
Governance in Education: Conceptualisation, Methodology, and Research Strategies for Analysing Contemporary Transformations of Teacher Education

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Abstract

In the following paper some concepts are introduced and used for analysing governance-related changes in education systems. In the first section, the concept of governance is explained. In the second section, it is used to analyse recent changes in the governance of systems of higher education and schooling, respectively. In the third section, the paper turns to the field of teacher education: A recent attempt to conceptualise changes in the Swiss system of teacher education is presented in order to ask what might be specific elements of governance of teacher education. Finally, the main arguments are summarised and some open questions for the development of teacher education emerging from this are formulated.

Zusammenfassung

Im folgenden Beitrag werden grundlegende Konzepte für die Analyse von Governanceprozessen und ihren Wirkungen im Bildungswesen vorgestellt, insbesondere mit Blick auf den deutschsprachigen Raum. Im ersten Abschnitt werden zunächst Begriff und Idee von Governance erläutert. Im zweiten Abschnitt werden diese grundlegenden Überlegungen zur Analyse und Reflexion aktueller Entwicklungen in Hochschule und Schule herangezogen. Abschnitt drei fokussiert schließlich stärker auf Fragen der Lehrerbildung; Unter Berücksich-

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tigung von derzeitigen Reformansätzen in der Schweiz wird nach spezifischen Merkmalen von Governance in der Lehrerbildung gefragt. Zum Abschluss werden die wesentlichen Argumente zusammengefasst und relevante Aspekte für die zukünftigen Entwicklungen in der Lehrerbildung hervorgehoben.

1 What is Meant by “Governance”?

There is no word such as “governance” or an equivalent to it in German everyday language. However, since the late 1980s “governance” has been used as a technical term in political and social sciences for conceptualising phenomena which have previously been called “*regieren*” (to govern) or “*steuern*” (to steer) (Schneider and Kenis 1996; Brand 2004; Benz 2004, p. 15; Schimank 2007a; see also Maguire, in this volume). Just as the concept of New Public Management, which emerged at the same time, the Governance Perspective reflects “the rise of a profound scepticism about the possibilities of hierarchical control of complex social systems” (de Boer et al. 2007, p. 137). However, contrary to the concept of “New Public Management” which is “a *normative* program for practical policy-making”, the Governance Perspective – as it is used in German speaking social sciences – aspires to remain “analytically open” (de Boer et al. 2007, p. 137; italics by the author) and to offer an *analytic* tool for understanding states of governance and their transformation.

“The governance perspective provides a general analytical framework for studying all kinds of coordination problems among actors” (de Boer et al. 2007, p. 138). The regulation of systems and the production of system-specific performance are conceived as arising from the *coordination of the independent actions of social actors* (Benz 2004, p. 17). This seemingly abstract definition – “coordination of actors” – invites us to spell out exactly what is happening when we consider social processes to be “governed”, “regulated”, or “steered”.

Over the last 5 years the concept of “governance” has also been introduced into educational research in order to study the changes in the regulation of school systems which German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria, German-speaking cantons of Switzerland, Liechtenstein) have seen since the beginning of the 1990s (Altrichter et al. 2007). Under the name of “Governance Perspective”, “Governance Research” or “Governance Studies” a body of work has evolved which aims to understand these changes by concentrating on the question of *how regulation and performance of school systems is achieved, sustained and transformed under the perspective of coordination of action between various social actors in complex multi-level systems* (Altrichter and Maag Merki 2010; Schimank 2007a; Kussau and Brüsemeister 2007).

Currently, there is quite a vivid conceptual discussion in educational governance research. The following passages will explain some features of the category “governance” which have been put forward in this debate. This is to give an idea of the specific foci of attention of this research approach, and to distinguish this technical term from connotations which might be valid in other contexts.

1.1 Multitude of Actors

The term “governance” firstly indicates that we assume that school systems – and their reform – are not shaped by a single dominant actor, for example by the government and its administrative staff. More actors are involved in the formation of a system. In order to make innovations work, teachers and school leaders must take innovative ideas on board, and they must translate them into actions and organisational arrangements. Students must understand the innovation and reshape, at least partially, their actions (and they may need some support and understanding from their parents). Intermediary institutions, such as the inspectorate, text book publishers and professional development institutions must also act accordingly. Although many actors have some influence, usually they do not have equal chances to participate and support (Altrichter and Salzgeber 2000).

1.2 Co-ordination of Action

We tend to consider something to be “regulated” if the relevant system actors “co-ordinate” their action. The Governance Perspective uses a non-evaluative concept of “co-ordination” to analyse the type and functionality of the actors’ combined action. Several instruments are available to analyse modes of co-ordination. Lange and Schimank (2004, p. 20) distinguish three *basic governance mechanisms* which may be used to analyse modes of co-ordination at the micro-level:

- Firstly, there are *constellations of observation*, in which co-ordination of social action is achieved by unilateral or mutual adaption to what has been observed of the others’ action.
- In *constellations of influence* co-ordination is achieved by the targeted use of means of potential influence, such as power, money, knowledge, emotions, moral authority etc. “Observation” is a precondition for “influence”.
- In *constellations of negotiation* social co-ordination is based on bilateral arrangements which may display their binding effects even without the exercise of power. “Observation” and “influence” are preconditions for “negotiation”.

Another analytic strategy uses “*classical models of societal co-ordination*”, such as the traditional macro-distinction between bureaucracy (or hierarchy), market, community and networks (Lange and Schimank 2004, p. 22; Benz et al. 2007; Dupriez and Maroy 2003, p. 379). It is a strength of these concepts that people can intuitively connect with them, thus allowing an easy first step into analysis. The weakness is that they seem to imply more homogenous conditions than can be found in reality. Governances in reality are usually very specific combinations of such ideal types.

1.3 Rights of Disposal and Regulation Structures

It is not the erratic or accidental actions which are interesting for governance analysis, but the structured and structuring actions. Agency and structure are considered as related and are analysed in their relationship. Action is structured, and structures become socially relevant when they are taken up by actors. The capability to act in social systems is based on structural elements, on a structure of regulation which organises rights and competences of disposal in a way which is specific to the particular system (Braun 2001, p. 247; Kussau and Brüsemeister 2007, p. 21). Thus, governance analyses are looking for rules and resources (Giddens 1992) which are already existent in a system, and also for those which are additionally provided by the promoters of a reform and which are to be taken up by other actors in order to push forward, transform or hinder the reform policy taking roots in a system.

1.4 Multi-level Systems

Another characteristic of the Governance Perspective is that complex social systems, such as the school system, are considered to be multi-level phenomena. This notion makes it clear that not all actors interact with all other actors in the same way, but that there are typical constellations of actors, typical “levels” with special logics of action which may be very different from the logics of action at other levels.

The concept of “multi-level systems” draws our attention to questions of *cross-border co-ordination* between system levels which appear to be among the most crucial problems of system development. It has been argued that Governance Research must not limit itself to the systemic and organisational questions at the macro and meso levels *before* classroom learning happens. The central concept of “action co-ordination” is also relevant for the micro level. Classroom teaching and learning may also be understood as an effort of co-ordination which contributes to the specific performance of a multi-level system: A number of learners and teach-

ers must co-ordinate their individual actions in such a way that individual and social functions are fulfilled.

1.5 Intentional Action and Partially Transintentional Results

The intentionality of actors is an important factor for understanding processes in schools. Actors have goals when they contribute to transactions in schools: Students want to pass the grade or understand a subject or prove themselves. Teachers want to do good classroom work, fulfil the idea of “*Bildung*” or preserve or improve their working conditions, etc. Although actors want to steer the system according to their intentions, and the “*Gestalt*” of the school and of the school system may be seen as a product of an “intentional struggle” of different actors (Schimank 2007a), many important dynamics and results of this struggle are, however, “transintentional” when actions produce non-intended results, unexpected ‘ripple’ effects or unforeseen distant effects to which governance analyses must attend (Sydow and Windeler 2000, p. 9).

The conceptual devices proposed by German governance researchers come very close to the *model of social regulation* developed by Christian Maroy and colleagues: Maroy and van Zanten (2009, p. e69) define school regulation as “multiple, contradictory and sometimes conflicting processes for orienting the behaviours of actors and defining the rules of the game in a social system”. “Regulation is always multiregulation” (ibid.) as there are more sources for rules than the traditional institutions, and more actors than the government (Dupriez and Maroy 2003, p. 379). Just like the German governance researchers this research group expects “transintentional” results (Maroy and van Zanten 2009, p. e72) and tries to attend to both structural and action aspects of social processes, and to the specific ways they unfold: “Regulation is considered as a composite, the partial and fragile inter-articulation of various forms of institutional co-ordination in the framework in which actors’ games take place.” (Dupriez and Maroy 2003, p. 379) Thus, it is no surprise that these two strands of research also turn to similar research areas (see Sect. 3.2).

2 Analysing “Governance Regimes”

2.1 Recent Transformations in Higher Education Systems

Many European countries have recently seen changes in the regulation of their education and higher education systems. But what features of system governance have really changed, and are there variations between countries? To answer such

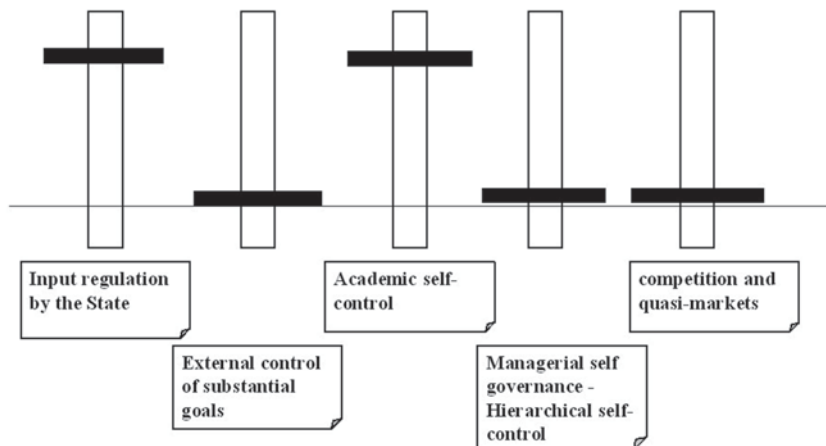
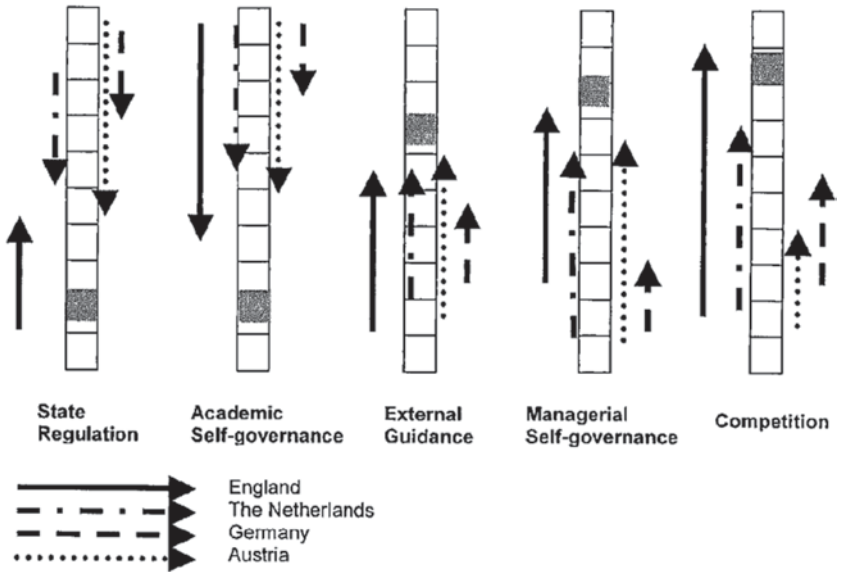


Fig. 1 “Governance equalizer”: Five dimensions for analysing changes in education systems. (Source: de Boer et al. 2007, p. 138)

questions the German sociologist Uwe Schimank (2007b; using leads from Burton Clark 1997) has developed an analytic instrument, dubbed “governance equalizer”. The claim is that changes during the contemporary transformation of education systems may be traced on at least five specific dimensions (see Fig. 1 and de Boer et al. 2007, p. 138):

- *State regulation* denotes the traditional regulation of public systems by the top-down authority of the state using legal measures, directives and the distribution of earmarked resources aiming to prescribe in detail the behaviour of sub-systems.
- *External guidance by the state or other stakeholders* describes regulatory activities that direct other systems and institutions through goal setting, advice and evaluation usually exerted by the government or other stakeholders.
- *Academic self-governance* refers to the professionals’ power in decision making, for example “institutionalized collegial decision-making within universities and the peer review-based self-steering of academic communities” (op. cit., p 139).
- *Managerial self-governance* refers to the regulatory power of the internal hierarchies in organisations (such as schools, or universities) and to their leadership’s power in internal goal setting, distribution of funds and decision-making.
- *Competition for scarce resources* (such as money, personnel, and prestige) refers to system co-ordination by market or “quasi-market” processes.



The “grey boxes” refer to the NPM standard.

Fig. 2 Shifts in the university governance of the four countries. (Source: de Boer et al. 2007, p. 149)

De Boer et al. (2007, p. 140) have used the “governance equalizer” as a tool to analyse changes in university governance in England, the Netherlands, Austria and Germany over the last 20 years. Figure 2 displays their summary findings: In all five countries there have been changes on all five dimensions; however, the degree of change varies between the five countries and also between the five dimensions. The most common feature seems to be that “academic self-governance is the main loser of the changes described” while external guidance by competence targets, the powers of managerial self governance and competition between the actors of the university systems have increased in all countries studied, but, to quite differing degrees. Changes in German higher education are considered modest when compared to the more radical changes in England or in Austria.

The analysis of de Boer et al. (2007, p. 150) refers to regulatory interventions of the state at the macro-level of analysis. In a “governance perspective” however, state interventions are “structural offers”, which will either be taken up or not, “re-contextualised” and “refined” or transformed by other actors. It follows that that type of macro-analysis has to be complemented by an analysis of the implementa-

tion of these new structural offers at a meso-level and by another analysis which identifies the effects of implemented reforms “on the micro-level of the day-to-day work of individual academics and research groups” (150; see also Kuhlee, in this volume).

2.2 Transforming the Governance of School Systems in Austria

In the German-speaking school systems – i.e. the school systems of the German federal states and the Swiss cantons in which German is the language of instruction, and the centralist state system of Austria – the traditional governance regime *before* the changes at the end of the 1980s may be characterised by a high amount of state (federal or central; canton) input regulation and a high amount of teacher self-control. This characteristic type of “double regulation” (“*Doppelsteuerung*”) is complemented by low external control of goals, a weak internal hierarchy of in-school management and leadership, and low competition between schools (see Fig. 3).

It can be argued that it is possible to distinguish three distinct phases of “school modernisation” in Austria (Altrichter et al. 2005; for a German perspective on school modernisation see Wagner and Kuhlee, in this volume): In an initial phase which started in Austria around 1993/1994 *school autonomy* was the key word. Legislation was passed and support measures were offered which were meant to open up room for manoeuvre for in-school decision-making, in Austria particularly with respect to curricular matters. This policy allowed schools to develop specific in-school curricula and, based on them, so-called “*Schulprofile*” (“school profiles”; Altrichter et al. 2011). These “school profiles” are usually packages of specific curricular elements (characterised by a thematic and/or methodological specialism) as well as some additional features (such as extra-curricular learning opportunities, special features with respect to school culture, specific services). Using this “profile”, individual schools tried to make themselves visible and attractive for specific target groups of students and parents. In this way, they aim to attract sufficient numbers of students (particularly in times of decreasing student numbers).

In terms of our five analytic dimensions, the situation may be described as follows (see Fig. 3): Through its autonomy legislation the state decreases the importance of the co-ordination mechanism “input regulation”. These moves put some pressure on teachers (who have to invest more time and energy in co-ordination in order to fulfil the promises of the “school profile”). Furthermore, it puts pressure on head teachers who have to orchestrate some co-ordinated development, although they were not provided with new instruments for leading and managing the school.

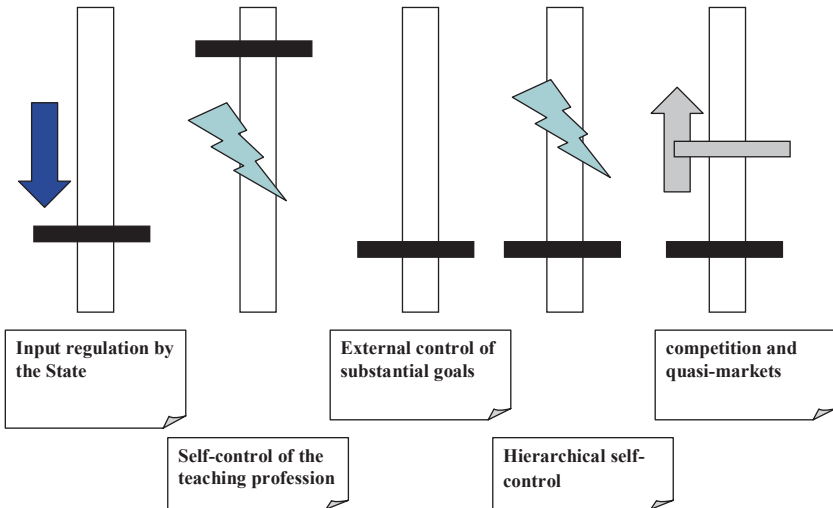


Fig. 3 Phase 1 – “School autonomy”

Additionally, we assume that in the course of these processes tendencies towards more competition between schools are increased.

It was not until the second half of the 1990s that a *second phase of school modernisation* explicitly raised the question of system governance. Concepts like school programmes, self-evaluation and quality management, new ways of school inspection, co-ordination of classroom work through exemplary assignments und “parallel tests” (*“Vergleichsarbeiten”*; i.e. tests using identical items to compare the performance of different classes) became more prominent. These measures were designed, on the one hand, to provide instruments for *in-school management*, for the internal government of schools (BMUK 1998). On the other hand, school administrations began to look for levers to “orchestrate variety” (EDK 2000) which had been obviously produced by the “autonomy policy”. This was not communicated as a departure from the previous strategy of “school autonomy”, but as a “complement” which should – for the sake of the “coherence of the system” – provide top and intermediary levels of the school system with new options for control and intervention.

In terms of our analysis of changing governance modes (see Fig. 4) attempts to increase “hierarchical self-control are the main issue in this phase. They are accompanied by early experiments with “externally formulated goals”. Strengthening the powers of the management should also put some pressure on individual teachers’ “autonomy”.

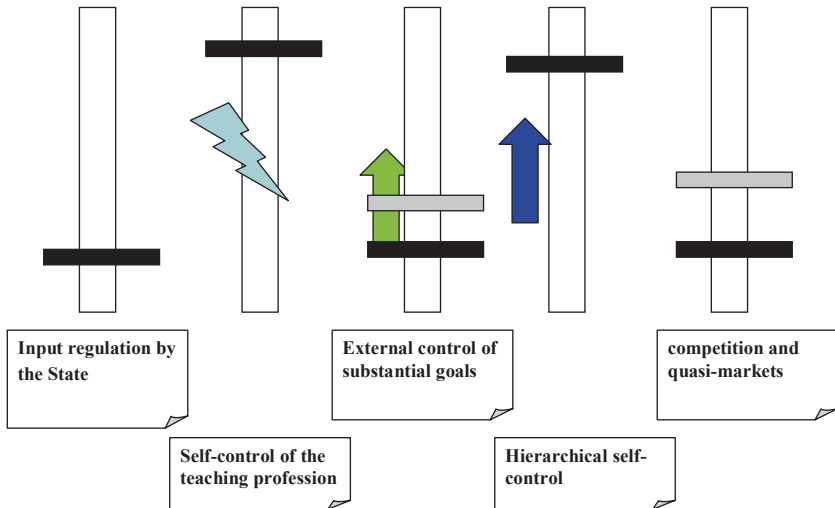


Fig. 4 Phase 2 – Strengthening in-school management

A *third phase* of modernisation was triggered by the results of the international large scale assessment studies TIMSS and PISA, which were not favourable for the education systems of the German-speaking countries (Baumert 1998; OECD 2001). This “PISA-shock” paved the way for new areas of emphasis, such as demands for more and more powerful *systemic instruments of governance* and, generally, *reinforced images of external governance of schools*. Educational standards and centrally administered external tests were to form the basis for more sophisticated “output-oriented system governance”. Additionally, the PISA (and TIMSS) results were interpreted to indicate a growing need for classroom development with respect to teaching strategies adequate to stimulating a more thorough understanding of school subjects and to dealing with heterogeneity in a more sophisticated way.

Figure 5 indicates: The main thrust of the reform is in formulating system-wide substantial goals and in controlling performance according to these goals. This should also exert some pressure on the teaching staff who are confronted for the first time with externally formulated and externally measured goals for student performance which, however, could also be used to measure teacher performance. The policy also affects the head teachers’ discretion in postulating goals for development which now are externally fixed. On the other hand, external performance standards may offer some levers to the school management to push forward with developments which might have encountered more opposition from teachers otherwise. Performance-related information may eventually support parents’ inten-



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