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Contents

Shared Responsibility of Three Principals in a Swiss Primary School

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Abstract: *This paper summarizes a multi-perspective case study on principals' shared responsibility based on the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP). The aim of the project is to make a valuable contribution to the broad international knowledge on successful school principals. The following Swiss case study gives insight into a story on successfully shared responsibility of three female principals of a primary school in the Canton of Zurich against the backdrop of the Swiss educational system and school culture, which lacks so far accountability measures such as rankings and ratings, but focuses on social efficacy and democratic aspects instead. Successful strategies applied in the school are the sharing of responsibility, the development of a team spirit, based on innovative projects, and many efforts to integrate pupils and provide them with a sense of community. An emphasis on innovative school development projects and a strong focus on the social dimension of school culture and on fostering cross-curricular competencies turned out to be key indicators for the principals' and the school's excellent reputation and success.*

Keywords: Principalship, principals, shared responsibility, International Successful School Principalship Project, Switzerland, single case, case study

Introduction

During the past decades, (low) student achievement has increasingly focused on teachers and principals as responsible for the problem and its solution (Ball 2008). This emphasis has prompted educational policies and accountability systems to improve teaching practices and school quality in many countries. Whereas accountability is highly linked to the structural level of schooling, (shared) responsibility includes both structural and personal aspects, such as autonomy, self-determination and cooperation (Bierhoff et al. 2005; Lauermann & Karabenick 2011). In this perspective, school principals' shared responsibility is a crucial aspect of professionalism, school culture and school quality. There is a body of knowledge on cooperative aspects of leadership, such as shared decision making and distributed leadership as core elements of transformational leadership (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach 1999;

Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz & Seashore Louis 2009; Pashiardis & Johansson 2016). However, studies on shared responsibility and leadership are still scarce (Connolly, James & Fertig 2017; Lauermann & Karabenick 2011, 2013; Lee Chi-Kin, Kwan & Walker 2009).

The following case study is contextualized in the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP 2015). It aims to analyze the leadership and shared responsibility of three female principals of a Swiss primary school focusing on different actors' perception of the relationship between the principals' leadership practices upon the school culture, community, as well as pupils' learning. Theoretically, we refer to the ongoing discourse on professionalization of school principals (e.g. Beycioglu & Pashiardis 2015; Fullan 2014; Pfadenhauer 2005). Furthermore, we link the analysis of our case study with the German tradition of school culture and school quality (Dubs 2005; Fend 1986, 2006, 2008; Seitz & Capaul 2005; Thom, Ritz & Steiner 2002), as well as international approaches on leadership in schools (Day, Gu & Sammons 2016; Day & Gurr 2014; Day et al. 2011; Moos, Johansson & Day 2011). Moreover, we include biographical aspects of leadership because leadership, and the role of principals in particular, are strongly linked to teachers' biography and life streams (Avolio 2005; Kunze & Stelmazyk 2008). Swiss principals can hardly be judged based on high-quality outcomes, such as student achievement, because, compared to the accountability system in many other countries (Grissom, Kalogrides & Loeb 2015), no such data are available yet as national tests on educational goals only started in 2016 with first publications on single topics due in 2018. We therefore focus on aspects of success in broader terms, such as positive values and social capabilities (Day et al. 2016), as well as dimensions referring to school quality that emerged in the case study, namely shared responsibility and social efficacy.

School Principalship in the Swiss Context

In Switzerland, the implementation of school principals was only introduced in the 1990s, whereas in other countries school principalship has a long tradition (Ärlestig, Day & Johansson 2016). The development in the Swiss state elementary education system is rooted in the reforms initiated in the wake of New Public Management (Altrichter & Maag Merki, 2010; Heinrich & Kohlstock 2016). As Switzerland is a federalist country, the responsibility for education lies mainly within the 24 cantons (states). In some of the cantons (for instance the Canton of Zurich), principalship has been mandatory since 2005. In other cantons, in contrast, it has been introduced on a voluntary basis (Huber 2016).

With the implementation of principals in the school system, the idea of decentralization (Buschor 1993, 2005) was realized. Nevertheless there remained strong links between the school, the school board within the local community and the canton. Some authors describe it as a 'tight directive net' (Höher & Rolf 1996: 190) because political guidance and operational management are intertwined (Thom, Ritz & Steiner 2002). Traditional, centralized administration of schools on the cantonal level shifted and was complemented with a local governance structure, consisting mainly of a school board (layperson), elected by the public

and a school principal, elected by the school board. In general, the principal in Switzerland is responsible for the operational and personnel management, whereas the school board, which appoints the principal, leads the school in accordance with the cantonal requirements strategically and makes the final decisions regarding the budget, personnel decisions and the school program (Kohlstock 2013).

Political System, Socio-Economic Situation and Current Tensions

The strong democratic and federalist political system provides the framework for principals' work in Switzerland. Table 1 provides summary information about the country and the Canton of Zurich. Switzerland is a small, mountainous country comprising an area of 40,000 km^2 with a high GDP per capita (recorded at 86,835 US dollars in 2018). In contrast to many other European nation-states, Switzerland is a nation formed by several linguistic groups and different denominational affiliations. There are four national languages in Switzerland with the following divisions: (Swiss) German (63%), French (23%), Italian (8%), Romansh (0.5%). Around 21 per cent speak another language (BFS 2015). However, there are considerable differences between these regions in terms of language, economical structure and amount of people with migration background. The following case study, for instance, is based on a school in the Canton of Zurich, the economic capital with dominant political influence. Schools play a major role in bringing the languages closer together, since cantonal school regulations require that children learn a second national language beginning at primary school. However, there is a debate whether children should learn French/German or English as a second language, which currently causes tension between the different regions. Switzerland's religious and linguistic borders do not coincide, and the country maintains strong cultural links with its neighboring countries. Historically, a strong spirit of republicanism and federalism has given birth to the creation of Switzerland as the first modern republic in Europe in 1848. This has fostered a strong sense of national identity that has emphasized independence from superpowers and a system of direct democracy (Brühwiler 2014). The Swiss political system offers its electorate an array of rights and grants them a direct influence on policies at every level. The Swiss democracy is maintained by three administrative levels, and consists of federal, cantonal and municipal divisions.

Table 1: Summary Information about Switzerland and the Canton of Zurich

	Country Level	**Canton of Zurich**
Facts and figures	41,285 km2 8,417,700 Inhabitants Four official languages	1,29 km2 1,487,151 Inhabitants German official language
Political system	Democractic, federalistic country, with 24 cantons	12 counties and 166 municipalities

Challenges	Four official languages	Zurich as an economic hub
	Public Welfare, prosperity Gap	Migration
	Migration	
Socio-economic situation	GDP 86,083 CHP per inhabitant	22% of the GDP
	(about 86,835 US dollar)	
Educational system **School level**	Federalistic country	Cantonal and local School Administration
	No educational ministry at the national level, responsibility lays within the cantons, but coordination within the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK)	
Training of principals	Further education at universities of teacher education (mandatory 15 ECTS-credits)	Mandatory 15 ECTS-credits
Selection of principals		Community level
		School board (layperson)

Professionalization, Selection and Training

Since the beginning of the implementation of principals there has been a process of professionalization (Pfadenhauer 2005). It has led, for instance, to their legal representation with the establishment of a principals union.

With regard to the selection of principals, the procedures are similar across different municipalities and cantons: School principals are selected by the local school board, sometimes with slightly differing selection criteria. A major difference is the fact that in some cantons principals need to have a prior teacher education and teaching experience whereas in others, this is only an optional criterion. Still principals without former teacher training and teaching experience remained a minority whenever the possibility existed. All principals must attend a special training, usually provided by Universities of Teacher Education, with a workload of 15 ECTS-credits at least, regardless of their individual background (prior education or work experience). Recently, masters' programs at several universities have been established (Huber 2016).

Accountability and Successful School Principalship

In the Swiss school system, there is hardly any tradition of accountability. Neither do standardized tests nor large scale assessments exist. Even though Switzerland participated in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, data have never been narrowed down to the single school, classroom or student level. Only in 2016 a school monitoring system was implemented in Switzerland for the first time ever (EDK 2016), with tests in mathematics in the first year and publication of the results due in 2018. Nevertheless, an accountability system in terms of an external school evaluation was established a few years ago based on common standards on school quality providing professional and thorough feedback. Schools are visited every five years by an evaluation board with a formative approach to school evaluation in order to ensure quality. Schools are not only evaluated externally but are also held accountable on a yearly basis by the local school boards. However this internal accountability differs from school to school and from board to board and cannot provide reliable or comparable data.

Based on these contextual facts it is challenging to assess whether these newly installed school principals fulfil their tasks successfully and achieve the goals the initial implementation set, due to the fact that Switzerland does not have a test tradition nor school rankings to compare before and after. To date, evaluation criteria mainly refer to Fend's tradition of school quality and school effectiveness that emphasise amongst other factors the social dimensions of schooling (Fend 1986, 2006, 2008). Subsequent approaches stress the interdependency of a broad range of domain-specific competences (e.g. competence in mathematics but also in history or arts), as well as cross-curricular competences (e.g. social competence, well-being) (Maag Merki, Emmerich & Holmeier 2015). According to Day et al. (2016: 224):

> … 'effectiveness' as defined solely in terms of academic progress and measurable attainment, is a necessary, but not sufficient, indicator of 'success' in terms of students' broader educational progress and attainment.

Therefore, the term 'successful principalship' needs further clarification even though robust international data show that successful school leadership consists of several core dimensions (Gurr & Day 2014; Leithwood 1994; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins 2006). While these aspects focus on school leadership, successful principals need to show numerous personal characteristics. In accordance with Day and Leithwood (2007: 172), successful school principals share a common set of values and consistently use a range of behavior that can be seen across cases and (intercultural) contexts:

> Successful principalship requires a combination of cognitive and emotional understandings allied to clear sets of standards and values, the differential application of a cluster of key strategies, and the abiding presence of a passion for people and education.

Responsibility

In the context of Fend's (2006) extended theory of schooling (shared) responsibility represents a social dimension of school quality and school culture beyond accountability. The concept of responsibility establishes a link between contextual and personal influences and has been defined as a person's commitment to produce or prevent designated outcomes. It encompasses dimensions, such as perception of job autonomy, position in the organizational network, availability of resources and information, role ambiguity, support, acting proactively and trust (Lauermann & Karabenick 2011, 2013). The concept has a clarifying function in the context of the current educational policy debate on accountability and can be interpreted in terms of an alternative concept referring to the teachers' internal sense of responsibility in contrast to the structural dimension. Whereas teachers who are held accountable are judged externally, those who feel responsible seem to be actors. From an agency perspective, the concept implies that teachers also accept responsibility for teaching-related outcomes beyond their obligation (Lauermann & Karabenick 2011).

Responsibility is strongly linked to self-determination, self-efficacy (Lauermann & Karabenick 2013), and social efficacy (Hopf 2004, 2013). The latter is embedded in the German debate on school culture. According to Helsper (2008: 65), school culture can be characterized by the 'symbolic order' of the single school that is related to strains regarding (1) the reality of the school system and structure, (2) the symbolic level of social interactions between different actors in the school (students, teachers, principals, other professionals, board members, parents, policy makers etc.), and (3) the imaginary level that appears in terms of school programs, principals' and other actors' talks and daily practices. Social efficacy refers to the social interactions between different actors (Helsper 2008) and to Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory focusing on the actors' beliefs in their effectiveness in performing specific tasks. Furthermore, the term 'social efficacy' has considerable similarities with Bandura's notion of collective efficacy. The latter refers to shared 'beliefs in its capability to attain goals, accomplish desired tasks and make a change' (Bandura 1997: 501). Schools develop collective beliefs about their capacity for change and to provide a good learning environment for their students.

Research Questions

Against this background, the research questions are as follows:

> How do the principals and different actors (e.g. teachers, board members, parents, students, etc.) perceive the principals' characteristics, leadership practices and strategies?

> How do they establish a link to the term 'successful school' – against the backdrop of the Swiss educational system without a tradition of testing?

Methodological Approach

For our purposes, we used the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) protocol and followed the explorative, qualitative case study approach. The designed protocol, conceptualized by a broad network of researchers, has been used and validated in several countries and research projects since 2002. The aim of these multi-perspective case studies is to contribute to the broad international knowledge on successful school principals (Gurr & Day 2014; ISSPP 2015).

Translation Process and Validation of the German Version of the ISSPP Protocol

For the first Swiss case study, we had, in a first step, the initial English protocol translated verbatim from English into High German and asked a professional to translate the result back into English in order to validate the German version of the protocol on the language level. In a second step, we crosschecked the translation in a group of three researchers. We particularly paid attention to terms and phrases that appeared different in the second English version (translated back from German into English) compared to the initial protocol. Step by step, we decided on adaptations in the German version (Kohlstock, Brauckmann & Bieri Buschor 2015). We used the validated German protocol to gather the data for the Swiss case study. Interviews were conducted in Swiss German. Data were then transcribed in High German and, for the subsequent presentation of the findings, translated into English.

Criteria for Selecting the Case

Based on Day and Leithwood's (2007: 172) understanding of the term 'successful principals', we defined the selection criteria as follows:

1. Established school principalship for at least 10 years
2. Strong learning and teaching engagement
3. Declared commitment to research-based practice
4. Good reputation, including a high sense of principals' responsibility among parents, school board, external evaluation
5. Willingness to reflect, learn and discuss the role and the tasks of school principalship and personal development,
6. Accessibility to pupils, parents, staff and school board

Using these criteria, we selected cases from the population of teacher training schools in the Canton of Zurich, where students of the Zurich University of Teacher Education do their internships. The following case study is based on one of these schools within the network of teacher training and will be described in the result section.

Data Gathering

The selection of the school, including a phase of 'contracting' took place from October 2014 to December 2014. We conducted interviews with the three principals of the school, seven teachers (in two groups), eight pupils, four parents, one board member, the president of the school district and the school psychologist during the time period of January until July 2015. In November 2015, we conducted another interview with the principals. In addition, we conducted observations in the school.

Data Analysis

For analyzing the data, we followed the guidelines on content analysis in the ISSPP protocol. We analyzed the interviews, step-by-step, in a reflective process (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). Firstly, we applied an inductive approach and used strategies from grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss 2008; Glaser & Strauss 1974) to analyze our interview data. This means we did not immediately categorize the data according to the categorization given in the ISSPP protocol. The aim of this procedure was to understand emerging themes beyond these categories. Secondly, we compared the themes with the ISSPP protocol categories based on a large amount of studies on successful leadership. Thirdly, we compared the data from a multi-actor perspective based on the matrix analysis of the principals' and other actors' interviews (ISSPP 2015).

In addition to interview data that are based on self-reports, we used observational data. We applied the method of shadowing (Czarniawska 2007; Tulowitzki 2012) to observe the principals' and teachers' interactions. This approach has been widely used in the field of organizational psychology (Kozlowski 2012; Mintzberg 1970). Finally, we compared the findings based on the interviews with the observational data gathered, including the plenary meeting with all the children of the school and a majority of the teachers. Within the context of mixed methods, this procedure has been described as analysis in terms of divergence and convergence (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2010).

Findings

The School and the Community

Context of the School

The school we report on is a Swiss primary school (grade 1 to 6), including Kindergarten and after-school care, that celebrated its 20th birthday in 2014. The school comprises 34 teachers, including five male teachers, teaching 340 pupils. Only a minority of teachers work full-time. Additionally, there are 13 professionals responsible for day care, social work and facility management. The school is run by three female principals who share the position of the school principal.

Due to the increasing diversity, classroom management requires high levels of attention from teachers, particularly regarding students with special needs due to their social background. Originally, the school was built in a very quiet, middleclass neighborhood, on the outskirts of Zurich. However, for the past 10 years, a social housing strategy has been pursued which has led to a considerable shift in the socio-economic structure of the community: a large amount of families with a migration background and a comparatively lower social status have moved in. The school is nowadays located in a challenging environment, facing a very heterogeneous group of children. In this area, many languages are spoken with 40 per cent of the people having a non-Swiss German background. The neighborhood, nevertheless, still has a village character but lacks shops, restaurants and other facilities nearby.

Environment

The school grounds are very generous, over several levels, with covered places and niches, a huge sports ground and even a pond. It is extremely clean and immaculately kept. The premises are open to the public, there are neither fences nor gates and there is no video surveillance. The school building, which was built in the 1990s, runs over several floors and contains numerous entrances. It is decorated with a considerable amount of artwork made by the children and there are posters with house rules at the entrances. The caretaker lives with his family on the premises.

Governance Aspects – School Board

The principals report to a school board that is responsible for 15 schools in the school district and consists of 25 laymen, including the president. Two members are explicitly assigned to the school. However, the presidency is a full-time position and paid accordingly. He is responsible for the personnel management of the three school principals and meets with them on a regular basis.

Characteristics of the School

School History and Development

Over the past few years, the school has undergone remarkable development. According to the principals, in the beginning, 'teachers used to focus on teaching' (Principal B, Interview 1: 2) due to the relatively high homogeneity of the students' social background. Against the backdrop of the social housing strategy and the subsequent development, including the increasing variety of students, the school has been struggling to cope with these challenges ever since. According to the interviewees the increasing diversity due to the changing socio-economic background of the families seems to be the major challenge of the school. One teacher used the 'battle' metaphor to describe the situation (Teacher M, Interview 1: 8). As a consequence, the school has made remarkable efforts to maintain quality teaching. One of the strategies was to establish new projects in order to integrate pupils and their families from different social and cultural environments. In addition, the question of how to maintain the

level of achievement has arisen. The president of the school board summarizes the development as follows:

> I think that there are other schools with more energy regarding the quality of teaching, yet this is a school that is socially effective, with tremendous effort being made to enable kids to learn in the first place. (President: 1)

School Culture

The school strives to enhance school quality and emphasizes the social dimension of the school culture. To act upon children's needs, a project called 'School Island' was introduced. The idea of that special program is to reduce teachers' stress within the classroom by providing special learning settings for pupils with difficulties and special needs during a certain time period. The program is led by an additional teacher who specialized in the field of special needs education and social work. The program aims to support pupils with learning difficulties, as well as gifted students.

Additionally, the school is involved in a network with several other schools following the same approach towards a 'social efficacy school' (Hopf 2004). These two projects (school island/social efficacy) were originally initiated by the principals and adopted later by the school team. The importance of the social and democratic values of schooling was mentioned several times by the president, the principals and teachers in the interviews. However, the principals strongly emphasized that they could only be as good as their team. One of the principals pointed out: 'School quality, particularly the social aspect, is the merit of the teachers rather than the principals because school happens without us but not without teachers' (Principal B, Interview 2: 19). The democratic values and the emphasis on the social dimension of the school culture are also visible in the plenary sessions with all the pupils that are held on a regular basis.

During the early years of the school, parent engagement was high. However, it has significantly dropped over the past 10 years. Parents mentioned that they were still involved in specific projects. The three principals stated that the parents' influence on the school was considerably high. The parents, in contrast, judged their role as being rather limited to providing support during special project activities, such as baking cakes for celebrations, erecting tents for performances, etc. One father stated:

> Even though parents are involved in the school, there is a clear barrier between parents and the principals that is mainly emphasized by the principals rather than by the teachers. And there are just small windows of opportunity … we particularly collaborate during extra-curricular activities, such as celebrations. (Parent D: 42)

The parents seem to appreciate the social dimension of the school culture. However, the statement expresses mild criticism regarding the rights to participate in the school community and to be involved in aspects beyond extra-curricular activities.

The School Principals' Perceptions – Biography and Narrative Profile

The Principals' Biography in the Context of the School History

The principals' biography is strongly intertwined with the process of establishing a system of leadership. Two of the three principals (A/B/C), whose stories are depicted in graph 1, were pioneers in the Canton of Zurich. In 2004/2005, a 'steering committee' elected the two principals A and B. Before taking over the leadership position, they had been teaching at the same primary school for over 10 years. Principal A used to teach from grade 1 to 3, whereas B worked with classes from grade 4 to 6. When they started their careers as a principal, they continued teaching as the size of the school, at that time, did not allow the establishment of two full principal positions.

The motherhood of principal A led to fundamental changes because she successively reduced her workload. Finally, she reduced to a 20 per cent workload. Even though principal A planned to resign from the job, principal B was absolutely convinced that they could continue their system of shared leadership. Principal B convinced her to stay and told the board members that she could not imagine herself having the full principal position and would resign if shared leadership was not possible. They continued their work, even while A was on maternity leave and, therefore, less present at school. In 2013, things changed when principal B met another principal, C, on a further education course for school principals and asked her to join the team. At that time, C was working as a principal in a rural area in the Canton of Zurich. After her first years of teaching, C studied psychology for three years and had considerable experience in the field of special needs education. She sought job enrichment and a change of the working environment and conditions.

Presently, principals B and C are working 50 per cent as school principals and 30-50 per cent as mentors at Zurich University of Teacher Education. In their role as mentors, they accompany student teachers during their internships at their own school, but also in other schools. Principal A is still working with a workload of 20 per cent and is fully integrated in the team. They divided responsibilities: principal A cares for Kindergarten, C for 1st to 3rd grade, and B for 4th to 6th grade. Rarely are they all together in the office at the same time. Nevertheless, they stated that it was shared responsibility, while dividing different tasks at the same time. One of them said: 'Even though we are not always here together, we all feel responsible for the whole school' (Principal B, Interview 3: 3).

The three principals have established a strong network between the different actors within the school system: 'Principals B and A are the ones with a tight network within the school and the community because they come from this village and have been working here for so long' (Board member T: 10).
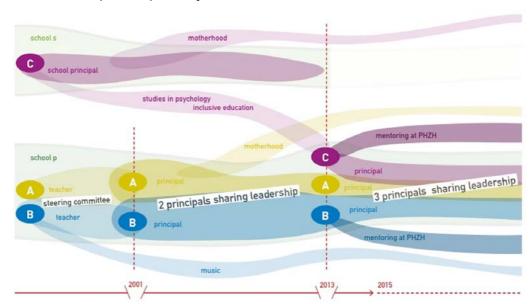
Figure 1: Principals A, B and C, who went through a phase of transition from teaching to shared leadership and responsibility.

The three principals are perceived to be a strong team. However, B is, from the pupils' perspective, regarded to be 'the boss' of the team 'because she is so strong that she is able to push the piano over the bridge [connecting the Kindergarten with the main building] on her own' (Principal B, Interview 2: 27). The teachers describe the three as follows: 'I got the impression that the three of them complement each other with their different characters. They are all different but they each have good qualities, and I think they work together very nicely' (Teacher S, Interview 2: 15). The member of the board describes them as being strong, present, clear, clearly structured, efficient, benevolent and consistent (Board member: 4). Many times in the interviews the unusual fact of three people taking the lead is commented on:

> I think that three people are better than one. … It is actually not according to the book to implement principalship consisting of three at a school of that size … I have to admit, it has proved itself: if one does not decide dogmatically but checks actual conditions and circumstances in the local situation. (President: 4-5)

The teachers mention the principals' passion for creating a good school, a passion for the support of their teachers and for the pupils. One teacher stated:

> I find that they are all very highly involved and instrumental in the success of our school and that they come to us, ask for our opinions, listen to our concerns and take them seriously. Things are not just ignored but discussed by the three heads of the school, and it is a huge benefit that they are all different. (Teacher M, Interview 1: 5)

Another teacher stresses the aspects of presence, attention and care (Teacher N, Interview 1: 9).

The interviewees perceived the strong sense of shared responsibility and the principals' education-oriented stance as being the most important qualities for improving the school. They emphasized their engagement and constant effort to establish a community-based school culture, including innovative projects to strengthen the sense of togetherness. Pupils and parents particularly valued these activities. One of the pupils stated: 'They always organise so many activities. They even had the great idea of the plenary sessions so that all the pupils are visible and have a voice' (Pupil T, Interview 1: 14). Members of the board further appreciated the principals' contribution and relatedness to the community. One father mentioned that he greatly valued the openness of the principals. To him, participating in so many projects was a clear indicator of school climate and school quality: 'I appreciate the principals' openness and that they let you [the interviewers] in to gain an insight into their books and listen to people's talks. These are important aspects of a good school and quality management' (Parent F: 67).

The different interview partners were in agreement that the principals' educational experience influenced classroom management, as well as school development. All interviewees mentioned their contribution to good classroom management by providing support for pupils with difficulties. The principals, having taught for so many years, intervene as soon as there are disturbances. Even the pupils said that they appreciated the support system the principals established among them: 'We build a helping group if there are pupils with difficulties. I belong to the group and I think that it is very good that she [one of the principals] organized this' (Pupil M, Interview 1: 11).

The high consistency in the team seems to be an important precondition for school development. The latter has always been stimulated by the three principals' professional development. Sharing responsibility also includes reflection and 'co-reflection' (Zeichner & Liston 1996), through which they have been learning from their experiences from the beginning of their cooperation. Being involved in teacher education is also a resource for co-reflection to promote school development. The principals and the president particularly emphasized the role of theoretical approaches to school development.

Successful Leadership and Management Strategies

Shared responsibility is one of the strategies used to face the increasing challenges. However, it is closely related to the establishment of school principals on the structural level and the female principals' biography (see above). The principals, as well as the members of the board, perceive shared responsibility as a strategy in terms of a strategy to buffer stress. As principal B said: 'It is a release from the strain that we share responsibility' (Interview 1: 7). In the third interview, she further stated that she also perceived it as 'a crucial aspect of innovation' (Interview 3: 2). Gaining the third principal led to an energy increase because of their mutual

understanding of school development, an aspect that was also mentioned by the president (President: 3). The teachers highlighted that the principals' shared responsibility also epitomized 'diversity' (Teacher M/S, Interview 1: 19). Moreover, the responsibility aspect is also inherent in one of the schools' development approaches, namely the strong focus on pupils' participation. The parents and teachers in particular mentioned the strong sense of community in combination with the responsibility aspect.

Team spirit and team development based on innovative projects is another strategy. Firstly, the team with its spirit is seen as a resource and as a source of self-regulation which also includes coping with emotions. Teachers mentioned that they often laughed in the team, shared their emotions and that it was a 'give and take-culture', as well as a 'strong team spirit' that has been developed over the past years (Teacher N, Interview 2: 16). This was also the principals' view that emphasized the well-being of the staff in the team due to their strong sense of togetherness and shared identity. Secondly, school and team development are mainly related to innovative projects comprising curricular and extra-curricular aspects. Overall, the interviewees' statements show a very high similarity regarding this aspect. Getting inspiration from many school projects and initiatives from outside, including the school- and community-based projects, such as the circus and music projects (see above), is regarded as a strategy to cope with the current challenges.

In addition, the *social efficacy approach and strong sense of community* mentioned by the principals and the president can also be seen as a 'strategy'. Yet, this aspect has already been described as an important part of the school culture (see above).

Integrating pupils and raising levels of achievement were named by all interviewees as goals and long-time strategies. The different approaches to integrate pupils from different social and cultural backgrounds was emphasized. Establishing the 'school island' in cooperation with social workers was particularly mentioned as one of the principals' significant contributions to integration. Another contribution was the music in the school, including the choir that was highly valued by the parents and board members. Parents regarded the vast number of projects as a special effort to integrate underprivileged children. As one father said: 'They provide a tremendous amount of opportunities for pupils with learning difficulties and children with a lower social background … they absolutely want to boost social competencies' (Parent F: 38-39). The principals and teachers also hold the view that these activities aimed to foster the pupils' cross-curricular competencies rather than the cognitive domain. They further mentioned parents' participation as a crucial element of integration.

Key Indicators of Success

The analysis reveals two indicators of success and can be described as follows:

Emphasis on Innovative School Development Projects

One indicator of success is the school's adaptation to new situations by means of implementing school development projects (as described above). The principals have always

been interested in participating in innovative, research-based projects in order to cope with challenging social situations and to improve school quality and culture. Since 2015, the school also participates in the project 'Strengthening the integrational power of schools' that was initiated within the school district. In addition, two of the three principals seized the opportunity to work part-time in teacher education. Being involved in different teams provides further inspiration for strengthening the school culture and school development.

Strong Focus on Social Dimension of School Culture and on Fostering Cross-Curricular Competencies

The school strongly emphasizes the social aspects of the school culture (see above). According to statements made by the principals, teachers and parents, the school also fosters students' cross-curricular competences. The school provides many extra-curricular activities, such as sport, music or circus projects that are aimed at supporting pupils who experience a lack of learning opportunities at home. These extra-curricular activities are highly regarded by all the interviewees. Parents, for instance, mentioned that the children were sad when they only had one circus project during their primary school years at the school. The pupils were enthusiastic when they told about their music projects and the dance award. The school psychologist particularly praised the school's endeavors to strengthen the children's social competencies: 'Their efforts to enhance pupils' social competencies are unique in the school district' (School psychologist R: 2).

Concurrently, the awareness of the school's strength was complemented with the perception that academic achievement was rather second-rate. The parents, the school psychologist and the representative of the board members mentioned the low number of achievement-oriented learning opportunities. The school psychologist said: 'It seems to me that there is an imbalance between the strength of the social dimension and the weakness related to fostering academic learning' (School psychologist R: 5). The board member mentioned that the parents had often complained about it (Board member T: 12). The principals themselves were clear regarding their philosophy. In the third interview, one principal said: 'We place great importance on social competence and community aspects rather than pushing pupils towards passing the admission test to academic high school' (Principal B, Interview 3: 6).

In sum, the school enjoys a good reputation. It is perceived as a 'good school' with a high level of stability and an excellent retention management. All teachers mentioned their strong affiliation with the school. Accordingly, the fluctuation of teachers is extremely low. The parents greatly appreciate the school. The representatives of the evaluation board also value the principals' and staff's constant efforts to develop the school, strengthen the community ties and improve the students' social competencies. Additionally, the two principals working part-time in teacher education are highly respected in the network of affiliated schools and a considerable amount of student teachers are assigned to the school for their internship.

Discussion and Conclusion

The story of shared leadership needs to be interpreted in the light of the Swiss reforms of school leadership during the past 30 years. In this context, being a successful principal is strongly linked to the school reforms, namely the principals' transition from the role of teachers to principals. Therefore, the female principals' leadership practices are strongly contextualized in their life streams (Avolio 2005). This process could also be described as a '"layering" of "fit-for-purpose" combinations and accumulations of within-phase leadership strategies and actions over time' (Day et al. 2016: 225).

However, the principals' professional development is also closely linked to female teachers' working biography (Kunze & Stelmazyk 2008), which paved the way for shared leadership and responsibility. The principals asserted a system of shared leadership and extended their job autonomy, which is, amongst other dimensions (network, resources, role ambiguity, support, acting proactively and trust), a crucial aspect of professional development in the school context (Ball 2008; Lauermann & Karabenick 2013; Pfadenhauer 2005).

Sharing responsibility in the school can also be interpreted as a strategy, which has had different beneficial effects upon the personal and organizational level. On the personal level, it has had a positive impact on the principals' well-being, their professional development and co-reflection. On the organization level, it has had positive effects on providing opportunities to school development and improvement, generating ideas to establish innovative projects, and maintaining a close relationship with the community. It can be interpreted against the background of the Swiss cultural context emphasizing democratic values. According to Fend's (2006) extended theory of schooling, the social dimension of school quality refers to community-based practice, corporate feeling and responsibility beyond test-related accountability. In this light, the term 'successful principal' is closely linked to the social dimension of school culture. However, the strong focus on the social dimension of the school culture also has side effects, namely a tendency to second-rate academic achievement. This can cause unintended outcomes, such as misunderstandings with parents.

The results of the case study further reveal that principals' strategies to deal with the current challenges are strongly related to the local and national context. Therefore, the term 'successful principal' needs to be discussed against the cultural, organizational and individual background.

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