

# **Steering network dynamics in educational systems: an international comparison**

Comparing educational network systems for mathematics, reading and citizenship education in secondary schools in Flanders (Belgium), Finland and Ontario (Canada)

*- Working paper -*

Andrea Frankowski & Martin Schulz

Netherlands School of Public Administration, December 2016

## Table of contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Educational network systems and steering dynamics.....	3
1.2 Methods .....	4
1.3 Data collection.....	4
1.4 Outline of the rest of this paper .....	5
<b>2. Background.....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Mathematics and reading .....	6
2.2 Citizenship education.....	7
2.3 Relevance of citizenship, mathematics and reading in secondary schools.....	8
<b>3. Flanders (Belgium) .....</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1 Context .....	9
3.2 The educational system: actors, roles and responsibilities.....	9
3.3 Specific dynamics for reading, mathematics and citizenship education .....	14
3.4 Analysis of steering dynamics in Flanders .....	16
<b>4. Finland .....</b>	<b>19</b>
4.1 Context .....	19
4.2 The educational system: actors, roles and responsibilities.....	20
4.3 Specific dynamics for reading, mathematics and citizenship education .....	25
4.4 Analysis of steering dynamics in Finland.....	26
<b>5. Ontario (Canada) .....</b>	<b>28</b>
5.1 Context .....	28
5.2 The educational system: actors, roles and responsibilities.....	29
5.3 Specific dynamics for reading, mathematics and citizenship education .....	33
5.4 Analysis of steering dynamics in Ontario.....	35
<b>6. Conclusions .....</b>	<b>37</b>
6.1 Differences and similarities between the educational systems .....	37
6.2 Translation versus transplantation of findings .....	38
6.3 Centralized versus decentralized network centrality.....	39
6.4 Default versus optional steering arrangements.....	40
<b>References .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Appendix A: data collection.....</b>	<b>47</b>

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Educational network systems and steering dynamics

A characteristic of many educational systems worldwide is the multitude of actors involved in them. Various actors aim to influence daily practices in schools; government, inspections, school boards, school leaders, teachers – and the branch organizations representing these groups, including labor unions -, students and their parents, supervisory boards, advisory councils, educational research groups, publishers of methods and other organizations targeted at educational support or advice all try to influence educational programs. Some actors are involved in determining the framework in which education takes place – for example by designing rules and regulations regarding the mandatory school attendance age of children, by setting class hours or providing limitations to the number of students per classroom – while others are more focused on educational content, by setting attainment goals, determining the curriculum, designing educational programs and developing methods, or in advising other parties on how to perform educational tasks. Everything comes together in schools, where school leaders and other support staff – both educational and non-educational – enable, assist and support teachers to interact with students in classrooms optimally, such that students' capabilities are best developed and educational attainment goals are met. In various ways, actors aim to influence what is taught in classrooms and hence form part of the *steering dynamics* within educational network systems.

Governments are merely one of the actors involved in these processes; there are many other parties involved. How to exercise influence on the educational system amidst the numerous interactions among various actors – and which roles and activities are best suited for that – are issues governments struggle with. For that reason, this paper seeks to describe and compare the *steering dynamics* in educational network systems, in order to reflect on similarities and differences across systems, with specific attention for the role of government and its relationships with other actors when governing complex education systems. Building on research that has been conducted in an earlier stage, and that resulted in *Steering dynamics in complex education systems: an agenda for empirical research* (Theisens, Hooge & Waslander, forthcoming) and *Steering dynamics in the Dutch Education System* (Waslander, Hooge & Drewes, forthcoming), in which the Dutch secondary education system was researched thoroughly, this paper seeks to describe the steering dynamics in complex education systems in three other countries, as to facilitate a comparison of these dynamics with the Dutch case. For that reason, this paper seeks to describe tasks, roles and responsibilities of actors involved in secondary education systems in three different countries: Flanders (Belgium), Finland and Ontario (Canada). Applying an international comparative approach, this research is guided by the following question: *What are the steering dynamics in secondary education systems in Finland, Flanders (Belgium) and Ontario (Canada), what are similarities and differences between these dynamics and which lessons can we draw in order to understand them?*

## 1.2 Methods

The focus of this paper lies on the steering dynamics in three secondary education systems: Flanders (Belgium), Finland and Ontario (Canada). The selection of these cases was made in an earlier stage of the research project, of which this paper forms part.<sup>1</sup> In general, the ratio behind the selection was that these countries are – similar to the Netherlands – western democracies with different political administrative systems that could potentially yield lessons for the Dutch case. The paper focuses specifically on the education systems evolving around two themes that form part of the curriculum of secondary schools worldwide: on the one hand the ‘core themes’ mathematics and reading and on the other hand education in citizenship.

Based on a two step approach, consisting of both an extensive desk study and interviews we determined how the steering mechanisms in the educational systems in these countries usually work. This is the traditional or default situation, or in other words, the way the system has always worked. For the purpose of the comparison with the Dutch case, that was studied in the main research project, it is interesting to see when deviations from the default occur. Thus the main objective for the comparison is to see where specific steering mechanisms for mathematics, reading and citizenship education are deployed that differ from the default situation.

## 1.3 Data collection

The desk research is based on an assessment of a combination of academic literature and grey literature – including policy documents, advisory reports, vision documents and applied research produced by parties that have knowledge and expertise on secondary education in the countries under study or that form part of the secondary education system themselves. In addition, websites of stakeholders that form part of the systems were consulted as well. In total, a number of 108 documents and websites was analyzed. The desk research was conducted according to a strategy in which the academic and grey literature functioned as a starting point. The university database WorldCatDiscovery<sup>2</sup> was used to conduct an additional extensive search on four topics: 1) the secondary education system in general; 2) citizenship education; 3. mathematics and 4) reading, in the three different cases (Finland, Flanders and Ontario). By using different search terms, books, articles, book chapters and other types of academic papers were selected that seemed relevant on the basis of their title or abstract. Appendix A contains an overview of the search terms entered in the university database search. A different search strategy was applied in the search for grey literature. Partly based

---

<sup>1</sup> Together with three other research papers, this paper forms part of the research project *Steering dynamics in complex education systems* funded by NRO Programmaraad voor Beleidsgericht Onderzoek (ProBO), an organization tasked with the evaluation of academic research proposals eligible for government funding and with the forthcoming allocation of subsidies for academic research in the Netherlands. Our paper was commissioned by the researchers working on the NRO research project on the basis of questions that would facilitate them in the overall research project. For that reason, we do not make a comparison with the Dutch case in this paper. This will be done by others in the overall NRO project.

<sup>2</sup> A database used by Tilburg University that contains all the academic literature the university has access to.

on what was mentioned in the academic literature, and partly based on prior knowledge about actors that are perceived as ‘usual suspects’ within educational systems – for example because they are described in earlier research on the Dutch case (cf. Hooghe, forthcoming; Waslander & Pater, forthcoming; Theisens, Hooge & Waslander, forthcoming; Waslander, Hooge & Drewes, forthcoming. Also see: Woltjer & Hooge, 2016) - documents of the education systems’ stakeholders were sought in a more focused and emergent fashion, by using the commonly used internet search engine of Google. Lastly, websites of actors that appeared in the academic or grey literature were visited, in cases where additional information was needed. Apart from the desk research, interviews were conducted with experts from the field of secondary education. Two experts were consulted per case, resulting in six interviews in total. For each case, one expert within and one outside of government was interviewed in order to validate and valorize the findings that resulted from the desk study. Appendix A contains an overview of the respondents.

#### **1.4 Outline of the rest of this paper**

In the following parts of this paper, the results will be presented. First, a brief outline of the most important notions regarding the subjects citizenship, mathematics and reading are described, by means of an introduction to the specific focus points of this study. Subsequently, the steering dynamics within the three cases –Flanders (Belgium), Finland and Ontario (Canada) - are described and compared, resulting in overall conclusions focusing on similarities and differences between the countries’ systems.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 Mathematics and reading**

Mathematics and reading are considered two of the most important themes within primary and secondary education worldwide. For that reason, these themes form part of various different international studies in which students' performances and educational achievements on an aggregated system level are measured, and countries participate in the assessments in large numbers (Shiel & Eivers, 2009). For example, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), both assessments of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), seek to compare the performance of educational systems across more than sixty countries. In addition, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publishes the triennial Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), in which – besides scientific skills – both mathematics and reading skills of fifteen year old students in thirty-five countries are assessed. Outcomes of both mathematics and education in reading, literacy and the mother tongue language – simply coined 'reading' in this study - in particular are often used as an indicator for the performance and quality of education systems as a whole, because they are perceived as some of the most crucial skills for students to obtain in order to function properly on the labor market and during the course of their lives (cf. Sulkunen, 2013). The three cases central in this study – Flanders, Finland and Ontario – have in common that they are all high achievers when it comes to both reading and mathematics outcomes.

Out of 49 countries across the world, Flanders scores an 11<sup>th</sup> place and Finland a 17<sup>th</sup> place in the mathematics achievement rankings of the 2015 TIMSS assessment, in which fourth grade students' achievements were assessed (Mullis et al., 2016a). Both Flanders and Finland fall within a category of countries that are considered the best performers in mathematics, except for five East Asian countries (Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, Chinese Taipei and Japan) that are considered top performers. These five countries score significantly higher (with a 23 point gap between these countries and the others on a total of around 600 points) than the rest (Mullis et al., 2016b). Canada scores comparably lower with a 29<sup>th</sup> position in the rankings. No specific data on Ontario are available however. The country as a whole does score high in the mathematics rankings for eight grade students however; Canada – including Ontario as one of the provinces - ranked as high as an 8<sup>th</sup> position worldwide (just behind the identical top five of East Asian countries).

With regard to reading achievements, Finland falls into the category of top performing countries, with the best results worldwide, together with Hong Kong, Russia and Singapore, according to the most recent PIRLS assessment, conducted in 2011. Ontario scored a very high 13<sup>th</sup> place out of the 49 countries that were assessed as well. Flanders was not included in the study, as students out of the French speaking part of Belgium were only studied (Mullis et al., 2012). Results of the 2016 assessment are not available yet, as they will be forthcoming in 2017.

According to the PISA 2012 results, both Canada and Finland score high levels of performance in both mathematics education and equity (OECD, 2013a; also see: Simola et al., 2002; Jahnukainen, 2011). The countries improve both equity and performance, by reducing the extent to which socioeconomic backgrounds of students guide their mathematics performances. In these countries, the performance differences related to socioeconomic status are narrower than average, compared to the other 37 countries that were assessed (OECD, 2013a). Even though Flanders and Finland are both still perceived as good performers in mathematics, it has to be noted that Finland's average performance on mathematics relative to other countries, has started dropping between 2011-2015 (Mullis et al., 2016a) and Flanders' performances are dropping gradually over the course of the past two decades as well – on average and for both the top segment and lowest segment of students (see: Mullis et al., 2016b). In addition, research suggests that, even though Finland is scoring high on reading assessment tests (for example PISA), the literacy performance of seven percent of students still remains at a level that is not sufficient enough for further studies or even active citizenship (Linnakylä et al., 2004).

## **2.2 Citizenship education**

Before describing countries' practices regarding citizenship education, the concept of citizenship needs some clarification. In general, the concept refers to either civic citizenship or to ethnic citizenship (Reeskens & Hooghe, 2010). Civic citizenship encompasses the membership of a nation and corresponding rights and duties in relation to the government, whereas ethnic citizenship is the ethnic status or ancestry of a person. Both concepts are often used in studies regarding nationalism, national identity and politics. There are big differences in the dominant views on citizenship within countries, which draw back on this dichotomy. For example in France, there is much more emphasis on the rather open concept of civic citizenship – ones descent is less relevant to be seen as a full citizen, than adherence to social norms and values – whereas in Germany, having German ancestors is considered an important criterion for national identity (Brubaker, 1992).

Citizenship education focuses strongly on civic citizenship, and emphasizes for example on adherence to the law, culture and values that are predominant within a country (Reeskens & Hooghe, 2010). Living on the territory, having a legal citizenship status, expressing the will to join the political community, adherence to the basic state ideology and to political institutions and rights are part of civic citizenship as well (Shulman, 2002). Thus, the concept of civic citizenship itself covers a broad range of elements. Three dimensions are (see: Bron, 2006): (1) political-judicial (state citizenship, civil rights, tax obligations, the right to vote, political participation); (2) economical (work and income, social security); (3) social-cultural (relationships and networks, identification, language, involvement, responsibilities, values).

The belief that citizenship education needs to be part of school curricula is prevalent in many countries (see: Kerr, 1999) and is based on the notion that democratic values and attitudes, active participation and competences related to democratic processes need to be taught to children while they are still in school (Reich, 2007). On which specific elements citizenship education focuses, is strongly dependent

on the dominant ideas and beliefs within a country. In addition, culture, context and developments play a big role. For example in the Netherlands, perspectives on citizenship education have changed over time due to societal developments (see: Bron, 2006). Processes related to enlargement, globalization and immigration are responsible for significant changes in the population and the emergence of new ethnic groups in many Western countries, including in the European Union (see: Georgi, 2008). This has led to the need for new policies aimed at attaining cultural, political, social and economical rights for these minorities and in new policy issues that need to be addressed. One of the expectations of citizenship education is that it might be a solution to issues related to social integration and participation within societies that are becoming increasingly more pluralistic (Bron, 2006). The assumption is that active participation in society and involvement with the state's institutions can be achieved by means of citizenship education for students already at an early age.

Tammi (2013) underlines that there are - at least - two perspectives on how citizenship education is best taught in classrooms. These are related to two distinct views on democracy. On the one hand, democracy can be viewed as a deliberative process in which “political knowledge is created, contested and renewed through reasoning about various perspectives” (see: Tammi, 2013: 74), whereas on the other hand, democracy is regarded as the outcome of a power struggle in which conflict is inevitable (see: Biesta, 2011) – for example because a too strong emphasis on shared norms, beliefs and values will disregard opinions of those who are not able to engage in deliberations, resulting in undemocratic practices (see: Young, 2000). This influences beliefs on how citizenship education is best practiced in classrooms: either by practicing deliberative skills or by practicing critical skills (Tammi, 2013).

### **2.3 Relevance of citizenship, mathematics and reading in secondary schools**

Both education in mathematics and reading on the one hand and citizenship education on the other hand fulfill important societal tasks that stretch further than strict educational purposes. Important social functions are attributed to all these themes. For that reason, a big number of actors is involved in the design of the educational programs and in the arrangements surrounding them in secondary education. The various actors exercise influence in many different ways. All actors have distinct roles and responsibilities and perform different tasks and activities. This will be discussed in the following chapters.

### **3. Flanders (Belgium)**

#### **3.1 Context**

##### *Political and administrative system*

Government in Belgium is distinctly organized in multi-level structures. The country has a federal state structure and a predominant consensual government, though it is becoming more polarized. There are three levels of government: the Federal State, regions (Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Capital Region) and communities (Flemish, French and German speaking) all of which have a government and parliament. On all levels, governments are composed by coalitions and cabinets act collegially. The regional division is mainly a result of language and adherent cultural differences (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). The country seems to be slowly moving from a consensual to a polarized political system with Flanders and Wallonia on either sides both having different economies and political preferences. The Flemish speaking community – a population of about six million - inhabits Flanders and a part of the Brussels Capital Region. Each one of the three communities has its own autonomous education system, with a small number of competences assigned to the Federal Government. The Flemish community has its own Flemish government, that is responsible for education in Flanders - the Flemish Region - as well as parts of the Brussels Capital Region, in which Dutch is the main language in education as well (Rouw et al., 2016). This research focuses on the education system in which Dutch is the main language. Even though this entails parts of the Brussels Capital Region as well, we will refer to it as the Flanders' educational system here.

##### *Educational system*

Education in Belgium is mandatory for all children between the ages of six and eighteen. Basic education is divided into two levels: primary education (6-12 year olds) and secondary education (12-18 year olds). Contrary to primary education, in which all students follow the same curriculum, secondary education is highly stratified. There are two streams in which secondary education is divided: A (general education track, of which more than 80 percent of students form part of) and B (vocational education track). After the first two years of education, differentiation between four different programs takes place each following its own curriculum: 1) general secondary education; 2) technical secondary education; 3) secondary arts education and 4) vocational secondary education (Shewbridge et al., 2011). Public expenditures on education are comparatively high, and the annual spending per student in both primary and secondary education places the Flemish Community among the top six member states of the 34 OECD countries (see: OECD, 2016).

#### **3.2 The educational system: actors, roles and responsibilities**

##### *Government*

The Federal state plays a minor role in the educational system in Belgium. It is only responsible for setting minimum standards, for example regarding school diplomas and for determining the duration

and age of mandatory education (Rouw et al., 2016). Since 1988, most responsibilities for education were transformed to the regional governments. The Flemish Government is one of the three regional governments in Belgium and has a limited amount of responsibilities regarding education. The Flemish Ministry of Education and Training sets a core curriculum with specified minimum attainment targets and developmental objectives (Nusche et al., 2015). These attainment targets have to be approved by the Flemish Parliament, since they form part of an official decree (Rouw et al., 2016). Apart from the ministry, there are three semi-autonomous executive agencies that are responsible for implementation of education policies: the Agency for Educational Services (AgODI); the Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Grants (AHOVOKS) and the Agency for Education Infrastructure (AGION). Each agency has some additional tasks. For example, AgODI is responsible for the payment of salaries of all school staff, AHOVOKS is responsible for defining minimum standards for the quality of education and AGION is responsible for realizing and developing education infrastructure (Eurodyce, 2015; Flemish Ministry of education and Training website, 2016). Apart from that, AHOVOKS is responsible for the National Assessment Programme, in which a representative sample of schools is periodically tested for the achievement of attainment targets at a system level, in order to inform policy makers and other stakeholders. For that reason, each assessment is followed by a conference (Rouw et al., 2016). The National Assessment Programme is carried out by the Policy Research Centre for Test Development and Assessments, a dedicated university research centre assigned by the Ministry of Education and Training (European Commission, 2012).

Apart from that, the Flemish education system is highly decentralized in many respects. First, it is characterized by high degrees of autonomy at the level of schools, and second, there is a constitutionally embedded principle of freedom of education, that provides every person in Belgium with the right to establish schools, organized and orientated towards denominational, non-denominational or pedagogical criteria (Shewbridge et al., 2011), resulting in a multitude of available school types in the country. In addition, parents have a free choice in and guaranteed access to a school for their children, although this cannot be ensured in all cases, due to capacity problems of the schools (Rouw et al., 2016).

#### *Flemish Inspectorate of Education*

In order for schools to receive funding by the Flemish authorities, they have to be assessed and accredited by means of an external inspection by the Flemish Inspectorate of Education – an independent body that falls under jurisdiction of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training - in which compliance with the core curriculum has to be demonstrated and some other preconditions have to be met. Schools are acknowledged and financed on the basis of these assessments. Each accredited school is visited by the inspectorate at least once every ten years (Eurydice, 2015). The inspectorate is tasked with supervising whether school learning plans correspond to the attainment targets set by the Flemish government, and whether school boards – or their umbrella organizations – formulate attainment targets in their curricula (Rouw et al., 2016). In addition, the inspectorate also verifies whether schools live up to these standards set by themselves or their ‘educational networks’

(see below) under which they fall, whether they meet the goals set in their own learning plans and checks for some additional educational elements that belong to the inspectorate's own framework, including whether schools take enough efforts to make adjustments when they are not performing well (for example by getting advice). The results of inspections are published in reports (Flemish Inspectorate of Education website, 2016).

### *Educational networks*

In Flanders, secondary schools fall under three distinct and officially recognized educational networks<sup>3</sup> (see: Shewbridge et al., 2011; Rouw et al., 2016; Flemish Government website, 2016; Van Heule, 2000; Vandamme et al., 2002), consisting of both official education and 'free'<sup>4</sup> education, with their own corresponding organizations:

- Flemish Community Education (16 percent of students)<sup>5</sup>:

These are public schools that fall under the authority of the Flemish Government and are thus labeled as 'community schools'<sup>6</sup>. The schools are run by an autonomous body, on behalf of the Flemish Community. This is the Community Education Council (RAGO)<sup>7</sup>. The executive organization GO! was created by this council and tasked with the organization of the schools that fall under this network.

- Official Subsidized Education (OGO)<sup>8</sup> (8 percent of students):

Two categories of schools fall under this network: schools under provincial authority and schools under the authority of municipalities or cities. The provincial authorities are represented by the Flemish Provincial Education (POV)<sup>9</sup> and the municipal and city authorities by the Educational Secretariat of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (OVSG)<sup>10</sup>. These are both autonomous bodies, responsible for the implementation of education policies.

- Free subsidized education (VGO) (76 percent of students)<sup>11</sup>:

Schools that fall under this category are non-state schools that are nevertheless publicly funded, although privately managed. This network comprises of a number of denominational umbrella organizations (catholic or protestant) and umbrella organizations for educational, philosophical or pedagogical streams (e.g. Montessori or Steiner). The vast majority of schools within this category has a catholic denomination and are represented by the Flemish Secretariat for Catholic Education (VSKO)<sup>12</sup>. Apart from this umbrella organization, there is a Protestant-Christian Education body (IPCO)<sup>13</sup>. The other school boards in this category are not represented by umbrella organizations, but operate as individual organizations. A big difference between official education (community, provincial, municipal or city managed

---

<sup>3</sup> "Netten"

<sup>4</sup> vrij onderwijs

<sup>5</sup> Onderwijs van de Vlaamse gemeenschap

<sup>6</sup> Gemeenschapsonderwijs

<sup>7</sup> Raad voor het Gemeenschapsonderwijs (RAGO)

<sup>8</sup> Officieel Gesubsidieerd Onderwijs (OGO)

<sup>9</sup> Provinciaal Onderwijs Vlaanderen (POV)

<sup>10</sup> Onderwijssecretariaat van de Steden en Gemeenten van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap (OVSG)

<sup>11</sup> Vrij Gesubsidieerd Onderwijs (VGO)

<sup>12</sup> Vlaams Secretariaat Katholiek Onderwijs (VSKO)

<sup>13</sup> Raad van Inrichtende Machten van het Protestants-Christelijk Onderwijs

schools) and free education is that it is mandatory for schools in the first category to offer a free choice of religious studies, while 'free' schools usually offer religious education in only one type of faith. Though managed by private boards, these schools are subsidized by government as well.

These networks form a categorization of Flemish schools, and have several umbrella organizations for school boards that fall into the different categories. These umbrella organizations handle the representation of schools boards towards government. Although schools have a high degree of autonomy in designing their own school plans in theory, the umbrella organizations connected to the networks play a major role in translating the attainment targets set by the Flemish government into learning plans in practice, rather than the schools themselves. Each of the networks' corresponding organizations interprets and translates the attainment targets to its own pedagogical preferences and extends these targets with goals specified for their own network of schools. The implementation of the attainment targets into schools, is part of the funding arrangement; without meeting these attainment targets, schools will not receive funding from government (Shewbridge et al., 2011). There is no central curriculum besides a very limited core curriculum and there are no guidelines on pedagogical methods set by the Flemish government. For that reason, organizations within the three networks establish their own curriculum within the framework of the final objectives set by regional government (Rouw et al., 2016). Because of the different networks, there is a lot of diversity in schools in Flanders (see: Opdenakker & Van Damme, 2006).

#### *Flemish Education Council*

All major stakeholders in the Flemish educational system take part in the Flemish Education Council (VLOR)<sup>14</sup>, which consists of parties varying from students to social partners. It functions as an independent advisory and consultation body (Standaert, 2011). All legislation related to education requires a mandatory consultation of this council (VLOR website, 2016). It assesses the desirability, achievability and acceptability of policies for the educational partners. Also, the council has the right to take the initiative to advise the Ministry of Education and Training, and its recommendations are often taken into account within the education policies (Rouw et al., 2016). Apart from the Flemish Education Council, another council is consulted with regard to educational policies: the Socio-Economical Council Flanders. This council formulates advice and recommendations on socio-economic issues that affect education (Rouw et al., 2016).

#### *School boards*

Schools in Flanders are governed by school boards which are tasked with the financial administration, the implementation of regulations and with the responsibility to perform other administrative and management tasks, including recruitment and promotion of teachers and appointment of principals. Within the Flemish Community Education, there are over 1500 school boards, all responsible for one or several schools. The Community Education Council functions as an overarching organization. Schools within Official Subsidized Education fall under the responsibility of provincial, municipal and town councils, which function as the responsible school boards. However, responsibilities are often

---

<sup>14</sup> Vlaamse Onderwijsraad.

delegated to foundations that act on behalf of the councils. The school boards of the private schools that fall under the category of free subsidized education are private foundations affiliated with particular religious, non-denominational or pedagogical streams. These are predominantly Catholic, but there are also protestant schools and schools with specific pedagogical methods, such as Steiner or Montessori schools (Eurydice, 2015; Rouw et al., 2016; Shewbridge et al., 2011).

#### *Schools and school teams*

Schools are responsible for the assessment of students and define their own criteria for certification. There is no central exam or national examination; schools make their own choices and have a lot of autonomy in this regard. According to Van den Branden (2012), Flanders has a strong tradition against central exams, which could explain why there are no central tests but rather autonomy for schools in this regard. The Ministry of Education and Training, the networks and publishers provide tests however, which schools can choose to make use of or not. There is no mandatory test in place (Rouw et al., 2016). Schools are also primarily responsible for assessing themselves in terms of attainment targets, learning plans and objectives. Schools can opt to use assessments and data provided by the Ministry of Education and Training voluntarily for the purpose of self evaluation. The ministry has developed a website that enables schools to use their tests (the 'Test for Schools' website). Most schools make use of self-made tests and tests developed by publishers however (Van Gasse et al., 2015).

Principals are responsible for the daily organization of each school, including support for the school teams consisting of teachers. Teachers are responsible for the quality of education in the classroom (Rouw et al., 2016). In Flanders, teachers mostly receive their education through university colleges, resulting in professional bachelors' degrees, making them lower educated than in most other European or OECD countries. Teachers do receive additional education after finishing their main educational tracks which resulted in the qualification as a teacher; almost 90 percent is involved in professional development activities (see: Deneire et al., 2013). According to Mullis et al. (2016b), Flanders brought important changes in teacher training programmes over the last two decades, resulting in a coherent framework in which teacher profiles describe and enumerate competencies regarding knowledge, skills and attitudes. In addition, continuing education courses after graduation allow teachers to acquire extra competences specifically aimed at particular aspects of their profiles in Flanders.

#### *Pedagogical Advisory Services (PBDs)*

In Flanders, when the Flemish Government became responsible for education in 1988, due to constitutional revisions, three institutions were appointed to ensure the quality of education. Apart from the Flemish Inspectorate of Education, a Department for Educational Development (DVO) and three Pedagogical Advisory Services (PBDs) were created, one for each of the three networks that function as umbrella organizations for school boards. These PBDs advice, support and coach the networks to process attainment targets formulated by the Flemish authorities into their distinct curricula, but are nevertheless financed by government. They also support teachers in processing these targets into learning plans. As of 2009, the structure of the 'quality triangle' consisting of the three

above mentioned parties changed. The PBDs still support schools in a similar fashion, while the Flemish Inspectorate for Education verifies whether schools meet the attainment targets. The design and maintenance of attainment targets is assigned to an executive government agency: the Flemish Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (AKOV). DVO was transformed into a unit within the Ministry of Education and Training and renamed 'Curriculum Entity'<sup>15</sup> (Shewbridge et al., 2011; Rouw et al., 2016).

#### *Publishers*

Publishers process learning plans and attainment targets into textbooks. Because there is a wide variety of curricula and learning plans, textbooks generally consist of several learning plans incorporated into the textbooks. Consequentially, the educational textbooks may contain a wide variety of goals and objectives. According to Rouw et al. (2016), this sometimes results in confusion for teachers, as it is not always clear to them which objectives belong to their own specific network. Also, the accumulation of all the objectives, can be experienced as overwhelming. Some teachers do not make use of textbooks, but develop their own teaching materials instead. The publishers also organize information sessions, gatherings and summer school courses for teachers in supporting them with the usage of the methods they have developed.

#### *Students and parents*

Apart from the above mentioned actors, students and their parents are important stakeholders in education as well. Parents are represented in the VLOR as one of the key stakeholders as well, by means of representing bodies. For this purpose, parents form school-based parent associations, which are grouped under the umbrella organizations at the regional or national level. Examples are: GO! (connected to the Flemish Community schools); KOOGO (linked to the public granted schools) and VCOV (affiliated to the free subsidized educational network) (see: GO! Website, 2016; KOOGO website, 2016; VCOV website, 2016). All these organizations receive financial support from the Ministry of Education and Training (European Commission, 2012).

#### *Other stakeholders*

Apart from these key actors, there are other parties in the Flemish education system as well. An example are the centers for student guidance and pedagogical support to teachers and schools (see: Rouw et al., 2016) and the educational organizations that facilitate teacher education.

### **3.3 Specific dynamics for reading, mathematics and citizenship education**

This paragraph describes the steering dynamics in reading, mathematics and citizenship education to the extent that these defer from 'the default' of standard practices within the educational system.

---

<sup>15</sup> Entiteit Curriculum.

### *Citizenship education*

In Flanders, citizenship education is not considered a separate subject in the curriculum of schools. Rather, it is perceived as a cross-curricular subject (Franken, 2014). It is therefore embedded in general objectives and values of the education system; there are no requirements for citizenship teaching as a separate subject. Citizenship education is integrated into the curriculum areas that fall under the discretion of schools (European Commission, 2012). This is a big difference with the majority of countries in Europe. However, there are specifically formulated learning objectives related to citizenship education nevertheless. These learning objectives are related to cross-curricular themes and key competences that apply to the learning and teaching process as a whole. The learning objectives are part of the curriculum that was lastly renewed in 2010 and are integrated into four topics: active involvement; human rights and basic liberties; the democratic system and the European and international dimension (European Commission 2012). Students work towards these objectives by means of projects or activities. Teachers have to acquire necessary basic competences linked to targets of the national curriculum, that are partly related to citizenship education as well. For example, teachers have to be able to reflect an understanding of children's rights in their teaching (European Commission, 2012).

The learning objectives in citizenship education (see: Elchardus et al., 2009), are not subject specific, but rather cross-curricular, leaving discretion for schools to design citizenship education to their own preferences. In contrast with the regular final objectives in mainstream education, which are subject-related, for citizenship education, there are Cross Curricular Attainment Targets (CCAT<sup>16</sup>) (see: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2010). The development of training programmes and materials is taken care of by NGOs and other organizations. In total, there are 65 different organizations that are involved in the process of developing these materials (European Commission, 2012). It is the responsibility of the school to meet these final objectives. Educational advisors offer educational and methodological advisory service, such as trainings, support or frameworks. Educational publishers develop manuals as well, but authorities are not involved in the development or distribution of didactic materials (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2010). However, the Ministry of Education and Training informs schools about these organizations on its website as well as through the Ministry's publication 'Klasse', which is freely distributed to all schools and teachers (European Commission, 2012).

Four aspects of citizenship education are being assessed when it comes to quality. These are: goal-orientedness, support, effectiveness and development. This is done by means of self-evaluation by the schools, and by the periodically conducted National Assessment, based on a sample of schools. Flanders periodically conducts national tests to monitor the education system as a whole, in which elements connected to citizenship education are included. For example, a sample of nearly 3.400 pupils in the last year of primary education at 113 schools were tested for all kinds of aspects, including political and legal aspects that are part of the domain of citizenship education (European Commission, 2012).

---

<sup>16</sup> Vakoverschrijdende eindtermen voor het secundair onderwijs (VOETen).

Besides paying attention to citizenship education in secondary schools, Belgium is characterized by a system of well established student councils in schools. These are political structures that stimulate a culture of political participation of students in society. The Flemish student councils<sup>17</sup> consist of members from 680 pupil councils of all schools that fall under the level of secondary education. These self-governed students' associations have the role of an advocacy body and are financed by the Ministry of Education and Training (European Commission, 2012).

### *Mathematics and reading*

For mathematics, there are no special provisions in place in Flanders that divert from the general practices mentioned in the previous paragraph. The same applies to education in reading and the mother tongue language. This is a large difference with the 1990s, in which reading was much more stressed in educational policies, for example in relation to inequality and discussions regarding immigration and integration. Apart from that, the PISA-scores, in which Flanders scores high with regard to reading levels of students, indicate that there is no need for extra attention (Van den Branden, 2012). However, emancipatory functions are still attributed to reading education nowadays and there are still a few specific actors in place that form part of the educational system for reading education (see: Colpin et al., 2006) of which the Dutch Language Union<sup>18</sup> is the most important. This is an international organization established under a treaty between Belgium and The Netherlands. It also plays a role towards Surinam, St. Maarten and Curacao. Its core body is a council of ministers from the respective nations in order to jointly create policies with regard to the Dutch language that is spoken by 24 million people world wide.

## **3.4 Analysis of steering dynamics in Flanders**

Education in the Flemish Community is characterized by high degrees of autonomy, at different levels. The Federal government has no serious role in education and regional governments have limited power. The most influential parties in the Belgian education system are the educational network organizations to which different schools belong. They are the *central* actors within the Flemish educational system. Even though the Flemish system is highly decentralized, school boards do not have much influence. In theory, they are allowed to design their own curricula, but in practice, this is done by network organizations that function as umbrella organizations for school boards. These organizations design the curricula according to their beliefs and preferences. School boards follow the prescribed school learning plans of the network organizations to a large extent. In addition, the Inspectorate develops its supervisory framework based on the attainment targets the network organizations decide on. Apart from the individual ties with the Ministry of Education and Training, they are represented in the VLOR as well, a council consisting of all major stakeholders in the Belgian education system. This council has to be consulted before any decisions regarding education can be

---

<sup>17</sup> These student councils are named 'Vlaamse Scholierenkoepels (VSK)'

<sup>18</sup> De Nederlandse Taalunie

made by the Flemish government and on top, they have the right to give advice by their own initiative, resulting in an even bigger influence of the educational network organizations. Apart from that, there is a constitutional principle of freedom of education in Belgium, which gives any person the right to set up a school and determine its educational principles, as long as it fulfils the regulations set by the Flemish Government. Parents are allowed to choose and are guaranteed access to a school of their choice within reasonable distance of their residence (even though this cannot always be guaranteed), with funding allocated to schools on a per student basis. Not only the network organizations are well organized and highly influential in Flanders, but other representing associations as well. There are different student and parental organizations active in the system and all of them are represented in the VLOR as well. In addition, there is an elaborate structure of student councils in place.

The high degree of decentralization within the Flemish system, has implications for education policies. Schools are not easily reached by government, which makes it harder to make changes or adjustments to the system. The implementation of new policies takes a long time and is very difficult – if not impossible – without the cooperation of the educational network organizations.<sup>19</sup> In that sense, the system is quite rigid. The right that allows everyone in Belgium to start a school, has resulted in a lot of diversity between schools. This factor enhances the rigidity of the system, in the sense that diversity does not always fit well with centrally formulated policies, which are generally aimed at enhancing uniformity within systems, at least to a certain extent. Apart from that, there is a tradition of being opposed to central exams in Flanders (according to Van den Branden, 2012), which allows for even less influence for the government. The Flemish government only ‘steers’ through a limited set of attainment targets that are developed beforehand. These form the basic framework for education. The Inspectorate checks for adherence to these attainment targets, and only once every ten years. A larger amount and more specific targets are rather formulated by the network organizations however. The Inspectorate checks for these attainment targets as well. The only testing that is being done is the National Assessment Program, in which a sample of schools is checked periodically.

In the Flemish system, the Ministry of Education and Training steers through information: it informs schools directly about developments in education, through the Ministry’s publication ‘Klasse’: a magazine that is freely distributed to all schools and teachers. Struyve et al. (2014) have noted that, despite the formal and neutral character of the magazine, it plays a large role in contributing to the organization of the public debate on education in Flanders. The distribution of the magazine, which enables government to communicate directly to teachers and school teams, could be understood as a coping mechanism for a lack of influence and stronger steering tools and mechanisms. The biggest ‘steering mechanisms’ the Flemish government uses however, are financial. The government is the main funder of schools, even privately run ones, and of many of the actors in the educational system. A lot of the representing associations receive public funding by government.

Specific about the Flemish system, is also that citizenship education is deliberately differently organized than other subjects – contrary to mathematics and education in reading and the mother

---

<sup>19</sup> According to one of our respondents.

tongue language, which are not distinctly organized and hence display regular steering mechanisms. Citizenship education differs in the sense that there are no subject-specific attainment targets, but rather cross curricular ones. It is up to the schools to organize the ways in which they pay attention to these objectives. In the case of citizenship education, another dynamic applies to the networks as well: they do not develop elaborate learning plans for citizenship education, but rather, 65 NGOs take care of supporting, advising and developing learning materials.

## 4. Finland

### 4.1 Context

#### *Political and administrative system*

Finland has a unitarian, decentralized, fairly fragmented state structure with a consensually operating executive government (Pollit & Bouckaert, 2011). The country has a strong tradition of relatively autonomous municipal governments. This autonomy is protected by the constitution. Finland has a multiparty political system and a coalition government. The prime minister heads the government and there is a president with some political power (more than the German president and less than the French). Up to the mid 1990s, Finland had a central government with strong legislative powers. After that, the agency level was reformed (shrunk) and its role headed away from regulating. The different ministries have an independent responsibility for implementation and control of laws and policies and the municipal governments make up for almost three quarters of the public sector workforce (Pollit & Bouckaert, 2011). Consequentially, central government deals with strong decentralized counter parts.

#### *Educational system*

The Finnish basic educational system consists of the following distinguished levels: early childhood education and care (aimed at children in the age of 0-5); pre-primary education (for 6-year-olds); primary education or lower secondary education (for children of the ages 7-16); upper secondary education, including vocational institutions (after the age of 16); post-secondary education; first stage of tertiary education (Bachelor's and Master's degrees universities); and the second stage of tertiary education (doctoral degree education) (FME, FNBE & CIMO, 2012). Finnish education focuses strongly on equity. For that reason, in Finland, education at all levels, from pre-primary up to higher education is free. At secondary level, students or their parents only pay for the books that are used. Apart from that, everything is paid for by the government, even the meals that are provided to children during lunch time. In Finnish education, the concept of 'life-long learning' is central to the education system. The country has a strong tradition of promoting adult education as well (FME, FNBE & CIMO, 2012).

The current education system in Finland is largely influenced by the economic crisis of the 1990s. Supposedly, the Finnish crisis was the "sharpest and deepest among the developed Western countries facing economic problems" (Simola, Rinne & Kivirauma, 2002: 248). Since then, the welfare state has been restructured and reshaped in a way that, among other things, affected education as well; small and gradual steps and shifts concerning funding, the basis of curriculum planning and defining school districts took place. Changes entailed a shift towards more freedom for students, due to free school choice; more autonomy at the level of teachers and schools; building up an extensive evaluation system and attributing more decision making power to local organizers of schooling (i.e. the municipalities). In addition, budgets for education were cut severely (Simola, Rinne & Kivirauma, 2002).

For the analysis of steering dynamics in secondary education in Finland, we focus on the - comprised - levels of primary education and lower secondary education, which is targeted at children between the ages of 7-16 years old. Since secondary education is intertwined with primary education, it is impossible to distinguish between the two. This study focuses on the current state of the Finnish education system, although some changes to the system have been announced to take place in 2017.

#### **4.2 The educational system: actors, roles and responsibilities**

##### *Government*

The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (FMEC) is the most important actor in education on the level of central government and is responsible for the education policies. The ministry develops education acts and decrees, government decrees, education policy guidelines and a Development Plan for Education and Research (Halinen, 2016). The ministry prepares and formulates legislation, after which the parliament adopts these. FMEC formulates almost all educational policies, except for certain specific educational forms, such as education regarding defense and the labour market. These fall under different ministerial departments. Basic education – education for children aged 7-16 - falls under the Ministry of Education and Culture entirely. There is a Basic Education Act and Decree in Finland which defines the general national objectives and distribution of lesson hours in basic education (Halinen, 2014).

The Development Plan for Education and Research is another important policy document the ministry develops. This is a comprehensive document consisting of a long term planning for education. It contains some objectives, but not attainment targets in terms of quantitative objectives. It contains time allocations and which level of competence students must obtain in order to get qualifications. The Finnish government recently decided however, not to pursue with the Development Plan for Education and Research anymore, as of 2017. The plan will be abandoned and replaced by several different 'key projects' for which objectives will be formulated that are more specific. Instead of a central plan, the policy will be formulated in decentral 'projects' regarding several different topics in education and research (see: Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture website, 2016).

An important feature of the Finnish education system is that it lacks a school inspectorate or school inspections. They were abolished in the early 1990s. In addition, there are no national central achievement tests for students, covering the entire age group, and there is no national control of text books or other learning materials. There is only a sample-based national achievement test in two or three subjects of basic education every year. National results are published as mean values, leaving no possibility for ranking lists of schools. Results are used for development purposes, for improving curricula, learning materials and teacher education. Information is available that is withdrawn from national quality evaluations, which is used by national and local authorities and by schools for the improvement of their work. Apart from that, Finland participates in international evaluations such as PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS (Halinen, 2014).

### *Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE)*

The Finnish National Board of Education is a national agency that falls under the responsibility of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. It is responsible for the implementation of the policy aims, formulated by the ministry and works together with it to develop educational objectives, content and methods. It implements policies that are drawn up by government and approved by the Finnish parliament. The board also develops the national core curriculum, evaluates education and is responsible for information to schools and support in educational services (FME, FNBE & CIMO, 2012; FNBE website, 2016).

One of the most important tasks of the Finnish National Board of Education is the development of the national core curriculum. This curriculum, which is a very exhaustive and thick document, contains general objectives for basic education and general rules (for example the number of hours that have to be spent weekly). The general objectives within the national core curriculum can be regarded as attainment targets. These are general objectives that are outcome-oriented, although not in a quantitative sense. Since there is no central testing by the end of basic education, there is no need for measureable quantifiable objectives. The formulated objectives are outcome-oriented in the sense that they do not say anything about the process that should be deployed to derive at the objectives. It leaves room for schools to design their educational and pedagogical processes in a way that suits best with their own preferences. The curriculum does contain quite prescribing principles. For example, in Finland, tests, papers and other examinations are graded with marks between 4-10. The National Core Curriculum prescribes for every course which mark should be attributed to students, in accordance with specified levels of competence.

The National Core Curriculum is reformed approximately every 10 years, on the initiative of the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE). This process involves broad-based co-operation with education experts and various stakeholders, as well as support for local curriculum development efforts. Outlined by multidisciplinary working groups and supported by online consultation groups, a new national core curriculum is drawn up. This provides the opportunity to develop a common framework and a structure to discuss changes that take place and to incorporate them into schools and teaching (Halinen, 2016). The National Core Curriculum draw-up process includes all actors in the field of education. There are many working groups and associations that are actively involved in this process. A few examples are: associations of teachers, principals, parents, students, NGOs, municipalities and other authorities. Apart from a direct dialogue with all these parties, the FNBE enables everyone to contribute to the draw up process by organizing an open consultation online, to which everyone, including citizens, can add ideas and opinions. Lastly, a draft of a newly developed curriculum is sent to all major stakeholders that have a key role in the educational administration system. This results in an open, interactive and cooperative ongoing dialogue between parties in the educational system, based on mutual trust and respect, that can be regarded as a continuous learning cycle at the same time (Halinen & Holappa, 2013).

The FNBE as it is in place now, will cease to exist as of 2017. It will be part of a merge with the Center of International Mobility (CIMO). The two national agencies will form a new entity together – the Finnish Agency of Education - which for a large part will continue with the tasks the FNBE and CIMO have now. However, they will receive some additional tasks and new responsibilities as well. In addition, the National Core Curriculum is currently subject to a process of reform. Last step in the reform process will take place by the end of 2016 or the beginning of 2017. The reform of the local curricula – which are based on the national core curriculum and developed by schools - follow the same time planning . They are being revised simultaneously with the national core curriculum.

#### *School boards (mostly local authorities)*

There are both public and private schools in Finland, but they do not differ much from one another: they follow the national core curriculum and qualification requirements, and both public and private institutions receive public funding. Public and private schools both follow the national core curriculum and on top municipal rules. Since both are publicly funded and both follow the national and local curricula, private board are rather seen as semi-private. Private schools are very marginal in Finland; there is only a small number operational in the entire country. Most institutions providing basic and upper secondary education are maintained by local authorities or joint municipal boards. These local authorities are municipalities, federations of municipalities or private organizations. The responsibility for educational funding is divided between the State and the local authorities (FME, FNBE & CIMO, 2012; Halinen, 2016). Board members of schools run by local authorities are directly elected by the citizens in municipalities. The nominated to be elected officials are members of political parties. Board member of private schools differ from this; they are not elected officials, but can be for example parent-based.

In Finland, municipalities have a high degree of autonomy in how they want to arrange or organize their educational structures. For that reason, there is a lot of flexibility and variety in how the municipal bodies tasked with educational responsibilities are organized and who is actually part of the school boards. Some municipalities have departments of education, or directorates of education that belong to the administrative side of municipalities, while other municipalities rather have local education committees that fall under the political and representative structures of the municipality that are mostly involved with education. Municipalities do not need an approval from central government in order to arrange their educational structures.

Local authorities are also responsible for local administration, which entails certain responsibilities for education as well, such as decision making on the allocation of funding, the determination of local curricula and the recruitment of personnel. Funding is not earmarked, but goes via a lump sum arrangement, which allows for local authorities to make their own choices in how they want to allocate their funds. Both private and public schools receive public funding, which makes the local authorities responsible for both types of education. Basic education is part of the municipal basic services that receive statutory government transfers. This is based on the number of 6-15 year olds living in the municipalities.

The National Core Curriculum is already quite exhaustive and prescriptive. However, local authorities are required to prepare their own local curricula and hence, can make choices about certain courses (for example which additional language courses they want to provide to their students) and which additional subjects they perceive as important locally. The National curriculum thus leaves room for local variations. Education providers draw up their own curricula within the framework of the national core curriculum. There is room for local or regional specificities. All local curricula must however, define the values, underlying principles, as well as general educational and teaching objectives of the national curriculum. Schools (either the local authorities that form the school boards or the school teams) decide themselves what they want to be part of the local curricula at schools. For that reason, there is a lot of variation between schools in Finland. The municipalities also have the autonomy to delegate their decision-making powers to the schools themselves; they determine how much autonomy is passed on to schools (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). Therefore, the local authorities have a lot of decision making power as well, particularly in terms of funding.

In Finland, school boards (local authorities) are required to conduct self-evaluations. This is an obligation based on the Education Act. This enables local authorities and schools to take responsibility over their own work, to plan, assess and develop systematically. There is also a pupil assessment system with a focus on the process of learning, of which the main task is to encourage and promote learning (Halinen, 2014). Since there is no inspectorate in Finland (abolished in the 1990s), self evaluations are very important in Finland. The use of student-assessment data for the purpose of comparing schools against national or regional benchmarks increased in a lot of countries during the last decade. Finland is the only country out of 65 countries in which the use of student-assessment data declined between 2003 and 2012 (OECD, 2013b).

### *School teams*

The school teams consist of principals and a team of teachers, as well as other (both educational and non educational support staff). Principals are generally required a higher academic degree and teaching qualifications than teachers. Also, they are required to have work experience and a certificate in educational administration or an equivalent. Typically, the principals recruit the staff of their schools. Schools have the right to provide educational services according to their own administrative arrangements and visions, as long as the basic functions, determined by law, are carried out. There are no regulations regarding class size. Schools and education providers can make these decisions themselves (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture website, 2016).

Basic education teachers in Finland all require a master's degree (both in basic and general upper secondary education). Teachers have high levels of autonomy and responsibility, since they are responsible for practical teaching arrangements and the effectiveness and quality of education. Teachers have pedagogical autonomy: they can decide themselves which methods of teaching as well as which textbooks and/or materials are being used. Brueggeman (2008) ascribes part of the success of Finnish students in international performance assessments (for example in reading) to this teacher

autonomy; other studies stress the importance of the teacher's impact on students as an important aspect of the Finnish system as well (cf. Niemi, 2002; Tirri & Puolimatka, 2000; Niemi et al., 2012; Sahlberg, 2007; Kupiainen, 2009). Activities of education providers are guided by objectives laid down in legislation as well as the national core curricula and qualification requirements. Continuing teacher education is encouraged, since teachers are recognized as one of the most important keys to quality in education.

#### *Teacher education institutions*

The high levels of autonomy and responsibility of teachers requires them to have high levels of education. Teachers in the first six years of basic education are usually generalists. Teachers in the three last years are subject specialists. A big difference between the two categories is that the latter receives subject specific education. However, all teachers in Finland have to follow pedagogical training of at least one year, besides the subject specific education. Class teachers all have a master's degree in education or pedagogical study fields, whereas subject teachers have completed a master's degree in the subject they teach. There is no free intake in the teacher education institutions, but there are quota and it is very competitive to get into one of the universities to get an educational degree. In subject teacher education, intake varies between 10-50 percent (see: FME, FNBE & CIMO, 2012; Theisens, 2013). Universities can select the applicants most suitable for the teaching profession. According to Mullis et al. (2016b), Finland pays a lot of attention to ongoing professional development of teachers and displays increased efforts to support teachers (Laukkanen, 2014), since teachers are believed to be one of the most crucial factors that progress students' achievement, as some research has indicated as well (see: Papay & Kraft, 2015; Ladd & Sorenson, 2015; Laukkanen, 2008). The Finnish government pays a lot of attention to teacher education (see: Malinen et al., 2012). In 2014, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture started a new development program to train 50,000 teachers over a two year period (Mullis et al., 2016b).

#### *Publishers*

Publishers of educational methods in Finland are private companies, but are nevertheless invited to participate in the curriculum drawing up process and form one of the stakeholders that contribute with input to debates about education and the national curriculum. Publishers incorporate the national curriculum guidelines by translating them into the method books. Teachers have full autonomy in selecting the course materials they want to use. This autonomy also entails that teachers are allowed to choose their own textbooks, including course materials which are not developed by publishers at all.

#### *Representing bodies and organizations*

There are many different associations and groups that are active in the field of education in Finland. These include associations for principals, teachers, parents, students, NGOs and others. In Finland, all teachers are fully unionized. All of these stakeholders are involved in the development of educational policies. Mostly in the process of drawing up the National Core Curriculum.

### **4.3 Specific dynamics for reading, mathematics and citizenship education**

This paragraph describes the steering dynamics in reading, mathematics and citizenship education to the extent that these defer from ‘the default’ of standard practices within the education system.

#### *Citizenship education*

Although citizenship education is regarded as an important subject in Finland, there are no specific or additional arrangements for it and there is not more attention for this subject in basic education than for other subjects.

While Finland is being considered a quite homogenous country, because other nations surrounding it have higher numbers of immigrants entering the country, the topic of citizenship has received quite some attention. The country traditionally has several different linguistic groups that have lived on the territory for centuries now. Apart from that, since the beginning of the 1990s, Finland has been increasingly involved in a process of European integration. For that reason, the nation has been searching for a way to redefine nationality in relationship to the broader notion of EU-citizenship (Piattoeva, 2009), and focuses on global citizenship more as well (Pudas, 2009). Apart from that, since recent years, there is a stronger focus on citizenship education in the country, because research shows that Finnish youths are far less interested in politics and societal participation at the age of fourteen – similar to Belgium, Sweden, Slovenia and Norway – than youths in other countries, despite being highly knowledgeable (see: Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

Finnish citizenship education dates back to the 1980s, when the Basic School Act issued in 1983 stated that schools should be arranged in a way that they promote skills required for the consolidation of national culture and national values (Finnish Ministry of Education, 1983). The curriculum guidelines of 1985 state furthermore explicitly that it is one of education’s most important tasks to ensure the continuity of basic functions of society; to contribute to the transmission of culture among members of society; to develop skills important for national culture and national values and to protect and strengthen national identity (FNBE, 1985). In 1998, a new Basic Education Act came into place, in which the aims related to the nation state’s culture received far less attention than before (see: Piattoeva, 2009). Nevertheless, the act refers to contributing to growth into humanity and enhancing ethically responsible membership in society as purposes of education (FME, 1998). Currently, a new National Core Curriculum is being developed, which will pay more attention to facilitating democracy, empowerment and equality, particularly between men and women.

#### *Reading and mathematics*

In Finland, there are no particular or specific policies in place for mathematics and reading in basic education. The National Core Curriculum is rather balanced; it pays attention to all subjects and contains prescriptions about grading and attributing marks to specific competences in all kinds of different subjects. There are no extra arrangements for certain courses and there are also no reading or

mathematics tests in place, since there are no centralized tests in the Finnish system at all. Much of the success of the mathematics

Reading, literacy and education in the mother tongue language have a specific history in Finland, however. Finland is an official bilingual country, with both Finnish and Swedish being national languages with equal status (guaranteed in legislation since 1922). However, during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, Finnish – the language of the common people, in contrast with Swedish which was the language of the elite – developed into the language of administration and education (Latomaa & Nuolljärvi, 2005). Even though international assessments of reading and literacy seem to suggest that reading and literacy skills are quite developed among Finnish students, there is also evidence that there is room for improvement; according to Lehto et al. (2001), Finnish pupils appeared to have difficulties with specific reading tasks that require higher cognitive processing, and research suggests that a substantial amount of students do not achieve reading comprehension standards specified by the national core curriculum. Specific about education in reading and the mother tongue language in Finland is also, that since recently, increasing attention is being paid to a gender gap when it comes to reading. Girls in Finland outperform boys significantly, resulting in an average high score in rankings on reading performance internationally, but with huge differences between the groups (see: Loveless, 2015; Malin, 2005). The same applies to mathematics results (of students in fourth grade) as well (see: Mullis et al., 2016b).

#### **4.4 Analysis of steering dynamics in Finland**

The Finnish educational system at first glance looks quite centralized, since there are extensive national policies for education, of which the most important one is presented in the form of a National core curriculum, a very elaborate document in which general objectives of education are formulated. The core curriculum is quite steering and quite prescriptive. For example, it consists of elaborate descriptions of which grade (between 4-10) should be attributed to students, in accordance with a certain level of competence. The national curriculum is the result of an extensive process in which all relevant actors are actively invited to contribute ideas during the draw up of the document. One of the principles of the core curriculum is that everyone who wants to contribute to it, is welcome and invited to do so. The core curriculum is developed together with all stakeholders in education. The idea behind the extensive and comprehensive dialogue that the Finnish National Board of Education – an autonomous agency - organizes and initiates, is that this will not only include all the actors involved in education, but will also create a sense of ownership and support for the educational policy. For that reason, Simola, Rinne & Kivirauma (2002) describe the Finnish education system as an example of *New Governance*, a concept that refers to notions such as ‘governance without government’ and ‘governance at a distance’, together with different stakeholders, that participate and contribute just as much to steering as government does, which is perceived as an important factor in education policies (Lingard, 2009).

Thus in practice, the Finnish educational system is highly decentralized, in the sense that stakeholder involvement – of decentralized actors - is one of the pillars of the system. The core curriculum prescribes the basic objectives of education, which every Finnish school has to adopt. How schools go about achieving the goals of the curriculum is the responsibility of schools themselves, however. Schools have high degrees of autonomy, in this regard. They develop their own local curricula and local authorities formulate local policies for education. Decentralization can also be seen in the extent and amount of responsibility that is attributed to teachers in classrooms. They have the freedom to choose learning and teaching tools and methods and they are responsible for the quality of education. A lot of attention is focused on the creation of professional communities in schools in Finland. By means of self evaluations and peer assessments, the professional culture within schools is extensively developed. High qualifications of teachers in the Finnish system contribute to this as well; in Finland, it is required for secondary school teachers to hold a Master's degree. In addition, teacher education is highly selective; only a limited percentage of applicants are accepted in the educational programs for teachers.

The Finnish government mainly steers through information, support and funding rather than through rules, regulations and control by school inspections. Finland does not have a school inspectorate – it was abolished in the early 1990s. Schools are rather trusted to ensure high quality of education in other ways. For example, there is a big emphasis on self-evaluations. The ministry provides schools with information, tools and guidelines to conduct these evaluations. This practice coincides with the decentralized responsibilities within the system. National government only takes sample based tests to measure the educational level and addresses the results of the system. There are both self-evaluations of schools and national evaluations of learning outcomes. National evaluations of learning outcomes are done regularly (tests every year either in mother tongue and literature or mathematics) and sample-based. Other subjects are evaluated according to an evaluation plan of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Finnish system thus evolves around an elaborate system of self-evaluations. The outcomes of the evaluations are not used as a means to assess individual schools however, such that the self-evaluations can be seen as an alternative to school inspections. Rather, the results are used internally, by schools themselves. Gathered information about schools – for example from the sample based tests that are conducted - are only used at an aggregate level, to improve the educational system as a whole, rather than to evaluate the performance of individual schools.

Thus, the system has a rather consistent interpretation of decentralization. Since the National core curriculum is altered only once every ten years, the system enjoys relative stability or steadiness. In addition, educational policies in Finland are balanced; the national curriculum consists of goals and objectives for all the general courses (except for courses that form part of the local curricula, and on which local authorities can decide). It does not pay more attention to for example mathematics or education in reading and the mother tongue language. Apart from that, there is a lot of support for the way the educational system is organized as well as for educational policies; all major stakeholders are included in the process of implementation.

## 5. Ontario (Canada)

### 5.1 Context

#### *Political and administrative system*

Canada has a ‘first past the post’ (majoritarian) political system with a limited number of parties and one party with an absolute majority in parliament (Theisens, 2013). The country has a federal state structure. Still it is not an entirely central minded system in the sense that it has two major linguistic founding groups and likewise categorized interprovincial regions known as French and English Canada respectively. As a result, the governing party will have to accommodate a representation of interests. In the administrative system, a strong form of ministerial responsibility is visible (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). The central agency has relatively prominent positions. Over the past decades, the number of political appointees has increased in the administrative system that is predominantly non-partisan. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) state that a number of commentators observe a centralization of power towards the prime minister and his political advisers.

Ontario, one of the provinces of Canada, consists of eight separate districts. Up until a little over a decade ago, from 1995-2003 the conservatives had a majority in parliament, but this shifted in 2003. Since then, a liberal party has had the majority. Historically, education is highly politicized in Ontario as media and the public pay a lot of attention to what is going on in the educational system. Since 1995, educational plans formed part of the elections in the province of Ontario. Accordingly, there have been major shifts in governance structures over the past decades. According to Li (2015), the conservatives started transforming the governance in the Ontarian educational system in the period before 1995, followed by another period of reforms implemented by the liberal government between 2003 and the present. Nowadays, tensions between the Ontarian government and teachers’ unions receive a lot of attention as well. The political attention for the field of education can be partly explained by the high amount of public spending in this sector (OECD, 2011).<sup>20</sup>

#### *Educational system*

The Ontario school system consists of twelve grades, of which eight (grade 1-8) form part of primary education (5-12 year olds) and four (grade 9-12) are part of secondary education (13-16 year old students) (OECD, 2011). In secondary education, there is a distinction and preselection of students for general education; advanced education; vocational education and education that prepares students for university (OECD, 2011). According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (see: Ontario Ministry of Education website, 2016), the educational system is based on a vision of an equitable and inclusive system where all students, parents, and other members of the school community are welcomed and respected; where every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning; and where all staff and students value diversity and demonstrate respect for others and a

---

<sup>20</sup> According to one of our respondents, similarly, a lot of attention is being paid to the health sector as well for this reason.

commitment to establishing a just, caring society (also see: Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a; Ungerleider, 2008; Paquette, 2001). All school boards are required to implement and monitor an equity and inclusive education policy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011).

## **5.2 The educational system: actors, roles and responsibilities**

### *Government*

In Canada, the federal government has no tasks and responsibilities regarding education, nor do affiliated agencies at the level of the central government do. It is the only country in the developed world that has no federal office or department of education (OECD, 2011). Rather, education is organized at the level of the ten provinces and three territories in Canada (Theisens, 2013), with the Ministry of Education as the central actor in Ontario – the largest province of Canada (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b; OECD, 2011). This follows from the Canadian constitution, which puts education under provincial jurisdiction (Li, 2015). However, there is a Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (CMEC) that provides all the provincial ministers tasked with educational responsibilities with mechanisms for consultation in matters of mutual interest (McEwen, 1995). The Council of Ministers discusses issues that might be relevant for the other provinces as well, even though the different provinces in Canada all have very different educational systems with different curricula. The council does not have a strong impact on the Ontario educational system, but it influences it in terms of broader directions nevertheless and fulfills an important function in information sharing (OECD, 2011).

The Ministry of Education in Ontario – a provincial authority – is responsible for funding, regulation and delivery (Li, 2015) and develops all sorts of educational policies, for example regarding equity, safety in schools, capital requirements and buildings. It is also responsible for setting educational policies, goals, performance standards and for monitoring the performance and compliance of schools to the goals and objectives (Li, 2015). There is an Education Act in place that offers a framework for the education system. In addition, the provincial Ministry of Education develops the Ontario Curriculum which contains objectives for education and that determines the requirements to obtain the Ontario secondary school diploma. For example, the Curriculum specifies how many credits each student must obtain, and prescribes the mandatory number of hours of voluntary work each student has to invest. The curriculum is focused on outcomes of specific subjects as well. It specifies which courses should be taught and which expectations regarding the given courses are at hand (Levin, 2012). These are formulated in a qualitative, descriptive manner. Since there is no central test by the end of secondary school in Ontario, there is no need for attainment targets formulated as quantified outcomes. The curriculum draw up process is very inclusive in the sense that it uses input from many different stakeholders in education, including representing bodies and associations of principals, teachers, students, parents and also labor unions (OECD, 2011). The curriculum is revised in cycles of renewal. However, the Ministry of Education does not only talk to representing bodies or associations of stakeholders within education. It also provides information and advice to schools directly –

sometimes targeted at school boards and at other times at principals or teachers – by communicating with them. The ministry provides suggestions, advice, support and distributes information on best practices, such that this will inspire other schools to follow a good example.

Ontario does not have an inspectorate or school inspections. Rather, the government has the power to undertake action when a school is not performing well directly. There are checks and balance in place for this in theory, but in practice, the ministry only intervenes at schools when there are financial problems, rather than problems with educational quality or when achievements stay back. There are extensive accountability arrangements which prescribe that schools have to report to the ministry about their financial state and the ministry has the power to take over schools if necessary. In the recent past (2002), the Ministry overtook three school boards that ended up with financial deficits, by appointing supervisors to the school boards, while board members lost their decision-making power and were held from having access to staff services. This became an issue central in the Ontario government elections of 2003. After the liberal party got elected in 2003 (after a period of conservatives governing the province for eight years), one of the first things that was done by government, was to remove the supervisors from the three school boards and restore the elected trustees' positions in the school boards (Li, 2015). Nevertheless, the new government continued with a strong policy of exercising financial control over school boards. For example, auditors were appointed to review school boards with deficits and school boards are expected to report back on how they spend public funding (for example by making their annual financial statements public).

Since a reform in 1997, funding for schools is the responsibility of the provincial government, who determines how much public funds schools receive. School boards receive funding from both the provincial government and from municipalities, but the latter takes place in accordance with a framework the provincial government decides on. There is still some flexibility however, and school boards still make some funding decisions about individual schools' budgets. Since the reform, there is also less flexibility in how boards decide to use their funding, since the Ministry of Education prescribes to a larger extent what money can be spend on. The provincial government also determines revenues for school board members, teacher working conditions and compensations as well (Li, 2015). The government obtained these decision making powers over the course of the last two decades. A process of centralization resulted in more power for government and less for school boards regarding these matters (see the following paragraph, where this is described in more detail). Together with cutbacks (see: Jefferson, 2010) that resulted in lower wages for school board members (trustees), this resulted in quite strong debates between government and labor unions, which try to maintain power over matters that were considered local before the process of centralization in education took place (Li, 2015).

#### *District school boards*

The provincial government delegates powers regarding public education to district school boards, which are publicly funded. Approximately 95 percent of all school aged children in Ontario go to these public schools, while the other five percent either goes to private schools, or is home schooled (Li,

2015). There are both English and French public schools in secondary education. Apart from 'neutral' public schools, Roman Catholics are entitled to have their own school system, following from the Canadian constitution. This resulted in four separate publicly funded school systems, with different boards: English public; English catholic; French public and French catholic (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b). In total, there are 911 secondary schools in Ontario, that are divided among 72 district school boards: 31 English public school boards; 29 English catholic school boards; 4 French public school boards and 8 French catholic school boards (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b; OECD, 2011). There is one exception: Ontario contains one Protestant school board that governs a single school. All schools are obliged to offer at least the Ontario curriculum or a program with higher educational value than the Ontario curriculum – including the private ones. Apart from that, private education has to meet other provincial standards as well. Thus, all schools have to meet with the educational requirements and goals of the Ontario curriculum. How schools go about achieving them, is part of the schools' autonomy. Apart from the 72 public school boards, and a small number of private schools, there are ten school authorities, consisting of four geographically isolated boards and six hospital-based school authorities. In addition, at the Provincial level, there is one central school authority. These authorities function as school boards as well, in a parallel system.

The 72 public school boards consist of locally elected trustees as board members. Historically, boards in Ontario were authorized to collect taxes from inhabitants of the corresponding districts for the maintenance of schools and the trustees were tasked with all matters related to schools. Over the years, a system was developed in which all schools had a board of trustees with three elected persons in rural areas, and a ward and two trustees for schools in urban areas. Before the 1960s, this resulted in over 3,000 school boards in Ontario, all with two or three trustees. This number was reduced to 170 in the late 1960s, and further to 72 in the present (Li, 2015). The school boards still consist of locally and directly elected trustees. The elections are separate from the ones held for the municipal councils, but take place at the same time. The education board trustees thus can change every four years, when new elections are being held. The boards of education have the authority to select textbooks and make rules and regulations for the good governance of schools in their district. In addition, there is a general board of education, created at the level of the province to manage all schools and lands for education (Li, 2015).

Since 1995, revisions in education in Ontario took place (Levin, 2010), in accordance with the political agendas of the governments of both the conservative party (1995-2003) and the liberal party (2003-present), resulting in less autonomy for the school boards in the districts and more for the provincial government, such that the latter became more powerful (Li, 2015). After a tradition of 180 years of local governance by elected trustees and high levels of local autonomy, from 1995 to 2003, a process of centralization took place: the number of school boards was reduced drastically (from 129 to 72 in 1997) and the Ontario provincial government received more decision making power in education, particularly with regard to funding and abilities for control. The Ontario government became responsible for determining the length of the school year, teacher preparation time and class size, instead of the school board to which this was formerly delegated. Also, the right to make decisions

regarding the collection of local education taxes was taken from the school boards. This resulted in very different relationships between government and school boards; funding came completely in the hands of the Ontario Ministry of Education and an Education Accountability Act (2000) made schools more accountable towards the ministry, which enhanced the government's power over school boards even more (McEwen, 1995). This resulted in debates about the loss of local autonomy, which is considered undemocratic by some (Li, 2015).

#### *School teams*

Teachers in Ontario have high degrees of autonomy in the sense that grading for courses is completely in their hands. There are no central tests or standardized tests in Ontario that measure educational outcomes at the end of secondary school, apart from some tests in literacy and mathematics, that all students take during the course of their school career. For that reason, whether students pass secondary school and with which marks, is completely left to school teachers. School teachers in Canada have a highly valued profession and teachers are recruited out of the segment of the best one third of graduates from secondary schools (Theisens, 2013); in that regard, the Canadian system has a high degree of selectivity (OECD, 2011). In accordance with this, wages for teachers are relatively high in Canada.<sup>21</sup> This might be due to the big influence of teacher labor unions, which lobby for better working conditions.

#### *Stakeholder consultation structures*

In 2004, the Education Partnership Table was created by the Ministry of Education. It is a practical forum designed to get broad and diverse input from the education sector on educational policies. Participants include groups and associations of representing students, parents, trustees, director of education, supervisory officers, teachers, support workers and principals (Ontario Ministry of Education website, 2016). In addition, the Ontario Ministry of Education established a Governance Review Committee in 2008 in order to develop a structure for the consultation of stakeholders. It consists of trustees, members of the trustees associations and directors of school boards. The committee makes recommendations about educational policies in the form of consultation papers and advisory reports. It consults trustees, school board directors, parents, their representing organizations and school council representatives for that (Li, 2015).

#### *Education Quality and Accountability Office*

Even though there is no central exam in Ontario, some student testing takes place nevertheless, during the course of both primary and secondary school for two specific subjects: literacy and mathematics. Students are tested in grade 3 and 6 (in primary school) and 9 (in secondary school). An external organization (outside of government), namely the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), develops these tests (EQAO website, 2016). This organization also administrates international assessments Canada takes part in (e.g. PISA).

#### *Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (University of Toronto)*

---

<sup>21</sup> According to one of our respondents.

Ontario has a research institute for teaching, learning and research in education, which is affiliated to the University of Toronto. This institute provides teacher education, for example through graduate programs aimed at teaching and learning. At the same time, the institute is highly research-intensive. Researchers work on issues in education, human development and professional practice in the field of education. For that reason, the institute is influential when it comes to Ontario's education (OISE website, 2016).

#### *Representing associations*

There are many representing associations in place in Ontario. Each of the four school systems has its own respective association for trustees, principals, teachers, and parents (e.g. the Society for Quality Education). In addition, there is a teacher association at the federal level as well: the Canadian Education Association, a network of Canadian educators (Canadian Education Association website, 2016). In addition, all teachers in the public system are part of unions. Labor unions have a strong voice in Ontario. There are four of them in the province: the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA); l'Association des Enseignantes et des Enseignants Franco-Ontariens (AEFO); the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, and the Ontario Secondary School Teacher's Federation. Together, these four bodies form a federation of teacher labor unions: the Ontario Teacher's Federation or la Fédération des Enseignantes et des Enseignants de l'Ontario (OTF/FEO). The federation has a partnership with the Ontario government, which is the Ontario Teacher's Pension Plan.

### **5.3 Specific dynamics for reading, mathematics and citizenship education**

This paragraph describes the steering dynamics in reading, mathematics and citizenship education to the extent that these defer from 'the default' of standard practices within the education system.

#### *Citizenship education*

There are no specific practices for citizenship education in Ontario. Citizenship education is one of the compulsory subjects, forming part of the curriculum in schools, similar to other courses. Students get a number of credits for civic courses. Citizenship education in Ontario consists of both class-room education as well as other activities (Schweisfurth, 2006). Because citizenship education is considered an independent subject in schools, there are specific course materials available to support the teaching in the subject. For example, there are textbooks available, provided by educational publishers (Schweisfurth, 2006). In these textbooks, a wide range of issues receives attention, such as justice, human rights, peace and conflicts, social and political movements and ecological balance (see: Watt et al., 2000). In Ontario, and perhaps in Canada in general, citizenship education has a rather global focus. Global citizenship education receives a lot of attention. Schweisfurth (2006) ascribes this to the multicultural status of the country and its aspirations as an international peacekeeper. However, regardless of the international focus, global citizenship education constitutes of a large number of national characteristics directly focused on Ontario as well (Pike, 2001). A recently conducted empirical study in which citizenship education was studied in three classrooms in Ontario, concludes that there are three distinct understandings of active citizenship that are advanced through citizenship

education at secondary schools: the duty-based; the make-a-difference and the politically-oriented active citizenship type (see: Alison & Girón, 2013). This diversity illustrates the effects of how schools exercise their pedagogical autonomy in Ontario.

### *Reading and mathematics*

In Ontario, specific attention is being paid to both mathematics and education in reading and the mother tongue language. Not so much by means of elaborate attainment targets in the Ontario curriculum, but rather by tests that every student has to take. Students are tested during the course of both primary and secondary school for both literacy and mathematics. All students – of both public and private schools – are tested in grade 3 (at age 7 approximately) and grade 6 (at age 10 approximately) in primary school and again in grade 9 (at age 13 approximately) in secondary school. In addition, every student has to pass a literacy test, which is conducted in the tenth grade (second year of secondary school), when students are approximately thirteen or fourteen years old. Students have to retake the test until they pass it (Cheng et al., 2009). Approximately a decade ago, Ontario struggled with the fact that only little over 50 percent of the students in grades 3 and 6 met the provincial standards in literacy and numeracy, which resulted in extra attention for this course in educational policies.

For this reason, specific goals were formulated for reading and mathematics skills in Ontario. The aim was to increase the average grades of students in these subjects from 55 percent to 75 percent (Fullan & Levin, 2009; Theisens, 2013). In addition, a Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat was founded in 2004, to help boost student achievement. The secretariat consists of educators, principals and other experts from the field – also referred to as student achievement officers – that work directly with schools and school boards across the province to strengthen literacy and numeracy capacity. The aim is to improve students' skills and achievements in reading, writing and mathematics. Through the founding of the new and independent secretariat, the Ontario government is steering towards better performance in schools, by investing in and building up the capacity of professionals in education (Winton, 2012). Responsibilities for the improvement of students' achievements in mathematics and reading are put at the level of the educators. Several initiatives were launched aimed at creating opportunities for teachers to come up with new ideas and to learn from each other (Fullan, 2009). At the same time, within every school district, responsibilities for the improvement of reading and mathematics skills were established within school teams. These school teams are guided by the secretariat by means of a partnership, in which support and advice is provided. In addition, so called 'student success leaders' were appointed in every district, with the task to increase the graduation rate of secondary school students. These experts are funded by the Ontario government as well; they receive budgets in order to meet each other and share ideas. Today, that performance of students in reading in Ontario is significantly higher than the 55 percent approximately a decade ago, with 71 percent (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b). However, the grade 6 mathematics results of students have been going down.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> According to one of our respondents.

Apart from the tests for literacy and mathematics, there is no standardized or central testing for other subjects in school. Hence, this is different to other courses. The outcomes of the tests are both used by the schools themselves (for individual student grading) and by the Ministry of Education to monitor student achievement at an aggregate level. The information drawn from the tests is used as input for the development of educational policies.

#### **5.4 Analysis of steering dynamics in Ontario**

Ontario is characterized by a strong central government – even though not at the federal level, but rather at the provincial level – that has a strategic vision about education. A highly politicized educational field in combination with strong leadership of political parties and persons that pushed reforms in the educational field over the past years, seems to be accountable for major changes in the system, that resulted in an ongoing process of centralization of the system. This process of attributing more power to the central government –has resulted in less decision making power for school boards at the local district level. The district level school boards consist of locally and directly elected trustees.

The provincial government level – the Ontario Ministry of Education - therefore forms the central actor in the Ontarian educational system and is responsible for funding, regulations and delivery. It develops all sorts of policies, for example regarding equity, safety in schools, capital requirements and buildings. It is also responsible for setting educational policies, performance standards and for monitoring the performance and compliance of schools to formulated goals and objectives. The provincial ministry therefore develops the Ontario Curriculum, which contains objectives for education and requirements the Ontario secondary school diploma.

Educational policies are formulated after deliberations with all major stakeholders in the educational field however, resulting in the situation where there is consensus about these policies. There are different structures in place, that support and organize a dialogue between policy makers and other parties in the educational system. For example, an Education Partnership Table was created in 2004, a practical forum designed to get broad and diverse input from the education sector. Participants include groups and associations of representing students, parents, trustees, directors of education, supervisory officers, teachers, support workers and principals. In 2008, the Ontario Ministry of Education also established a Governance Review Committee, consisting of trustees, members of trustees associations and directors of school boards, which forms another structure for stakeholder consultation.

There is a strong focus on accountability in Ontario as well. Even though there is no central exam in place – which does not allow for the collection of information on quantitative performance indicators –, nor an inspectorate or school inspections, there is a strong focus on the financial performance of schools in Ontario nevertheless. School boards receive certain levels of autonomy to make their own decisions, but in return, they are held accountable and government has far stretching powers to exercise control and to even overtake school boards in case of underperformance. However, only in a

financial sense. The Ministry of Education does not bring these powers into practice with regard to lower performance in relation to the quality of education, but rather for financial underachievement.

In that sense, the government developed a strong framework with specifically formulated goals and objectives for education and with strict and elaborate structures for accountability and control. At the same time, teachers have quite some autonomy as well, since they are responsible for assessing students' performances. There is no centralized system of testing; student achievement reviewing lies in the hands of teachers.

Specific policies were formulated to increase the performance of students in both reading and mathematics education deliberately and increasing results in student achievement suggest that they pay off. Approximately a decade ago, a policy was formulated in which the government set specific goals – namely to increase average grades of students in these subjects from 55 to 75 percent -, a new structure, namely a Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, was created and investments in capacity building of teachers, principals and experts that cooperate, share ideas and that receive advice and support, have been made. The government intervened by enabling other parties – for example 'student success leaders', experts in each district in Ontario - to accomplish results and by bringing them together in cooperative structures with school teams, which were offered support and advice as well.

## 6. Conclusions

In this final chapter we present some conclusions to our findings. It is important to understand that the findings and therefore conclusions in this paper are meant as an addition to a larger research project done for NRO as part of which this specific comparison was commissioned. The paper is not meant to be read as a stand alone report of the educational systems in the three countries. We start out with an overview of differences and similarities between the three educational systems – in Flanders, Finland and Ontario, after which we present a general conclusion on what the value of international comparison of educational systems is, in our opinion. We conclude with some comparative conclusions for the three countries.

### 6.1 Differences and similarities between the educational systems

The table below provides an overview of the most important differences and similarities between the educational systems in Flanders, Finland and Ontario (for secondary education). It highlights certain characteristics, allowing for a direct comparison.

	<b>Flanders</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>Ontario</b>
School age	12-18	7-16*	13-16
Role for central (or: federal) government	Minimum to none	Strong (however, by means of an agency: the National Board of Education)	Minimum to none
Highest government level involved in education	Regional	National	Provincial
Stakeholder involvement in policies	High	High	High
Stakeholder representation by	Education Council of all stakeholders and individual associations	Individual associations	Individual associations
Curriculum	Local (developed by network organizations)	National and local (developed by government)	Provincial (developed by government)
Attainment targets in curricula	Yes: exhaustive targets and objectives	Yes: exhaustive targets and objectives	Yes: minimum targets
Central exam or central criteria for certification	No: schools make their own choices	No: schools make their own choices, but have to align with criteria in	No: grading by teachers (however: some central testing)

		National Core Curriculum	takes place for both mathematics and reading)
Education inspectorate in place	Yes: school visitations once every ten years	No	No (however: Provincial ministry has far stretching intervening powers)
School boards	Provincial, municipal and town councils (public) or denominational foundations (private)	Municipal or joint municipal boards (public) or private organizations	Locally elected trustees (public) or private organizations
Teacher education	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Bachelor's degree
Responsible for the quality of education	Teachers and school boards	Teachers	Teachers and school boards
Most steering actor on the system or policy level	Network organizations (umbrella organizations for school boards)	National Board of Education	Provincial Ministry and school boards
Other specific characteristics	Umbrella organizations of school boards connected to educational networks have high amounts of influence	High levels of autonomy for teachers; Highly selective application procedure for teacher education	Highly politicized educational system; Ongoing centralization processes; Strong influence of labor unions

\* Primary and secondary education are combined in Finland.

## 6.2 Translation versus transplantation of findings

Each country shows an educational system that is consistent with the political administrative system in the country. Flanders as part of the Belgian Federation has a consensual tradition accounting for the overall tradition in the educational system as well – policy making involves lots of different actor coming together on the scale of the Flanders region. Because of this consensualism, government has to deal with rather powerful networks of school boards. In Finland the political administrative system underwent a change in the 1990s as a result of an economic crisis. As the political administrative system decentralized even more and central government became less regulating the autonomy on decentralized levels (mainly the municipalities) grew. Thus the educational systems local decentralization may be understood as part of larger changes – placing significant responsibilities with teachers resulting in professional communities and peer to peer learning. The National core curriculum may in that respect be seen as the result of bottom up processes that end up constituting a

central curriculum. Ontario on the other hand is part of a Canadian majoritarian political administrative system where a core curriculum is also built on the provincial level (federal government has no educational responsibilities). In comparison with Finland this process also involves all sorts of educational stakeholders, but the process is more government oriented.

Since the differences in the educational systems may be understood from a political administrative tradition it is in our opinion necessary to incorporate the political administrative tradition when comparing educational systems. Thus a government trying to learn from choices made in other educational systems should *translate* these choices to its own political administrative context rather than *transplanting* them. What works in a certain country does so also because of the broader context of which political administrative traditions are an integrated part. Thus for the overall research project for the NRO it is relevant to acknowledge that The Netherlands as a country may learn from what is done in other countries by relating findings to its own political administrative tradition rather than just implementing that which is done elsewhere as well.

### 6.3 Centralized versus decentralized network centrality

With regard to steering in networks it is of importance to identify the position of actors in relation to one another. More specifically, the position of an actor determines its option of steering. Power in networks is not hierarchically distributed. So not the actor with the top position but the one with the most and strongest ties has the best position to steer within the network. So which actor or actors have the most central position in the network is of importance. Not only for these actors themselves, but also for the government especially if it is not itself in this central position. The table below shows that in all three countries network centrality is found with different actors on a different level.

	<b>Actor(s)</b>	<b>Level</b>
<i>Flanders</i>	Network organizations of school boards	Intermediate
<i>Finland</i>	Teachers, schools, municipalities	Decentralized
<i>Ontario</i>	Ministry of Education	Centralized

*Table: network position centrality*

The network organizations of school boards in Flanders have a very strong position, because they are the intermediates between the government and the schools. As a result of this the Flemish government on only looks for ways of steering with the network and through the central actors, but also for ways around the centrality of the network organizations. Government is coping with its position outside the center by for example introducing its own magazine 'Klasse' that is distributed to schools and teachers. In Finland there is not one or a few but many central actors. Centrality of the network can be found on the decentralized, municipal level. Teachers, schools and municipalities together create local educational practices within the core curriculum. Thus the extensive core curriculum is a way for central government to steer within the network by bringing experiences from all of these local practices together. Then in Ontario the curriculum is also produced in interactive processes, but the

government is the central actor in the network. This is also why the approach to increasing the results of language and mathematics teaching by establishing district and school teams with separate responsibilities is such a significant breach with the usual steering paradigm.

**6.4 Default versus optional steering arrangements**

Within all educational systems there is a default way of doing things. It is the way the system usually works, because it always works in this way. In our exploration of the language and mathematics education and citizenship education we have searched for situations where the default situation is not used, where – in computer programming terms – the optional choice was made.

	<b>Citizenship</b>	<b>Language and Mathematics</b>
<i>Flanders</i>	No subject-specific attainment targets, but rather cross curricular ones. A non regular supportive infrastructure of 65 NGO’s advising schools on citizenship education has developed as a result of this.	No specific provisions are made.
<i>Finland</i>	No specific provisions are made. Citizenship is part of the National Curriculum like many other topics.	No specific provisions are made. Language and Mathematics are part of the National Curriculum like many other topics.
<i>Ontario</i>	No specific provisions are made. Citizenship education is an independent subject in schools for which students get credits, similar to other subjects.	Specific policies were formulated to increase student performance in both subjects. By applying a specific policy consisting of a combination of the government setting specific goals, the creation of a new structure – the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat – that invests in capacity building of teachers, principals and experts by cooperating with them, by sharing ideas and giving them advice and support, government enables other parties to accomplish results.

*Table: choosing optional steering modes*

## References

- Alison, L. & Girón, M. (2013). How do schools educate students to be active citizens? A case study of citizenship in Canada. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research*, 3(3), 296-326.
- Biesta, G. (2011). The ignorant citizen: Mouffe, Ranciére and the subject of democratic education. *Studies in philosophy and education*, 30(2), 141-153.
- Bron, J. (2006). *Een basis voor burgerschap. Een inhoudelijke verkenning voor het funderend onderwijs*. Enschede: Stichting Leerplan Ontwikkeling.
- Brubaker, R. (1992). *Citizenship and nationhood in France and Germany*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Brueggeman, A. (2008). An Outsider's View of Beginning Literacy in Finland: Assumptions, Lessons Learned, and Sisu, *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 47:1, 1-8.
- Canadian Education Association website (2016). Accessed on 20 November 2016 at <http://www.cea-ace.ca/about-us>.
- Cheng, L., D.A. Klinger, D.A. & Y. Zheng. (2009). Examining students' after-school literacy activities and their literacy performance on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test.
- Colpin, M., S. Gysen, K. Jaspert, R. Heymans, K. Van den Branden & M. Verhelst (2006). Studie naar de wenselijkheid en haalbaarheid van de invoering van centrale taaltoetsen in Vlaanderen in functie van gelijke onderwijskansen. Leuven: NT2, centrum voor taal en onderwijs, K.U. Leuven.
- Deneire, A., J. Vanhoof, J. Faddar & P. Van Petegem (2013). Denken, handelen en professionele ontwikkeling van Vlaamse leraren en schoolleiders. Eerste resultaten van de Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013. Antwerpen: Edubron, Instituut voor onderwijs en informatiewetenschappen, Universiteit Antwerpen.
- Elchardus. M., S. Op de Beek, F. Duquet & L. Roggemans (2009). Vakoverschrijdende eindtermen in het secundair onderwijs. Een onderzoek naar de relevantie en de haalbaarheid van de vakoverschrijdende eindtermen in het secundair onderwijs. Brussels: VU Brussels.
- EQAO website (2016). Accessed on 21 December 2016 at <http://www.eqao.com/en>.
- European Commission (2012). *Citizenship Education in Europe*. Brussels: European Commission.
- Eurydice (2015), *European Encyclopedia on National Education Systems: Flemish Community of Belgium*. Accessed on 20 November 2016 at <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Belgium-FlemishCommunity:Redirect>.
- Flemish government website (2016). Officieel en vrij onderwijs, onderwijsnetten en koepels. Accessed on 2 November 2016 at <http://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/officieel-en-vrij-onderwijs-onderwijsnetten-en-koepels>.
- Flemish Inspectorate of Education website (2016). Accessed on 2 November 2016 at <http://www.onderwijsinspectie.be/>.
- FME (Finnish Ministry of Education) (1983). *Basic School Act*.
- FME (Finnish Ministry of Education) (1998). *Basic Education Act*.

- Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture website (2016). Accessed on 2 November 2015 at <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/?lang=en>.
- Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2010). OECD Review on evaluation and assessment frameworks for improving school outcomes. Country background report for the Flemish community of Belgium.
- Flemish Ministry of Education and Training website (2016). Accessed on 2 November 2016 at <http://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/node/4915>.
- FME (Finnish Ministry of Education), FNBE (Finnish National Board of Education) & CIMO (2012). *Education in Finland: Finnish education in a nutshell*.
- FNBE (Finnish National Board of Education) (1985). *The National Curriculum Guidelines for Basic School*.
- FNBE website (2016). Accessed on 2 November 2016 at <http://www.oph.fi/english>.
- Franken, L. (2014). Religious and citizenship education in Belgium/Flanders: suggestions for the future.
- Fullan, M. (2009). The Fundamentals of Whole System Reform. In: *Education Week*, 28(35).
- Georgi, V.B. (2008). Citizens in the making: youth and citizenship education in Europe. *Child development perspectives*, 2(2), 107-113.
- GO! Website (2016). Accessed on 21 December 2016, at [http://www.g-o.be/sites/portaal\\_nieuw/english/educationinlanders/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.g-o.be/sites/portaal_nieuw/english/educationinlanders/Pages/default.aspx).
- Halinen, I. (2014). Curriculum reform 2016. Building the Future Together. Presentation for the Enirdelm Conference (19 September 2014). Helsinki: Finnish National Board of Education.
- Halinen, I. (2016). Curriculum reform in Finland. Presentation. Helsinki: Finnish National Board of Education.
- Halinen, I. & A. Holappa (2013). Curricular balance based on dialogue, cooperation and trust. The case of Finland. In: Kuiper, W. & J. Berkvens (Eds.). *Balancing curriculum regulation and freedom across Europe*. Enschede: SLO.
- Hooge, E.H. (forthcoming). *Sturingsdynamiek in onderwijs op stelselniveau*. Tilburg: TIAS School for Business and Society, Tilburg University.
- Jahnukainen, M. (2011). Different Strategies, Different Outcomes? The History and Trends of the Inclusive and Special Education in Alberta (Canada) and in Finland, *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*.
- Jefferson, A.L. (2010). Impact of the economic crisis on elementary and secondary education funding: Ontario. In: *Management in Education*, 24(3), 124-126.
- Kerr, D. (1999). Citizenship education in the curriculum: an international review. *School field*, 10(3), 5-32.
- KOOGO Website (2016). Accessed at 21 December 2016 at <http://www.koogo.be/>.
- Kupiainen, S. (2009). *The Finnish education system and PISA*. Helsinki: Ministry of Education Publications.
- Laukkanen, R. (2008). Finnish strategy for high-level education for all. In: Soguel, N.C. & Jaccard, P. (Eds.). *Governance and performance of education systems*. Springer, 305-324.

- Laukkanen, R. (2014). Finnish model of teacher education for lifelong teaching career. In: *Revista Fuentes*, 15, 19-42.
- Ladd H.F. & L.C. Sorenson (2015). Returns to teacher experience: student achievement and motivation in middle school. Washington: National center for analysis of longitudinal data in education research.
- Latomaa, S. & Nuolljärvi, P. (2005). The language situation in Finland. In: Kaplan, R.B. & R.B. Baldauf (Eds.). *Language planning and policy in Europe, vol. 1. Hungary, Finland and Sweden*. Clevedon/Buffalo/Toronto: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Lehto, J.E., P. Scheinin, S. Kupiainen, & J. Hautamaki, (2001). National survey of reading comprehension in Finland. *Journal of resarch in reading*, 24(1).
- Levin, B. (2010) *Governments and education reform: some lessons from the last 50 years*, in: *Journal of Education Policy*, 25(6), 739 – 747.
- Levin, B. (2012). System-wide improvement in education. *Education policy series*, 13. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO.
- Linnakyla, P., A. Malin & K. Taube (2004). Factors behind low reading literacy achievement. *Scandinavian journal of educational research*, 48(3).
- Li, X. (2015). Ontario education governance 1995 to present: more accountability, more regulation and more centralization? In: *Journal of International education and leadership*, 5(1).
- Lingard, B. (2008). Researching education policy in a globalized world: theoretical and methodological considerations. In: *Yearbook of the national society for the study of education*, 108(2), 226-246.
- Loveless, T. (2015). How well are American students learning? The 2015 Brown Center Report on American education, 3(4). Washington: The Brown Center on Education Policy, the Brookings Institution.
- Malin, A. (2005). School differences and inequities in educational outcomes. PISA 2000 results of reading literacy in Finland. Institute for Educational research, research reports 15.
- Malinen, O., P. Väisänen & H. Savolainen (2012). Teacher education in Finland: a review of a national effort for preparing teachers for the future. In: *The Curriculum Journal*, 23(4), 567-584.
- McEwen, N. (1995). Accountability in education in Canada. In: *Canadian journal of education*, 20(1), 1-17.
- Mullis, I.V.S., M.Ó. Martin, P. Foy & K.T. Drucker (2012). *PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading. Progress in International Reading Literacy Study*. Boston: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College.
- Mullis, I.V.S., M.O. Martin, P. Foy & M. Hooper (2016a). TIMSS 2015 International Results in Mathematics. Boston: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College.
- Mullis, I.V.S., M.O. Martin & T. Loveless (2016b). 20 years of TIMSS. International Trends in Mathematics and Science Achievement, Curriculum and Instruction. Boston: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College.
- Niemi, H. (2002). Active learning: a cultural change needed in teacher education and schools. In: *Teacher and teacher education*, 18, 763-780.
- Niemi, H., A. Toom, & A. Kallioniemi, (2012). *Miracle of Education. The Principles and Practices of Teaching and Learning in Finnish Schools*. Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense publishers.

- Nusche, D., G. Miron, P. Santiago & R. Teese (2015). OECD reviews of school resources: Flemish community of Belgium 2015. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2011), Lessons from PISA for the United States, Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2013a). PISA 2012 results: excellence through equity: giving every student the chance to succeed (volume II). Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2013b). PISA 2012 Results: what makes schools successful? Resources, policies and practices (volume IV). Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2016). *Education at a glance 2016: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OISE website (2016). Accessed on 21 December 2016 at [http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/oise/About\\_OISE/index.html](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/oise/About_OISE/index.html).
- Ontario Ministry of Education (2009). *Ontario's equity and inclusive education strategy. Realizing the promise of diversity*.
- Ontario Ministry of Education (2011). *Ontario schools: kindergarten to grade 12. Policy and program requirements*. Ontario: Ministry of Education.
- Ontario Ministry of Education (2014a). Equity and inclusive education in Ontario Schools. Guidelines for policy development and implementation.
- Ontario Ministry of Education (2014b). *Achieving excellence. A renewed vision for education in Ontario*.
- Ontario Ministry of Education website (2016). *Education Partnership Table*. Accessed on 20 November 2016 at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/partnership/>.
- Opdenakker, M. & J. Van Damme (2006). Differences between secondary schools: A study about school context, group composition, school practice, and school effects with special attention to public and Catholic schools and types of schools. In: *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 17(1), 87-117.
- Papay, J.P. & M.A. Kraft (2015). Productivity returns to experience in the teacher labor market: methodological challenges and new evidence on long-term career improvement. In: *Journal of Public Economics*, 130, 105-119.
- Paquette, J. (2001) Cross-purposes and crossed wires in education policymaking on equity: The Ontario experiences, 1990-1995. In: *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 33(1), 89-112.
- Piattoeva, N. (2009). Citizenship and nationality in changing Europe: a comparative study of the aims of citizenship education in Russian and Finnish national education policy texts, *Journal of curriculum studies*, 41(6), 723-744.
- Pike, G. (2001). Re-evaluating global education: opinions from the field. *Issues in global education*, 168.
- Pollit, Ch. and G. Bouckaert (2011), *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis – New Public Management, Governance, and the Neo-Weberian State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (third edition).
- Pudas, A. (2009). Some perspectives on global education in Finnish basic education, *Journal of research in international education*.

- Reeskens, T. & M. Hooghe (2010). Beyond the civic-ethnic dichotomy: investigating the structure of citizenship concepts across thirty-three countries. *Nations and nationalism*, 16(4), 579-597.
- Reich, W. (2007). Deliberative democracy in the classroom: a sociological view. *Educational theory*, 57(2): 187-197.
- Rouw, R., M. Fuster, T. Burns, & M. Brandt (2016). *United in diversity: a complexity perspective on the role of attainment targets in quality assurance in Flanders*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Sahlberg, P (2007). *Education Policies for raising student learning: The Finish approach*, in: Journal of Education Policy, 22(2), 147 – 171.
- Schweisfurth, M. (2006). Education for global citizenship: teacher agency and curricular structure in Ontario schools. *Educational review*, 58(1), 41-50.
- Shewbridge, C., M. Hulshof, D. Nusche & L. Stoll (2011). School Evaluation in the Flemish Community of Belgium 2011. OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Shiel, G. & E. Eivers (2009). International comparisons of reading literacy: what can they tell us? In: *Cambridge journal of education*, 39(3), 345-360.
- Shulman, S. (2002). Challenging the civic/ethnic and West/East dichotomies in the study of nationalism. *Comparative political studies*, 35(5), 554-585.
- Simola, H., R. Rinne & J. Kivirauma (2002). Abdication of the education state or just shifting responsibilities? The appearance of a new system of reason in constructing educational governance and social exclusion/inclusion in Finland. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 46(3), 247-264.
- Standaert, R. (2011). Twintig jaar eindtermen: een terugblik. In: Tijdschrift voor Onderwijsrecht en onderwijsbeleid, 1, 2-22.
- Struyve, C., M. Simons & A. Verekens (2014). Parents are not born, they are made: a critical discourse analysis of an educational magazine in Flanders (Belgium). In: *Journal of Education Policy*, 29(6), 785-803.
- Sulkunen, S. (2013). Adolescent literacy in Europe. An urgent call for action. In: *European Journal of education*, 48(4), 528-542.
- Tammi, T. (2013). Democratic deliberations in the Finnish elementary classroom: the dilemmas of deliberations and the teacher's role in an action research project. *Education, citizenship and social justice*, 8(1), 73-86.
- Tirri, K. & T. Puolimatka (2000). Teacher Authority in Schools: A case study from Finland. In: *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 26(2), 157-165.
- Theisens, H. (2013). *Bestuurlijke arrangementen in succesvolle onderwijslanden*. Den Haag: Onderwijsraad.
- Theisens, H., E. Hooge & S. Waslander (forthcoming). *Steering dynamics in complex education systems: an agenda for empirical research*. Working paper. Utrecht: TIAS School for Business and Society.
- Torney-Purta, J., R. Lehmann, H. Oswald & W. Schulz (2001). *Citizenship and education in twenty-eight countries: civic knowledge and engagement at age fourteen*. The international Association for the evaluation of educational achievement.

- Ungerleider, C. (2008). *Evaluation of the Ontario Ministry of Education's student success/learning to 18 strategy*. Canadian Council on Learning.
- Vandamme, J. B. De Fraine, G. Van Landeghem, M. Opendakker & P. Onghena (2002). A new study on educational effectiveness in secondary schools in Flanders: an introduction. In: *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 13(4), 383-397.
- Van Gasse, R., J. Vanhoof, P. Mahieu & P. Van Petegem (2015). Informatiegebruik door schoolleiders en leerkrachten. Beleidssamenvatting. Antwerp: University of Antwerp Edubron Research Group.
- Van Heule, K. (2000). Mixed education in Flanders: how well prepared are teachers? In: *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 8(2), 143-155.
- Van den Branden, K. (2012). Onderzoek naar taalonderwijs in Vlaanderen. In: Olijkan, E. & Weger, H. de (Eds.). *HTNO: brug tussen onderzoek en onderwijs. Het Taalonderwijs Nederlands onderzocht*. Nederlandse Taalunie.
- VCOV Website (2016). Accessed on 21 December 2016 at <http://www.vcov.be/vcov/>.
- VLOR website (2016). Accessed on 21 November 2016 at <http://www.eunec.eu/member/vlor-vlaamse-onderwijsraad-belgium>.
- Waslander, S., E. Hooge & T. Drewes (forthcoming). *Steering dynamics in the Dutch Education System*. Working paper. Utrecht: TIAS School for Business and Society.
- Waslander, S. & C.J. Pater (forthcoming). *Sturingsdynamiek in het voortgezet onderwijs*. Tilburg: TIAS School for Business and Society, Tilburg University.
- Watt, J., I. sinfield, & C. Hawkes (2000). *Civics today*. Toronto: Irwin.
- Winton, S. (2012). From zero tolerance to student success in Ontario, Canada. In: *Educational Policy*, 27(3), 467-498.
- Woltjer, A.M. & E. Hooge (2016). Aansturen op beter onderwijs. De harde en zachte kant van bestuursakkoorden. In: *Goed Bestuur & Toezicht*, 2, 24-31.
- Young, I.M. (2000). *Inclusion and democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## Appendix A: data collection

Table 1: Overview of search terms used as entries in the university database WorldCatDiscovery search for academic literature

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>Flanders (Belgium)</b>	<b>Ontario (Canada)</b>	<b>General</b>
<i>Secondary education</i>	["Secondary education" AND Finland] [Secondary AND education AND Finland] ["Secondary education system" AND Finland] [Education AND actors AND Finland]	["Secondary education" AND Flanders] ["Secondary education" AND Belgium] [Secondary AND education AND Flanders] [Secondary AND education AND Belgium] ["Secondary education system AND Flanders] ["Secondary education system AND Belgium] [Education AND actors AND Flanders] [Education AND actors AND Belgium]	["Secondary education" AND Ontario] ["Secondary education" AND Canada] [Secondary AND education AND Ontario] [Secondary AND education AND Canada] ["Secondary education system AND Ontario] ["Secondary education system AND Canada] [Education AND actors AND Ontario] [Education AND actors AND Canada]	["Secondary education" AND governance] [Education AND governance] ["Secondary education system"] ["Secondary education system" AND actors] [Education AND actors]
<i>Citizenship education</i>	["Citizenship education" AND Finland]	["Citizenship education" AND Flanders] ["Citizenship education" AND Belgium]	["Citizenship education" AND Ontario] ["Citizenship education" AND Canada]	[Citizenship] ["Citizenship education"] [Citizenship AND education]
<i>Mathematics</i>	[Mathematics AND Finland]	[Mathematics AND Flanders] [Mathematics AND Belgium]	[Mathematics AND Ontario] [Mathematics AND Canada]	[Mathematics] [Education AND mathematics] ["Secondary education" AND mathematics] [Secondary AND education AND mathematics]
<i>Reading</i>	[Reading AND Finland] [Reading AND education AND Finland]	[Reading AND Flanders] [Reading AND Belgium] [Reading AND education AND Flanders] [Reading AND education AND Belgium]	[Reading AND Ontario] [Reading AND Canada] [Reading AND education AND Ontario] [Reading AND education AND Canada]	[Reading] [Education AND reading] ["Secondary education" AND reading] [Secondary AND education AND reading]

Table 2. List of interview respondents

<b>Case</b>	<b>Date of interview</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Function/expertise</b>
<i>Finland</i>	15 November 2016	Petra Packalen	(Counselor of Education, Finnish National Board of Education)
<i>Finland</i>	17 November 2016	Reijo Laukkanen	Docent at University of Tampere, former member of the Finnish National Council of Education and the Finnish permanent delegation to the OECD.
<i>Flanders</i>	21 October 2016	Rien Rouw	Policy analyst at OECD – expert on secondary education in Flanders
<i>Flanders</i>	18 November 2016	Jeroen Backs	Head of Strategy Department of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training
<i>Ontario</i>	15 November 2016	Francesca Gottschalk	Policy analyst at OECD, Center for Education, Research and Innovation – expert on education in Canada (in particular Ontario)
<i>Ontario</i>	16 November 2016	Aryeh Gitterman	Visiting professor School of Child and Youth Care, Ryerson University, former Assistant Deputy Minister tot he Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services.