

## EDITORIAL

### TRUST AND CONTROL IN SHAPING EDUCATIONAL PROCESSES

Education is a process in which success depends very much on the trust invested. Learners, teachers, and institutions need autonomy, as ownership is central to educational processes. Trust among individuals and at an institutional level is considered to be a prerequisite for policymaking and social (pedagogical) interactions. At the same time, processes and results in education are always evaluated and checked, especially if institutional involvement has its say. Consequently, today's education processes—both institutional and pedagogical—are increasingly difficult to manage. One of the delicate tasks for education and its management is to balance trust (or autonomy) and control. This monothematic issue of *Studia paedagogica* focuses on diverse educational settings in which configurations of trust and control are at play.

In many countries, education systems have been decentralized and a substantial reallocation of power and autonomy to more local educational partners has taken place. The steering of educational institutions has changed radically over the past several decades. One of the most crucial changes has been the move from centralized rational planning to more decentralized governance with a diverse set of actors and networks. As it is not possible—nor desirable—to rationally and situationally plan educational processes in advance, all parties involved need a certain amount of room for maneuvering to take place. Rather than (central) steering, governance and local policy-making can today be defined as “the processes of establishing priorities, formulating and implementing policies, and being accountable in complex networks with many different actors” (Theissens, 2016, p. 56). Rather than being driven by a command–control principle, educational governments see themselves as facilitators, mediators, and brokers. On the other hand, and in combination with the mentioned trends, counter-movements have also stood up, arguing that new accountability tools such as standardized testing and performance-based measurement are needed. Such forms of control

and standardization have been labeled as the “institutionalisation of distrust” by some (e.g., Luhmann, 2000).

The two first papers in this special issue are directly related to examples of standardization and the question of whether standardization in itself is a practice which inevitably has an element of accountability attached to it or whether it can also be a strategy to create and build trust in educational settings. Maarten Penninckx and colleagues open the special issue by looking at control and trust functions that can be attributed to pupil monitoring systems that rely on standardized testing. Using a Delphi methodology, they have gathered and analyzed the opinions of Flemish stakeholders on whether standardized tests foster a development-oriented goal that supports public trust in and within schools or are characterized by an accountability-oriented perspective that increases (perceptions of) control and distrust. The paper presents scenarios for future student performance monitoring systems that have various control and trust features. The study reads as an appeal to policymakers for a profound discussion on what kind of (trust-based) monitoring system would be most effective. A key finding is that to gain broad support for a student performance monitoring system, a focus on “strengthening trust” is preferred over a focus on control. The contribution of Carlijne Ceulemans addresses the role of educational standards in shaping and understanding educational contexts. The case of the Flemish teacher career profile, which defines the functions, tasks, and attitudes of experienced teachers by means of job specifications is made central. Such standards aim to guarantee quality and uniformity in the training and professionalization of teachers. The author argues that conceiving standards through a binary lens, namely control based and accountability oriented versus autonomy and professionalization oriented, fails to fully conceptualize the (un)intended consequences of standards. The study investigates educational standards in use by describing how a standard comes to work and how it gains authority. The study finds that how a standard is implemented and embedded in evaluation and measurement approaches is a determinant in understanding how and why it effectuates both trust and control.

The complex interplay of trust and control can also be recognized at an interpersonal level and in individual perceptions of educational processes. Experienced teachers and (local) policymakers often report about their autonomy being limited. Through rules, procedures, and protocols, they experience that their work is forced to be standardized. Less experienced professionals appear to experience this as less of a problem, as they perceive elements of control and supervision as the grip and explication of working standards that still need internalization. In either case, in the end, both trust and control measures are directed at stimulating improvement through providing feedback on teacher or school strengths and weaknesses. While

the purpose of an accountability perspective primarily seems to be about providing a guarantee of compliance with legislation and regulations, it is also seen as a lever for improving educational quality. The third paper clarifies this mixture of policy intentions and how these become meaningful in educational practices. The contribution by Laila Niklasson looks at the role of trust and control in system level change processes from the perspective of a school principal. In the context of Swedish education, it describes the implications of embedding control versus trust strategies in implementation strategies on how principals in schools carry out and perceive change. Based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data gathering, it explores the potential of using different conceptualizations of trust as a way to understand change. It also clarifies that control and trust are socially constructed phenomena that are often perceived in a different way than was intended. The fourth paper—by Karla Brücknerová and Petr Novotný—also investigates the social interpersonal manifestations of trust. It clarifies the diverse ways in which mutual trust impacts teachers' learning processes and the role of principals and organizational structure in creating a social context that stimulates interdependent teacher initiatives for learning among teachers. Schools with different levels of trust were selected and analyzed using observation and interview data. Analyses show that the relationship component of trust serves as a lubricant for mutual learning among teachers. Conceptually, the paper challenges the assumption that this relationship is linear and that trust is directly related to teacher behaviors such as sharing learning content.

The paper by Annika Schweizer and colleagues takes the issue of trust and control to the core of social relationships in education. It investigates parents' relationships with educational institutions and questions whether trust can be gained via mechanisms of control. Conceptually, the authors explore the idea of trust and control as complementary rather than independent or dichotomous. In this sense, accountability measures can be functional only if they can rely on trust in the accountability system itself and if they in turn generate trust in the educational (f)actors involved. Methodologically, the authors resolutely advocate and illustrate the use of qualitative approaches that enable a thorough context-sensitive description of the phenomenon of trust. In particular, the findings on the tacit dimension of trust and how it can become reflexive and explicit are noteworthy.

The contribution by Arnošt Veselý addresses the cultural and organizational complexity that is involved in governing beyond traditional command and control. It acknowledges the importance of creating compatible cultures, as officials are more and more expected (to be able) to operate in networks while they themselves are deeply embedded in hierarchical organizations. The focus in this contribution is on education ministries, which are said to

be typical institutions in which the tension between control and trust is observable. The paper starts by exploring international differences in terms of who makes key decisions on educational issues. Next, empirical evidence from a large survey of ministerial officials in the Czech government is used to understand different kinds of accountability that are experienced by officials. It shows that the strictly hierarchical organization of education ministries is not easily aligned with policy principles aiming at open communication and a horizontal network approach.

This special issue further contains a paper by an emerging researcher and a book review. The text by the emerging researcher Sabine Gerhartz-Reiter touches on the theme of trust and control implicitly. It reports on biographically oriented narrative interviews regarding the educational careers of unsuccessful and very successful students. The aim is to present a typology to aid in describing and understanding success and failure in educational careers. The book review by Amy Quintelier again reaches the very heart of the special issue. The book *Methods and Modalities of Effective School Inspections* by Melanie Ehren (2016) was chosen for review as it provides an overview of evidence on how effective control strategies (in this case school inspections) can help create conditions to improve the quality of education in (inspected) schools.

No doubt, the interplay between trust and control is a permanent and highly sensitive phenomenon in education and the settings in which it takes place.

*Jan Vanboof, Milan Pol, editors of the issue*

## References

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