



Country Report Switzerland

Survey of School Leadership Canton of Zurich

The survey is based on a leadership model (concept) which is not limited to the school head, but concerns all levels of school, sees teaching in the centre of all efforts and generates changes (by forming structures).

The data refer to elementary school, i. e. "Volkschule" (years 1 to 9, excluding grammar-school). Examples of good practice will illustrate the survey.

1. Background

Reality of leadership in the educational and political settings of Zurich

Political tradition in Switzerland – and this is, of course, true for the region of Zurich, too – is very critical towards the idea of leadership. In Switzerland, decision-making is a very democratic process with plebiscites. Policies are agreed upon in complicated negotiations. All this is also true for the state schools, which 95 % of the children in Zurich attend. Since the beginning of the 19th century, the public school system has covered six years of primary school and continues until secondary school (divided into three achievement levels) followed by a vocational training or the last years of grammar schools.

Attempts to change this highly differentiated system always failed. Criticism claims that this system distributes educational chances according to social background and is thereby disadvantageous to less education oriented milieus. However, school success in terms of statistics on an international level can be called satisfactory.

This situation has not changed since leadership became an issue and was introduced in schools. The leadership concept was not developed in the public or educational field, but in the field of management development. In the meantime leadership has led to a new organization of schools, but this does not mean any improvement for socially disadvantaged children. In political discussions the demand for equality of chances is raised, but the concern of school quality and

educational standards prevails. So an equal distribution of quality for everybody remains wishful thinking.

2. Context

National context

The Swiss school system is decentralised by tradition. There are no competencies on the national level apart from the curricula for vocational training and the final examinations in grammar schools (Matura). The federal government (national) is not responsible for elementary school (grade 1 - 9). The federal system of Switzerland leaves the school authority to the 26 cantons (similar to the German structure). This is even true for the universities (exception: The Federal University of Technology).

Regional context

The cantons have their own governments, parliaments, and councils. The schools are directed by "Bildungsdirektionen" or "Erziehungsdepartemente" (Educational Directorates), similar to ministries of education in other countries. In the Canton of Zurich a new education act was passed for the elementary school in 2005; teachers' education and salaries rely on their own laws. In Zurich teacher training is organized by the Pädagogische Hochschule (Teacher Training Institute). The Educational Directorate supervises the school generally. The Office for the elementary school ("Volksschulamt") keeps in contact with the schools and the local authorities; it supports them in teacher recruitment and forming classes according to a set standard.

The education act for the elementary school and other regulations define standards for the educational performance (school programme) and quality development. The curriculum is given by the authorities as well as the school material (the canton has its own publishing company and declares text books to be compulsory). Teachers can contribute to the development of teaching materials.

Local (municipal) context

The communities run the school and therefore the local level is of considerable importance. The local educational authorities (“Schulpflegen”, i. e. governing board) of the communities are elected, the candidates being proposed by the political parties. Their tasks are the following:

- supervision of schools, especially of teachers
- financing of schools, e.g. up to 80 % of the teachers’ salaries, payment of teaching materials
- infrastructure (construction and maintenance of school buildings)
- employment of teachers (in consultation with the school heads) and school leaders
- final decision on students careers

There are shared responsibilities – in terms of preparatory work – between schools and authorities, although regulations will be set.

3. School Leadership Concepts and Practices

Conceptual framework

The Zurich model of governance at the communal level has three levels of responsibilities/competencies:

The local educational authority/governing board
Political legitimization, finances, infrastructure and supervision (political leadership)

School leadership (head teacher)
Personnel matters, organisation of the individual school, administration (administrative leadership)

School leaders (head teacher) and school conference (teachers)
School programme, school development, teaching (pedagogical leadership)

This Zurich *concept of school leadership* is a system of shared power or responsibility, which limits personalised leadership. It rather requires leadership on several levels.

Leadership was a consequence of the “effective school movement” when characteristics of effective schools were discovered. School

leadership was considered to be the decisive factor. This stands in contrast to the fact that the elementary school, founded in 1832, which is compulsory for the years 1 to 9, did not know school leaders until the end of the twentieth century. In contrast, the grammar schools and vocational schools have always had (limited) school leadership. They are supervised by a commission and have organisational and administrative competencies; they do not have any responsibilities concerning the staff.

The political introduction of *school leaders* in the elementary school followed economic and financial concepts like New Public Management which gives more autonomy to schools, while at the same time evaluation and accountability are imposed.

These changes were introduced with the Elementary School Act of June 2005. In 2008/2009 all schools established school leaders.

School leadership is traditionally expected to be *administration*: organisation of teaching (from curriculum to special needs measures), very limited budget as well as personnel competencies. The final responsibility remains with the *local school board* which is legitimized by election. A special challenge to school heads is the realisation of parents’ involvement and quality management, secured by *school programmes* and *self-evaluation*.

A clear concept defining the *abilities (qualities) of school leaders* does not exist. Most of the new leaders have been teachers with additional qualifications.

The idea of leadership in a comprehensive way (from school head to teacher) is still limited to running the school. The intention of having people in responsible positions for quality management or special needs cannot be realised due to the small size of schools. The average school in the Canton of Zurich has got 9 classes.

Focus on teaching and learning

Contributing to *teaching* is part of the Zurich leadership concept. There is, however, no direct intervention, but rather cooperation related to teaching. School head and school conference (the teachers) share the leading responsibility. Leadership in the classroom is part of the teacher training programme at the Teacher Training Institute in Zurich.

At the present stage of school development the emphasis on teaching is supported by the Canton (Educational Directorate) since the new policy of support for students with special needs demolishes special classes for this target group. Consequently, the teaching staff will be confronted with a much wider range of abilities in their classrooms (i.e. more heterogeneity).

Means in this process:

- *School programme* and *curriculum* allow for core areas/focus themes, e.g. free or optional subjects are possible.
- The *personnel concept* requires insight in lessons and an assessment of teachers; this is a communal task of school leaders and the communal inspection of the governing board. The school heads visit lessons and talk to the teachers; this may result in further education for individual teachers. Some schools also support mutual visitations of teachers. The evaluation of teachers is standardized; the results can be reflected in the teachers' salaries.
- In the individual school it is *the school conference* (staff) which should be the nucleus for teaching development.
- Schools (school conference and inspectorate) can decide to *teach across classes*; this demands adaptations of the teaching.
- The *renunciation of special classes* (a decision of education directorate) also leads to new teaching concepts.

School leadership is a recent invention in the Canton of Zurich; its establishment is not completed yet. A cooperation of the three leadership levels must develop and the staff must learn to accept the new school leaders. When this is done, school leaders will be able to start their teaching oriented leadership. The new leaders

themselves have to grow into their tasks until they can initiate the changes in their schools.

Restructuring and re-culturing school organisation

Talking about organisation development in the Canton of Zurich means talking about a relatively small number of inhabitants and consequently of small sized schools. So there are no structures like departments or the like; the organisational tasks are delegated to the staff.

Since 2006, when the new education act for elementary schools was put into practice, schools have been asked to:

- reorganize the *responsibilities* on the three mentioned levels; in small communities (see above) there is little to distribute
- write their individual *school programmes*
- start *self-evaluating* on a low scale; this is to prepare for the external evaluation. These are means to improve school quality.
- take first steps to *parent and student participation*

School leaders are forced by the new law to start organisation development and they get support from the cantonal education directorate, which provides plans and a training week.

School leaders have the following means at hand:

- *Competencies* for the development of personnel, e.g. to enforce in-service-training.
- *Organisation structures* are limited to the *school conference*, in some cases there are special teams for special projects.
- *Quality control* (e.g. in self-evaluation) as a basis for development, taking measures; there is also external evaluation to support this.

School leaders face a new task of establishing the leading structures and at the same time have to introduce changes in the class structure (inclusion model). Administration and organisation consume most of the resources.

Setting and negotiating the direction of school development

Dealing with and meeting general expectations are the function of the cantonal curriculum and the cantonal jurisdiction. Input for school development is covered by the inspection, at local

level the school and the authorities are involved in directing school development. The schools have to give account in regular meetings.

Parents, local industry and commerce are not part of negotiating school development. However schools communicate with their parents regularly, parents participate in extracurricular activities (like sports days, project weeks), in the presentation of results as well as festivities. These are well documented in the local press.

The individual school, i.e. its leader, is often confronted with particular interests of parents, which have to be dealt with.

School leaders try to establish relations to the local public, especially to industry and commerce. They are supported by their teachers. The school subject 'religious education' involves the churches as well.

System leadership and cooperating in networks

This is a new field, so there is little experience. One example of networking that has to be mentioned refers to schools undergoing self-evaluation. They join to exchange data and cooperate in the interpretation of results.

Good practice/success stories

The concept of inclusion (applied for demographical or pedagogical reasons) can mean that teachers are faced with three and more age groups in one class room. This structural change requires team teaching (more than one teacher in one class) and new methods of differentiation.

The school leaders have to introduce the following measures:

- defining other responsibilities,
- subsequent planning of the everyday teaching
- organising team teaching and
- initiating joint preparation of lessons

This does not only lead to a change in teaching, it also generates further education for the teachers on the job. This cooperation of teachers in the class may also give an example to the students in a most efficient way (the small schools on the outskirts of Hinwil may serve as a proof).

4. Recruiting and educating school leaders

Recruiting and retention

Usually teachers are trained to become school leaders. Teachers can also train in the field of educational management and thereby qualify for extra tasks allotted to them by the school heads.

Attractiveness

Becoming a school head is a step on the job ladder with extra pay. Once taken, there are the chores of the everyday work, which is more stressing than attractive.

(National) structures of education (pre- and in-service, induction)

There are no national structures; on the cantonal level it is the Teacher Training Institute Zurich (as part of the University of Applied Sciences) which is authorized to train candidates. But interested teachers are free to attend for example institutions of adult education. These courses of further education generate an additional diploma ("Nachdiplom"). The formal requirements follow the Bologna regulations.

The training concentrates on tasks like administration, conflict management and organisation development.

Coaching and other forms of support

Coaching is used when there are conflicts in the cooperation of the different levels and the Teacher Training Institute Zurich offers support to

- Governing boards: clarifying roles in the leading and management processes.
- school leaders: coaching personnel, project management
- school conferences: school programme, team development, conflict mediation
- teachers: coping with heterogeneity and leadership in the classroom.

5. Challenges, areas of innovation and underlying evidence

The success of leadership in schools in Zurich will depend on the cooperation of the three levels involved: governing board – school leaders – school conference. By the new policy the school heads move into a middle position (sandwich), which is known (from management theory) to be the most difficult one.

In order to survive on the middle level it is important that sufficient resources are provided. So the canton offers extra pay for the headmaster and less teaching time. At the moment a fast and efficient organisational development is the precondition that school leaders can concentrate on *teaching development*. Improving the teaching in schools must be focused on and requires a joint effort of the leaders and their staff. The quality of teaching defines the success of a school.

Starting the school leadership programme the headmasters were recruited in their schools where they taught. In the future they should be appointed from outside and thereby be more

independent from personal relations within the staff. There are no initiatives in this direction on the part of the inspectorates.

So far, a school leadership policy (besides the regulation of the law) has not been initiated by the education directorate (cantonal level). However, as already mentioned, the college of education offers coaching and support. This includes work on the school programme, working with heterogeneity as well as personal coaching for school leaders.

Two recent surveys (Reichwein 2007, Wehner 2008) give evidence of the status of leadership in the Zurich elementary schools as it is described above.

Appendix

1. School Governance: Elementary schools in the Canton of Zurich

	School heads School conference	Local school board	Regional;Cantonal administration	National school authorities
Teaching	School programme	Approval	Curriculum, laws	
Internal organisation/ School development	SL Organisationsstatut Projekte	Approval	Law	
Admission/selection of students	Selection procedures	Distribution to schools / recourse	Law	
Communication, representation	School head to school authority / community	Community	Canton	
Staff	MAB	Recruitment / MAB	Law	
Finances	School budget partially by school head	Payment, etc.	Administration of staff	
Infrastructure		SB	Subsidies	
Reporting	School head and staff, self evaluation		Inspection, Specialist department	

2. Legislation

Das Volksschulgesetz in Kürze/New Education Act Volksschule:

www.vsa.zh.ch/file_uploads/bibliothek

3. Surveys/Literature

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Zusammenfassung einer Schulpflege-Untersuchung. In: Zürcher Beiträge zur Psychologie der Arbeit. Eine Schriftenreihe des Zentrums für Organisations- und Arbeitswissenschaften der ETH Zürich, Heft 1 / Januar 2007 (p. 3 – 14) Auch unter:

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- Reichwein, K.: Führung und Personalmanagement in Schulen. Eine empirische Studie zum 'Working Knowledge' von Schulleitungen, Zürich 2007 (Verlag Rüegger)
- Wehner, Th. und andere: Projekt „Geleitete Schule“ (Zürich, 2. Juni 2008) www.bildungsdirektion.zh.ch/internet/bi/de/aktuell/News08/05