF360 consists of different fields (quadrants), which are set up between the poles of stability and development on the one hand, and relationships and content on the other. Competence refers to the inherent ability to freely vary between poles and generate knowledge and actions, meaning a certain level of quality that is more highly aggregated and is characterised as an ability to actually handle knowledge and actions (cf. Dewe, 2010). In the FTF model, the first quadrant (bottom left; hereafter clockwise) represents "rational processes" of reason and sanity, the second "strategic processes" of objectives and goals, the third "creative processes" of ambition and creation and the fourth "identity processes" of grounding and values regarding educational leadership [...] (Wiesner *et al.*, 2015: 82). Each quadrant contains four thematic fields. Working with the model renders leaders and researchers an understanding of the respective leadership *culture* in the dynamic framework between stability and development as well as distance (factual content) and proximity (emotional relationship), which determines the space of opportunities for each leadership action (Schratz *et al.*, 2016) with regard to a personal leadership mastery (cf. Fig. 1).

Figure 1. School leadership qualities according to the "FieldTransformation³⁶⁰" model²



According to the theoretical model, leadership and personal mastery are situated within the two axes: On the one hand, principals have to balance their work between the *past* (stability and continuation) and *the unknown future* (development and innovation); on the other hand, they have to achieve the desired or expected results through communication with the people in relations and connections (teachers, students, parents, partners etc.) involved. Successful principals have to be competent in all four quadrants, which means they have to:

- be a visionary, articulate goals and give the direction where the school is going (strategy),
- build organisational effectiveness and a community through standards, norms and rules to achieve expected goals and to gain a commitment within the people (reason),
- show character to live the values which are convincing and support the leadership attitude to create a culture of leadership (identity),

² The "FieldTransformation 360" was developed by a think tank consisting of Wilfried Schley, Michael Schratz, Christian Wiesner, David Kemethofer and Johannes Schley, and based on the theoretical work of Riemann (1961), Ulrich, Zenger & Smallwood (1999), Watzlawick, Beavin Bavelas & Jackson (1967), Thomann (2014), Scharmer (2009), Schley & Schley (2010), Schratz, Hartmann & Schley (2010), Wiesner (2010), Scharmer & Käufer (2013). The model was also developed with reference to the "Central 5".

- facilitate personal engagement of all the actors involved for a resonant and generative way of working and living together (creativity).

The concept of the Leadership Academy (LEA) including the FTF model assumes that school climate and school quality are significantly influenced by school leadership and that school leaders are amongst the most important change agents in schools. Against the background of the social framework, political conditions and new challenges to the school system, school leaders must be competent in dealing with transformation (Schratz, Hartmann & Schley, 2010: 29). In this sense, leadership is a specific attitude and watchful care – *Haltung* (Steinkellner & Wiesner, 2017), directed towards the future, which is to be enacted in the present as leaders have to act in the present by sensing already the future in a given present moment (Scharmer, 2007).

For Stoll, Moorman & Rahm (2007: 27) the Leadership Academy programme (16 ECTS), was “an innovative and carefully crafted response to a need to prepare a large number of school leaders over a short period of time to fulfil their role effectively in an increasingly autonomous system. Blending content and process, it focuses on developing learning-centred leadership and an orientation to systems change through an approach that emphasises building personal capacity in a supportive learning community”.

The importance of reflection in spiral shaped cycling movements. Systematically implemented “quality development leads to a cyclic movement that, if successful, leads upwards in the form of a spiral” (Schratz, Iby & Radnitzky, 2000: 10). The “distance from the target criterion becomes the basis for assessments” (Terhart, 2002: 58) and becomes the centre of interest in order to enable comparative assessments of schools of the same type or with the same prerequisites. The processing cycle of evidence is influenced by various individual, school and external conditions and ideally reflects the development-oriented effect through helical or spiral-shaped evaluation processes (Wurster *et al.*, 2013; Schratz *et al.*, 2019). In particular, the Helmke framework model (2004) corresponds to the school and teaching development and shows the pedagogical benefits of data and information. Following Helmke’s supply-use model (2007), there is, ideally, manifold evidence for school and classroom improvement and development, be it with regard to achievements, competence levels, processes (enjoyment of the subject, etc.), satisfaction or other aspects of school quality at a particular school, which are (1) understood (received), (2) reflected and then (3) could lead to concrete changes (Helmke, 2007) through actions relating to school and teaching development, the (4) effectiveness of which is then evaluated internally. Each of the “individual steps (reception, reflection, action, evaluation)

is a prerequisite for the next step” (Koch *et al.*, 2006: 190). In principle, the model is for principals also “suitable for describing the use of self-evaluation data” (Wurster *et al.*, 2013: 24).

In the course of the Austrian education standard testing stages in 2016, 2017 and 2018, in order to partially examine parts of the model (reception – reflection – action), all school principals at lower secondary and primary school level in Austria were surveyed with regard to school development work with the education standard testing (cf. Wiesner, Schreiner, Breit, Kemethofer, George & Angerer, 2016). The results reinforce the significance of *reflection* in the evidence-oriented school and teaching development (Wiesner, Schreiner, Breit & George, 2018). The reception of evidence heavily influences the reflection work by principals in the secondary school, which in turn has a great impact on action. However, there are no discernible significant direct effects of reception on action (Schratz *et al.*, 2019; Wiesner & Schreiner, 2019). Similar effects have been observed in school principals at primary school level. Evidence can be used as part of a powerful reflection process that aims at understanding, instruction, and mobilisation of processes and actions, in order to improve and develop the school over time (Firestone & Gonzalez, 2007). Reflection work should be understood as value work and cultural work and is a defining stage of the entire process (cf. Helmke, 2004) of school and lesson development and improvement.

Leadership for learning

Schwartz (2013) dealt with the first systematic application of the concept of the Classroom Walkthrough (CWT) in a German speaking country. She sees CWT as a highly effective instrument to monitor and direct lessons to achieve leadership for learning if the principal of the school frequently observes lessons for a short amount of time and thus gets a snapshot insight into the pedagogical work at the school. A principal’s task to affect higher student achievement can only be achieved through the teachers and their actions in the classroom. Her findings point to the fact that successful work with the CWT in schools can trigger dialogue about teaching and learning through efficient and trustful feedback. By putting the focus on all efforts on teaching and learning of pupils and teachers, the principal can get an insight and high-quality data which can be used for school and staff development. The stronger the CWT is linked to the goals of the development plan of the school, the more successful will its implementation be and the more success will this concept have at the actual school.

There are different practices for evaluating walkthroughs. Various forms have developed, depending on the time available, the size of the school, and the school culture: individual feedback, feedback at subject area or grade level, feedback to team-teaching partners or to the entire teaching staff. The short reflective dialogue has proved to be the best form. "The primary objective of the walkthrough is to improve pupils' performance through reflection and the professional development of teachers" (Schwarz, 2011: 30).

So the competences needed for principals in mastering CWT as a leadership-for-learning tool are highly complex. Therefore Schwarz investigated how Austrian principals mastered the implementation of the CWT at their schools. According to her findings, feedback about what the principal had observed in a professional conversation with the teachers proved to be the most important asset in staff development. The aims of these dialogues are twofold: on the one hand, they should encourage the teachers to reflect on their own actions; on the other hand, they should inform the leadership team about how they can support their teachers' progression. The primary aim of walkthroughs lies in the increase in students' achievement through the reflection and the professional development of the staff.

SUMMARY

This chapter on leadership research in Austria has given insight into the Austrian school system which has historically been characterized as highly bureaucratic, strongly regulated in details, hierarchically organized, and little output-oriented. There seem to be too many actors, numerous parallel structures and too little congruence in task-orientation and responsibility. The system is characterized by a strong influence of the social partnership structures, partisan politics, the (teacher) union and the teacher representatives, whereas parents, students, research(ers) and other (less formally organized) actors have little voice (Schmid, Hafner & Pirolt, 2007).

School principals are confronted with conflicting messages from federal (Ministry) and regional (Länder) levels and often experience an overload of disconnected policies, leading to a sense of confusion and uncertainty on the different levels of the school system (regional, district, local levels). This in turn can lead to de-energizing effects of fragmentation, creating leadership dilemmas, and pulling principals into different directions between *sollen* (duty) and *wollen* (desire) (Schratz, 2003).

Although there has been a shift towards more school-based innovation through a slow movement towards more decentralization and deregulation (Schratz & Hartmann, 2009), local school governance and leadership are characterized by a flat hierarchical structure with one principal and varying numbers of teachers; due to a strong focus on one person, leadership is usually not shared by many people. Moreover, principals are confronted with restricted autonomy (finance, curriculum, personnel), which makes it difficult for them to empower their faculty for collective action.

Most of the research on principals in Austria concentrates on the question of what the key competences for effective leadership are in a system which asks principals to lead schools in a system which gradually becomes more autonomous. The answer to this question is based on research which was often done co-operatively with other partners through international projects (e.g. through European Union grants). This is a general feature of research in Austria because of the small size of the country and the limited number of researchers, which gains from internationalization and the comparative perspective.

The second question on principal research in Austria builds on the first one: How effective are national and regional qualification and professionalization programmes in teaching the necessary key competences to newly appointed and experienced principals? The results of the studies give an insight into how principals articulate goals and give the direction for the school, how they create organizational effectiveness and build community to achieve these goals, how they show character to live the values which are convincing and support the leadership attitude and how they facilitate individual engagement among the actors involved.

In more recent times the transformation of school governance has become a major focus of educational reform, which has stimulated various investigations to explore and evaluate various national strategies of school governance with respect to their contribution to quality development of the school system. Since principals play an important role in this transformation process at the school level, some of the research focuses on the role of principals as change agents, for example in evidence-based measures such as standardized testing or school inspection as an external evaluation.

The concepts and findings of the various research approaches have to be seen in the light of reform in stable systems, where policy cultures are closely related to the socio-historical context of a country, and that is why mere policy borrowing does not work easily (Devos & Schratz, 2012). Although schools are locally managed in Austria, the government still decides what constitutes a good school. Therefore the introduction of national

testing has led to some incremental changes. However, deep-rooted cultural mechanisms continue to successfully promote decentralization and stability as the most highly valued sources of educational quality. And principals have to walk the tightrope between federalism and centralization, which will be the dominant challenge in the near future and open up new research questions to be answered.

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