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STUDYING STEERING DYNAMICS
USING FOUCAULT'S CONCEPT OF GOVERNMENTALITY

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: governance, governmentality, network steering, research methods, steering dynamics

1 INTRODUCTION

Education systems in almost all OECD countries have become more complex as a result of greater school autonomy, more parental choice, and the introduction of more and new actors into the education system (Burns & Köster, 2016). Not only are more actors involved in educational decision-making, but these actors are also affecting each other across multiple levels (e.g. state, district, school) and from multiple centres (e.g. government, agencies, councils, boards). This is leading to complex steering dynamics, as steering by one actor can reinforce, neutralise, oppose, distort or reinforce steering by others. Nevertheless, governments are still being held accountable for providing high-quality education systems that are efficient, equitable and innovative. There is thus a need to understand the kinds of steering dynamics that actually arise in complex education systems and the consequences that these dynamics have both for educational practice and for effective government intervention. Although governance in complex systems has received ample attention from scholars, repeated calls for empirical research are seldom answered. Policymakers are inspired by concepts of network, multi-layered and polycentric governance, but knowledge about the kinds of steering dynamics that arise as a result is lacking.

In section 2 of this paper, we show that given the state of our knowledge about New Public Governance, there is a real need for empirical research. We then take Foucault's concept of governmentality to develop a framework suitable for the empirical study of steering dynamics in complex education systems². Based on our experience during a two year research

² An extensive description of the theoretical background and Foucault's framework is given our previously published article, see: Theisens, Hooge & Waslander, 2016.

programme funded by the Dutch Research Council, section 3 shows how we used that model to study steering for one specific policy issue in Dutch secondary education. The focus of this paper is on the methodology and techniques used in the research programme as a whole. For the content and results of the respective studies we refer to the three empirical papers in this symposium (Hooge et al., 2017; Waslander et al., 2017 & Theisens et al., 2017). We conclude (section 4) with a number of strengths and weaknesses of using this framework and its usefulness for empirical research into steering.

2 STUDYING STEERING IN THE ERA OF NEW PUBLIC GOVERNANCE

2.1. The rise of New Public Governance

Many policy systems and education systems have grown more complex in the past three decades. This is a consequence of fundamental social changes that have made our societies more complex, in the sense that they have become more global, more liquid and more interconnected. Power has shifted away from central government in different directions: upwards towards international organisations, sideways towards private institutions and non-governmental organisations, and downwards towards local government, school boards and schools. Where once we had central government, we now have 'governance', a term that can be defined as processes of establishing priorities, formulating and implementing policies and being accountable in complex networks that contain many different actors (Pierre & Peters, 2005). Around the turn of the century, new forms of governance emerged that were labelled as 'New Public Governance' (Osborne, 2010). These forms of government manage complexity by allowing for self-organisation: vertically-organised societies based on hierarchical power have made way for horizontal forms with multiple centres of power; that is, governance through networks (Thompson et al., 1991; Hufen & Ringeling, 1990). One key concept in New Public Governance is that of plurality, whereby multiple interconnected actors contribute to the delivery of public services such as education. New Public Governance focuses in particular on the relationships and interaction between actors and on how the policy-making system is

informed by multiple processes (Osborne, 2010; Kooiman, 2003; Zehavi, 2012; Rhodes, 1997). Networks operate on the basis of links between different actors and reflect the growing interdependence of society. Networks are more flexible than the traditional hierarchical organisation of central government and therefore reflect the dynamics of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000).

2.2 *The concept of steering*

One critical concept in perspectives on governance is that of steering. Whereas the concept of governance is wider and covers, apart from steering, notions such as identifying priorities and ensuring accountability (Pierre & Peters, 2005), our study focuses primarily on steering. In its most succinct form, steering can be defined as 'exercising influence', a definition that makes it abundantly clear that steering is a characteristic of relations between actors. Steering in complex education systems is by no means straightforward. It emerges from the combined activities, tasks and responsibilities of state and non-state actors, operating on different levels and from different positions. This is encapsulated in many conceptual models, such as multilevel and or network models (Pierre & Peters, 2005; Rhodes, 2007; Osborne, 2010). In the era of New Public Governance, at least two new forms of government steering have emerged (Politt & Bouckaert, 2011; Osborne, 2010; Pierre & Peters 2005):

- 1 Meta-steering, where government steers *through networks*. This involves creating an arena in which networks of public and private parties operate: establishing frameworks, formulating strategic visions, facilitating knowledge and feedback and operating as a 'crowbar' when participants in a network arrive at a stalemate (Pierre & Peters, 2005).
- 2 Network steering, where government is an *actor in the network*. At the edges of government, where ministries, civil society organisations, private companies and citizens come together, there are dynamic networks that address social problems (Pierre & Peters, 2005).

According to this concept of governance, central government plays several roles and steers in several ways. Whereas some argue that the role of the state has weakened (Rhodes, 2007),

others maintain that the state continues to play a dominant role in governing the public domain, even if it is less powerful and omnipotent (Pierre & Peters, 2005). From the perspective of New Public Governance, effective governance requires both strong networks and strong government. Steering through networks increases the effectiveness and legitimacy of government steering by entailing a shift from formal legal instruments to more flexible forms of steering, and by involving decentralised organisations and actors in implementation (Politt & Bouckaert, 2011).

Despite the growing body of literature on new forms of steering, studies rarely take the form of empirical research. There is thus a growing need for empirical studies that take the New Public Governance perspective as their starting point. If we are to understand how new steering dynamics in complex education systems are playing out in practice, we first need to specify the underlying notions of steering. These notions indicate where we should look and what we should look for. Based on the New Public Governance perspective, we can identify four specific notions in relation to steering:

- 1 Steering comprises a range of *very different actions*, as it occurs by, through and in *networks*. Steering is not only limited to the passing of laws and the issuing of regulations, but also entails covert and informal actions, such as building and facilitating networks and negotiating.
- 2 Steering actions are undertaken by *many different actors*. Steering in the public sector is not limited to government or to public or non-profit organisations, but can also include actors operating at all 'layers' of society and in all positions in a field.
- 3 Steering *emerges in interaction*. This type of steering is critically dependent on the structure of the relations between the actors involved. Moreover, steering assumes different forms, depending on this structure: authoritative or hierarchical steering, non-jurisdictional steering, unintended steering, network steering, self-steering or co-steering.
- 4 Steering *actions* should be clearly *distinguished from their consequences*. Although steering actions are often deliberate and based on reasoned argument, due to the interplay between steering actors, such actions can have non-deliberate, unintentional and unforeseen consequences.

2.3 *Foucault's concept of governmentality*

In order to conduct empirical research into the steering dynamics in complex education systems, we need a concrete perspective that does not conceive of steering as linear or hierarchical. Foucault's concept of governmentality (Foucault, 1988, 1995; Burchell et al. 1991; Rose, 1999) is particularly suitable in this respect. By 'governmentality', Foucault means all of the techniques that are used by a government to influence people's behaviour (Foucault, 1988). These techniques can be revealed by conducting meticulous empirical research into how steering emerges in the relations between actors.

Governmentality takes actual steering in relations and interactions between actors as its point of departure. A particular conception of power is used, namely that power is non-hierarchical and not 'possessed', but is shaped in relations and interactions. Power 'produces' certain forms of behaviour, is based on knowledge, and can always be resisted (Foucault, 1988). This specific conception of power entails moving away from the distinction that is usually made between an actor who steers and other actors that are steered, focusing instead on the relations and interactions between multiple actors that are simultaneously steering (or attempting to steer). As a result, the categories 'steering subject' and 'object of steering' become blurred. Objects of steering – actors such as project-based organisations, managers or teachers – are simultaneously the subject of steering, because people themselves actively give meaning to the intended goals and steering instruments used. Thus the concept of governmentality also puts into question the strict distinction between autonomy and control. On the one hand, this is because greater autonomy is paired with (implicit) beliefs about how this autonomy should be exercised responsibly. Autonomy and control, freedom and responsibility are inextricable ('required autonomy'). On the other hand, control is a precondition for being autonomous; actors express their autonomy by steering and therefore by exercising control. Rather than being a negation of the tension between autonomy and control, this is an invitation to look more carefully and more specifically at the way in which actors use and exploit others' steering in order to gain and maintain their own autonomy.

Foucault's concept of governmentality has two implications for empirical research. First, there is a need to view steering from an actor perspective. As steering is something that occurs through the actions of actors, and through the relations and interactions between actors, empirical research should focus on these actors and the relations and interactions between them. The second implication is a broad interpretation of the concept of 'steering'. Steering covers both actions that are intended to influence others, actions intended to influence one's own behaviour (self-discipline), as well as actions that are the consequence of others' influence.

Steering, which Foucault conceives in terms of 'techniques', can assume many forms, varying from the assignment of meaning and exemplary behaviour (defined here as 'normalisation'), through role allocation and appeals to actors' responsibilities (defined here in terms of 'responsibilisation'), to all conceivable forms of oral and written communication and formal agreements and formats (defined here as 'instrumentalisation').

2.4 Developing a framework for empirical research

In order to trace steering within educational systems and school boards, we defined our research questions with the aid of three concepts that have already proven their value in research and studies undertaken from the governmentality perspective: the concepts of 1) thinkable, 2) practicable, and 3) calculable (Edwards, 2002; Rose et al., 2006; Gillies, 2008; Suspitsyna, 2010).

Thinkable

Reflecting on *what* needs to be steered presupposes a language with which we can speak about a phenomenon and the ultimate intention of the steering ('outcomes'), including terms to designate the steering objectives. A notion such as 'raising standards', for example, presupposes that we have a language for thinking about 'educational standards' and terms with which we can describe these standards. At the same time, this language and these terms contain presuppositions about our ability to influence (that is, steer) aspects of educational quality in a

goal-oriented way. Steering is therefore paired with terms that give specific meaning to the intention and the objective of the steering, and who is doing the steering (roles).

Practicable

The terminology and technology of steering (see below) may or may not be translated into action. In the process of translation, both the meaning that others give to the terminology and technology (sensegiving) (Gioia & Chittipedi, 1991) and the meaning that individuals themselves give to them (sensemaking) (Weick, 1995) are relevant. The actions that are relevant for steering assume different forms for actors at different levels of the system, and often entail the use of steering instruments. These can be formal instruments (such as subsidies and accounting rules) or more subtle and informal forms of steering, such as communication, for example, or the active promotion of 'best practices'.

Calculable

In order to be able to steer, the phenomenon that has to be steered must be made calculable. This means that information is needed in order to map out the nature and magnitude of a problem, to legitimise the need for policy, and to monitor whether the problem is becoming greater or smaller. This information can be objective or subjective, hard or soft. Together, the way in which steering objectives are operationalised, which information is collected by whom, and how information is analysed and represented, form the *technology of steering* (see, e.g., Suspitsyna, 2010). How a steering technology works is not defined in advance, nor is it inherent to the technology itself. Making a quality judgement ('very weak') thus forms part of a steering technology, but the steering effects that result from this can be different (see also Van Twist et al., 2014). The same technology can be employed at different times for different purposes. Likewise, different actors can interpret and use the same technology differently.

The idea behind the three central concepts comprising the 'steering trilogy' is that in order to be able to steer, actors must have: a conception of the policy area, their role and others' roles (thinkable); translate this in a certain way into their own or others' actions (practicable); and be able to make the area and progress in relation to it visible (calculable). In this way, we can use

the steering trilogy to trace an actor's steering techniques, because it reveals how the actor makes something thinkable, practicable and calculable. Mapping out the steering trilogy for a single actor reveals the techniques that the actor uses to steer in that area. After the steering trilogy has been mapped out for every actor involved in a particular policy area, the relations between thinking about, making calculable and implementing the steering between these actors can be analysed. At the system-level, all of these steering actors together produce what is referred to in this research as the 'steering dynamic': the pattern of relations and interactions between 'language, terms, role perception, repertoire of action, instruments, information and monitoring and evaluation techniques'. The mutual relations and interactions between the actors can strengthen, transform, neutralise or undermine steering. This produces a specific pattern of interaction; that is, a steering dynamic.

3. USING FOUCAULT TO CHART STEERING DYNAMICS

To illustrate how steering dynamics in complex education systems can be charted using a framework based on the governmentality work on Foucault, in this paper we present how we have used this framework to collect and analyse the data and present results. To be able to give a *concrete* description of how Foucault's framework can be used, we use the example of charting system-level steering dynamics empirically, namely the policy issue of the Dutch government encouraging schools to become 'learning organisations'. The third paper of this symposium (Hooge et al., 2017) reports on the investigation of system-level steering dynamics with respect to three specific policy issues, including the policy issue 'schools becoming learning organisations'. It is important to note here that investigating the system-level steering dynamics with respect to the policy issue 'schools becoming learning organisations' on the basis of the governmentality framework, serves only as one particular illustration. Our research project is broader and focuses on charting steering dynamics with respect to various policy issues at the system-level and within school boards and has an international comparative component (see the other papers of this symposium).

3.1. Data collection

Two data sources were used: 1) relevant government reports, policy documents and websites, and 2) semi-structured interviews with key actors.

Selecting documents

The government reports, policy documents and websites were selected in three ways:

- 1) By using (combinations of) relevant keywords, using Google and the website <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/>;
- 2) By drawing on a recent general synthesis study on recent Dutch education policies (Ledoux, Van Heemskerck, Veen & Sligte (2014)); and,
- 3) By limiting the period from 2013 to 2015.

Identifying actors

Actors involved in steering in the 'schools as learning organisations' policy issue were identified with the help of selection criteria based on the trilogy of policy instruments (legal, economic and communicative policy instruments) (Vedung et al., 1998 in: Zehavi, 2012). As selection criteria, we specified that the actor should have been involved by central government in steering and control in the schools as learning organisations policy via:

- Law and regulations and/or by involving the actor in the implementation of legislation, including references in so-called 'soft law', such as a covenant or an indication in the preamble to an act (legal);
- funding/financing (economic); and
- incorporation into and/or activation in communications and information about the policy area (communication).

To trace additional potential actors, the derived set of actors was offset against the general overview of actors in the administrative environment of Dutch educational organisations (Hooge, 2013, p. 19). The final selection of actors was submitted to experts for a check on completeness and relevance. Subsequently, we positioned the identified actors with the help of

the following questions: 1) Which challenge or task is the actor facing with respect to this specific policy issue? 2) Which activities are performed by the actor with respect to this specific policy issue? And 3) Which products/instruments are produced by the actor with respect to this specific policy issue? A total of 20 actors involved in steering the policy issue 'school as learning organisation' were identified. After identifying the most important actors in the steering network, semi-structured interviews were held with four key actors (see below). During these interviews, the selection of actors and the positions attributed to them were tested and, if deemed necessary, minor alterations were made.

3.2. Data analyses

The data analyses consisted of data reduction through coding and memo-ing, data display in tables and networks, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, we coded the selected government reports, policy documents and website texts. Descriptive, interpretive and pattern codes were developed both *a priori* on the basis of the steering trilogy and inductively. We 'interviewed' the selected government reports, policy documents and website texts, so to speak, and selected characteristic text fragments, segments and statements on the basis of the following questions:

- what does the actor understand by 'learning organisation' (thinkable meaning);
- how does the actor define its own role and that of other actors? (thinkable roles);
- which forms of steering/steering instruments are identified? (practicable);
- which instruments and information are referred to in order to visualise the current situation and developments in learning organisation? (calculable).

The results of these analyses formed the basis for semi-structured interviews with representatives of the main actors. The interviewees were asked to reflect upon, complement and correct our analyses, provide additional information, and confirm or contradict the picture painted thus far. The interviews were transcribed in full and analysed using coding and memo-ing. As researchers, we kept a record of all ideas, interpretations and theories. In order to increase inter-subjective reliability, parts of the coding and memo-ing process were carried out independently by two researchers, who then discussed their results in order to produce joint coding and a joint interpretation. Finally, a member check of the final analysis and results was

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conducted, consisting of a group interview with representatives of the main actors (Meadows & Morse, 2001).

For the policy issue 'schools as learning organisations', a total 559 text fragments were coded. The majority of these were about how actors make the phenomenon thinkable (223), and a substantial number were about how to make the issue practicable (165) and calculable (170). The tables below give examples of the raw results of the analysis of the data in accordance with the steering trilogy of thinkable, practicable and calculable. It should be noted that these results are just a small selection from the total. Table 1 shows the words, expressions, terms and formulations that three main actors involved in steering the ‘schools as learning organisations’ policy used to capture the meaning of the phenomenon. Table 2 shows the roles that these three actors ascribed to themselves and to others with respect to steering this policy issue. Tables 3 and 4 show how, and with what instruments, the actors made the policy issue practicable and calculable.

Table 1: Example of how actors make ‘schools as learning organisations’ thinkable (meaning)

Actor	How is the ‘secondary schools as learning organisations’ policy understood, and what meaning is attached to this? (thinkable)
Ministry of Education	The learning organisation drives the improvements that school boards and principals want to implement. Teachers, teachers’ teams, supervisors and boards together build a culture of learning that is characterised by continuous work on improving educational standards. In a learning organisation, it is taken for granted that goals are set and reflected upon, and that related follow-up action is taken. As part of this, teachers have sufficient space, interesting development opportunities and career prospects such as specialisation, research or coaching. As a learning organisation, a school works with universities and universities of applied science. Teaching standards are high and remain so, because teachers, teachers’ teams, supervisors and boards build a culture of learning together. For example, through an effective appraisal cycle, by reflecting on each other’s teaching using peer review, observing lessons or preparing lessons together, or more effective use of ICT. In learning organisations, all professionals work together in and on a culture in which everything revolves around learning.
Education Cooperative (body comprising teachers’ unions and teachers’ organisa-tions)	The quality of educational outcomes is closely related to the quality of the school as a professional organisation. In a professional learning community, the teachers play a central role and take ownership of the quality of teaching and their own professional development. Peer review and learning from one other contribute to professionalisation. This is a powerful method for raising standards, in which teachers are given the professional space they need. Peer review covers every form of peer dialogue between teachers based on their own educational practice, focused on developing this practice. It is about reflecting, sharing knowledge, and giving and receiving feedback.
Council for	Professional learning communities attempt to find a balance between the primacy of the

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Secondary Education (VO-raad)	primary responsibility of each of the individual players: teachers, principals, pupils, parents and the board, searching for unity [...] through the development of (new) connections between educational practice, educational and school development and research. It is an ambitious learning culture encompassing pupils, teachers and school management, where there is ongoing joint reflection on improving education and educational innovation. Pupils learn better in 'learning schools'. A professional learning culture within schools gives space to the teacher; teachers are given the professional space they need. Increasing the number of teachers educated to Master's level boosts the creation of learning organisations, because they can contribute to linkage between cooperation, learning and research. Teachers need to feel ownership. There is cooperation within schools, between schools and between schools and teacher-training programmes at universities and universities of applied sciences. A critical role is played by strategic HR policy and the boards and management of schools.
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Table 2: Example of how actors make 'schools as learning organisations' thinkable (roles)

Actor	Own role	Other actor's/actors' role(s)
Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Competency requirements set out in the Education Professions Act. -Three administrative agreements. -Make funding available. -Facilitating role: providing framework, offering assistance and support when needed, disseminating good examples, organising pilots, supporting initiative-takers, holding discussions with stakeholders, linking people and activities, conducting the necessary research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Realising our ambition is only possible with the commitment of teachers, teacher-training programmes, principals, employers and other stakeholders. -Schools need to work intensively with teacher-training programmes. -All stakeholders – students, teachers, principals, boards, teacher-training programmes, teaching unions and social partners – are responsible. -Calls on educational employers and employees, among others, to [...] draft a professional statute. -Calls on principals to transform schools into learning organisations. - Boards should follow HRM policy based on policy and learn from good practice in other boards. - Calls on the Council for Secondary Education [...] to make members aware of the importance of 'learning from each other' and continue to stimulate this.
Education Cooperative (body comprising teachers' unions and teachers' organisations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Motto: teachers on behalf of teachers. Represents teachers as a professional group. - Works on strengthening the position of teachers in educational practice. - Consultative partner for the Ministry of Education and for councils on issues relating to the professional quality of teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourages teachers to take control of educational standards and their own professional development.
Council for Secondary Education (VO-raad)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stimulating and supporting role to facilitate jointly-held ambitions. - Boards and principals help to strengthen the 'learning culture'/'professional learning culture' within their schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Boards and schools establish preconditions for the development of schools as professional learning communities. - Boards focus on organising structural meetings and dialogue between boards, principals and teachers. - Boards are accountable for the space that teachers have for professionalisation. -The Ministry of Education stimulates the creation and the development of professional learning communities in secondary education. -The Education Cooperative works on strengthening the position of teachers in educational practice.

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Table 3: Example of how actors make 'schools as learning organisations' practicable

Actor	Actions and instruments (practicable)
Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Measuring instrument 'Onderwijs werkt! [Education works!]' survey by research agency, which addresses aspects of the Teacher! Action plan, the National Education Agreement (Nationaal Onderwijsakkoord) and the sector agreements, resulting in the www.trendsbeeld.minOCW.nl dashboard that measures the development of three indicators: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) By 2020, all teachers in primary, secondary and intermediate vocational education will have at least one performance appraisal each year; 2) By 2020, all teachers in primary and secondary education will take part in peer review; 3) By 2020, the level of satisfaction of teachers and principals on HRM policy will have risen by 15 percentage points. -National principals summit. -Regulations on teaching hours. -Funding of coordination and monitoring of pilots on 'professional learning communities' by the Education Cooperative and Councils for Primary (PO Raad) and Secondary Education (VO Raad). -Commission research agency to conduct research into development of secondary schools -Commission university research on professional learning communities. -Commission consulting firm to draft informative and inspiring descriptions of peer review in primary, secondary and intermediate vocational education. - Frequently refers to other actors' instruments and frameworks.
Education Cooperative (body comprising teachers' unions and teachers' organisations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Guidelines for lesson observation and www.kijkbijmijnles.nl website. -Literature, checklists and practical information on peer review, such as peer feedback, peer visitation and lesson study. -Multiannual pilot on interschool visitation. -Professional learning communities in secondary education in collaboration with the Council for Secondary Education and VET Schools. -Collaborate with 16 pilots, Association Teacher! approach. -Commission literature study on peer review. -Commission research on professional development by teachers, on behalf of teachers. Review study 'Leraren als gelijken [Teachers as peers]'
Council for Secondary Education (VO-raad)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Multiannual programmes on professional learning communities, in partnership with the Educational Cooperative. -Programme to stimulate ambitious learning climate with peer visitations and learning networks. -Make good practices available via own website under the heading 'Inspiration: professional schools as learning organisations'. -Project on strengthening HRM. -VO2020 [secondary education 2020] scan reveals progress in the achievement of ambitions from the sector agreement, including learning organisations. -VO-Academie (professional development for school boards and management). -Professional standards for principals, supported by the sector and professional group. -Commission research into professional learning culture in secondary education.

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Table 4: Example of how actors make ‘schools as learning organisations’ calculable

Actor	Measurable and visible (calculable)
Ministry of Education	-Measuring instrument ‘Onderwijs werkt! [Education works!]’ survey Regional plan, which addresses aspects of the Teacher! Action Plan, the National Education Agreement (Nationaal Onderwijsakkoord) and the sectoral agreements, resulting in the www.trendsinebeeld.minOCW.nl dashboard that measures the development of three indicators: 1) By 2020, all teachers in primary, secondary and intermediate vocational education will have at least one performance appraisal each year; 2) By 2020, all teachers in primary and secondary education will take part in peer review; 3) By 2020, the level of satisfaction of teachers and principals on HRM policy will have risen by 15 percentage points. - The OECD’s Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)
Education Cooperative (body comprising teachers’ unions and teachers’ organisations)	--
Council for Secondary Education (VO-raad)	--

3.3. Results

Foucault’s steering trilogy enabled us to take a close and very precise look at steering processes as they occur, depicting an actor-perspective that allowed us to trace back steering to all of the actors’ expressions, perceptions, actions and interactions. As a final step, we were able to map out the steering dynamics and describe the patterns of relations and interactions between language, terms, perceived roles, repertoire of action, instruments, information and monitoring and evaluation techniques. In Table 5 the steering dynamics for the policy issue of ‘schools as learning organisations’ are described in terms of the steering trilogy at the general level of all the actors in the steering network.

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Table 5: Steering dynamics for the 'schools as learning organisations' policy

<p>Thinkable (meaning)</p>	<p>Wordy: a lot of text is used. Although there is general consensus on the meanings assigned by actors, the actors emphasise the following different aspects of the 'school as a learning organisation':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - contributes to raising standards in education; - gives teachers the professional space they need; - HRM and educational leadership; - professional space, say, ownership by individual teachers.
<p>Thinkable (roles)</p>	<p>The Ministry of Education plays an indirect steering role, assigns tasks and funding to the relevant actors, and responsabilises a number of actors. The Council for Secondary Education wants to encourage a movement and get going in an initial direction. Many actors in the network assume the roles of advising, facilitating and equipping teachers, schools and school boards. Expert institutes and research institutes are assigned the role of providing schools with knowledge, insights, models and examples, based on research.</p>
<p>Practicable</p>	<p>The Ministry of Education introduces a 'dashboard' and captures the issue in three SMART indicators. From the steering network, a large number of instruments are made available by a range of actors, and activities are undertaken that enable the schools to get working on the area; in addition, there is a substantial amount of advice, assistance, guidance, information and data. Many actors refer to each other's services and websites.</p>
<p>Calculable</p>	<p>The Ministry of Education makes progress and the achievement of objectives calculable through narrow operationalisation and the introduction of the dashboard as three SMART indicators.</p>
<p>Steering Dynamics</p>	<p>There is a very tightly-knit steering network. Government steering is characterised by indirect steering with a 'network' character. The steering dynamic is characterised by dialogue and tends towards conceptualisation (large amounts of text) and advising. The steering network comprises ten main actors, of which eight form a tightly-knit group and two occupy a marginal position. Four of the ten relevant actors are 'composites of actors'. The Ministry of Education and the Council for Secondary Education act as arbitrators, mainly by responsabilising other actors, and the Educational Cooperative assumes a central position in the steering network. The Ministry of Education steers indirectly in this policy area by means of three administrative agreements, performance-related funding and commissioning research and knowledge dissemination.</p>

4 CONCLUSION

4.1 Strengths and weaknesses of using Foucault's framework

The strengths of investigating steering dynamics in complex education systems based on Foucault's framework, lie in the very precise way of charting the mechanisms and means involved in steering at all levels of the education system. It enables to focus on steering as a result of interactions and relations between many actors, and reveals the patterns in these interactions and relations. It reveals how various actors engage in, and contribute to steering, as this research approach allows to chart meticulously how actors literally express themselves about a policy issue and give words to it, how they act upon it, and which concrete activities they undertake. Aided by the steering trilogy, the cognitions, practices and instruments that shape steering are detected. This empirical approach is in sharp contrast with the conceptual notions that dominate most analyses in Public Administration.

Another benefit of the governmentality approach as proposed in this paper, is its purely analytic-descriptive character, which offers an escape from the one-sided focus on the effectivity and efficiency of steering that is common in governance and policy implementation research. Foucault's framework focuses on steering as a phenomenon. It aims at describing steering and steering dynamics "as they are", emerging from the perceptions, relations and interactions of various actors involved.

A third strength is that this approach looks beyond formal legislation and regulation when investigating steering. It reveals the more flexible, informal and less visible ways in which steering often operates. The three concepts thinkable, practicable and calculable are open and can be used to identify 'soft' steering mechanisms like persuasion, framing, sense giving, connecting, giving examples, developing tools, models and frameworks, organizing networks, giving impulse, disclosing information etc. These 'soft' forms of steering, are an important part of steering with or through networks and 'horizontal' non-hierarchical steering mechanisms, typical for New Public Governance.

The large amount of qualitative data that this approach generates is a challenge in methodological terms. It requires stringent and very precise methods and decision rules for data

collection, analysis and interpretation. Well-structured and rigorous qualitative research methods are needed, including the use of appropriate software.

A more substantive weak point of drawing on the work of Foucault is that it relies strongly on one conceptualisation of power that is the formal and informal rules that shape behaviour.

Broader conceptualisations of power such as deriving from personal charisma or from being skilful at political games are not included. This approach provides focus and clarity to the conceptual framework, but it narrows the perspective on power.

4.2 The usefulness of Foucault's framework for studying steering

In this paper, we have shown how Foucault's steering trilogy can be used to conduct empirical research on steering dynamics in complex education systems. We conclude that drawing on the steering trilogy is a fruitful way to investigate steering dynamics in education systems. It allows for a broad approach to discourse analysis, focusing on the ways in which actors are created and positioned both alone and as part of networks. It also enables us to establish which ideas or perceptions are spread through networks of involved actors and to investigate whether there is (a lack of) congruence between the language used by different actors in the field. Foucault's steering trilogy allows us to highlight and compare the different roles that the actors assume and/or are ascribed in the steering network, and the various steering modes that are used. In sum, our research suggests that the steering trilogy provides a promising framework for the empirical study of steering dynamics in complex education systems on different levels.

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