



Balancing Curriculum Regulation and Freedom across Europe

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CIDREE 2013 conference

November 14, 2013



CIDREE
yearbook
2013

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Curriculum classics

- What is of most worth to teach and learn within a limited amount of time?
- Many claims on aims made by many:
What to prioritize - and why?

Relevant questions for CIDREE agencies

- How to organize debate and decision-making about what is of most worth to teach and learn?
- To what extent and how to regulate what should be taught and learned?
- To what extent and how to monitor and inspect what has been taught and learned?
- To what extent and how to allow, foster and support local curricular decision-making?
- What roles, when, how and by whom to fulfil when developing, reviewing, and implementing a national curriculum framework?

Why this theme for the Yearbook?

Sharing and developing knowledge by CIDREE agencies about balancing curriculum regulation and offering schools curricular freedom (examples, motives, experiences, dilemmas...)

Professional implications to be inferred from an analysis of curriculum *policies, practices* and *research* from an international perspective



Curriculum regulation

Government's intention to prescribe high-fidelity implementation of directives

- at **input** level ('front door'): goals and contents, in terms of 'goals to attain' or 'goals to strive for'
- at **output** level ('back door'): assessments, examinations, and inspection/surveillance

Restricted room for site-specific curricular choices

Curriculum deregulation

Government's intention to refrain from prescription and control at input and output level by stimulating school-based decision-making

Trust in schools and teachers having professional freedom to make site-specific interpretations of curriculum guidelines



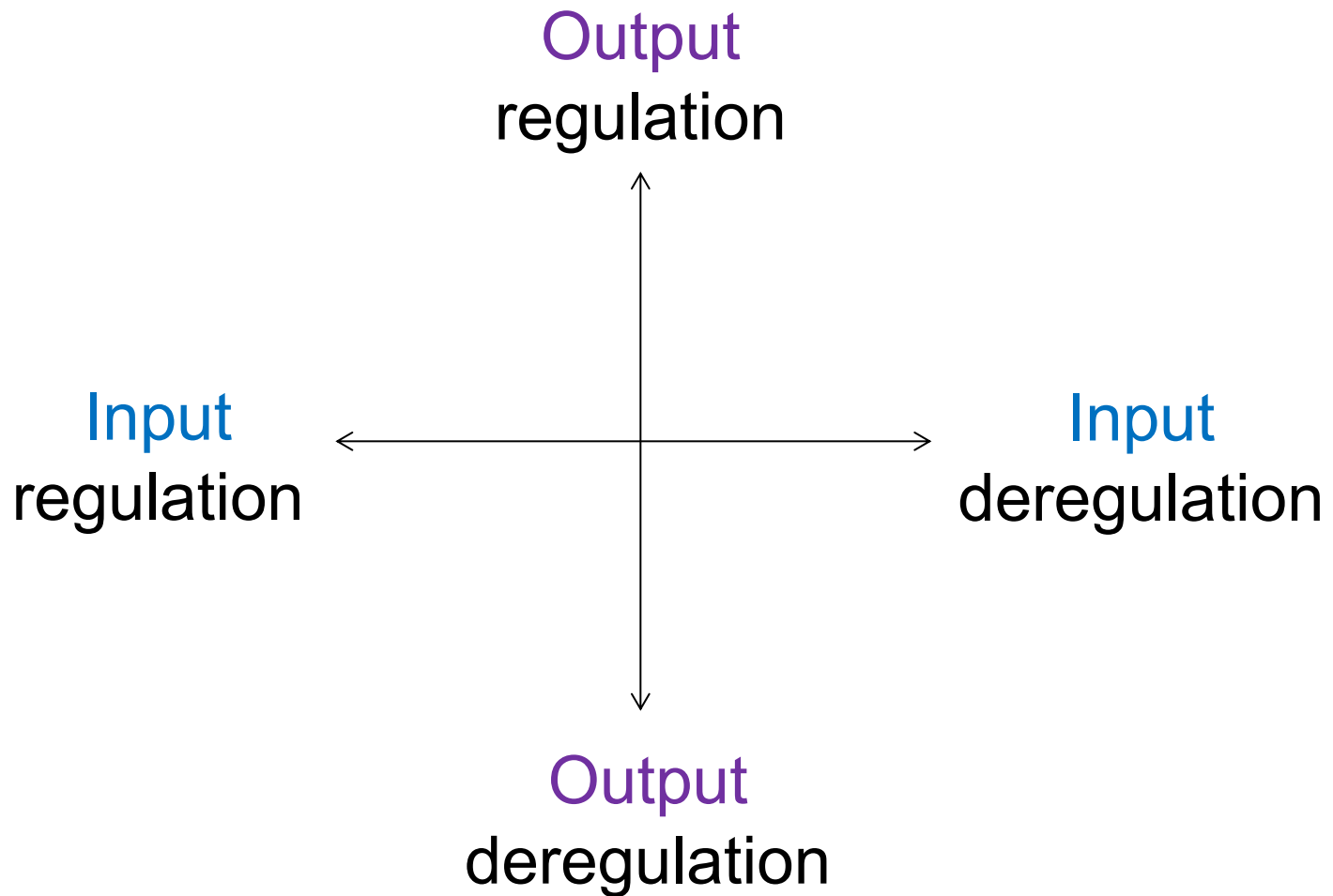
Paradoxical perspectives

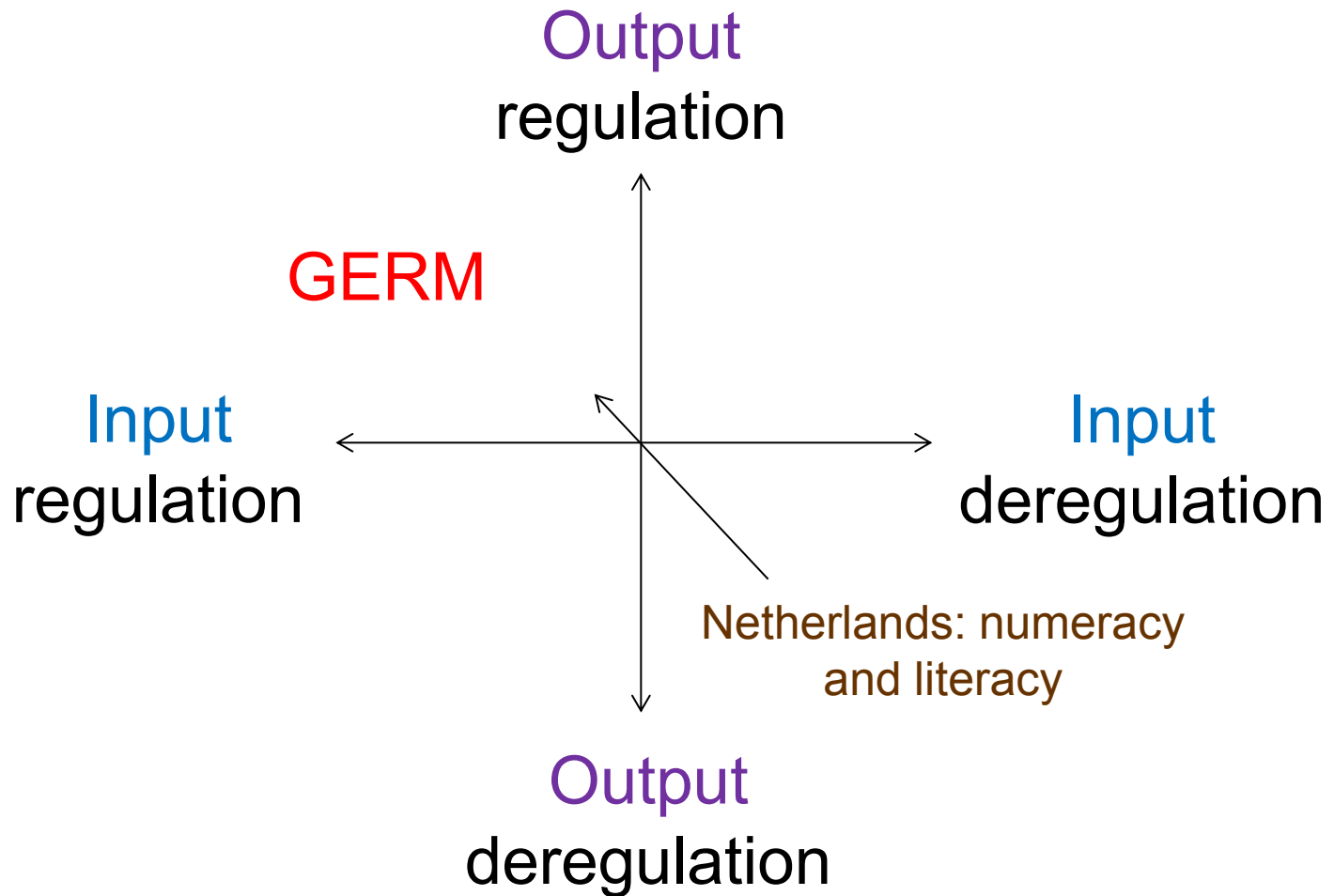
Input regulation and output regulation are 'paradoxical perspectives':

- Strong input and output regulation does not create professional ownership.
- Weak input regulation provides insufficient sense of direction.
- Only trust in teachers and teachers' professionalism does not guarantee educational quality.
- Insufficient curricular autonomy undermines teachers' professionalism and negatively affects imago of the teaching profession.

Balancing act: What is wisdom?







Contributions to Yearbook

- Estonia: *Finding one's own way*
- Finland: *A balance based on dialogue, cooperation and trust*
- France: *Work in progress*
- Germany: *Decreasing autonomy at many levels*
- Hungary: *A swinging pendulum*
- Ireland: *A growing role for schools*
- Netherlands: *Curriculum regulation and freedom as a puzzling paradox*
- Norway: *Seeking guidance and autonomy*
- Portugal: *Struggling with decentralization*
- Scotland: *Calls for exemplification*
- Slovenia: *Curricular autonomy and teacher professionalism*
- Sweden: *Steering with outcomes*
- England - Scotland: *Divergent moves*

To be discussed

- Where to position each country now?
- Pendulum movements: what was, is, and should be?
- Reasons for pendulum movements?

Regulation:

raising the bar and closing the gap
more structure, uniformity, and homogeneity
economic relevance

Deregulation:

market competition
acknowledgement of teachers' professionalism

Mechanisms and reflexes

- GERM-inspired output regulation (test-based accountability) powerfully supersedes/counter-balances input regulation and erodes (trust in) teacher professionalism
- 'Framing the back door' without first 'framing the front door' (providing a common sense of direction as to what to teach, learn and assess)
- Textbooks as 'self-imposed prescriptions'

Input regulation - freedom: some examples

Estonia: NC basic education (general and subject syllabi; prescriptive, detailed, whole range) + freedom for school curriculum (increasing)

Finland: NCC pre-primary and basic education (regulative, 'national goals set in collaboration', whole range) meant to stimulate local curriculum decision-making

Hungary: 'two-pole/three-level content regulation'; NCC (prescriptive) + subject-specific framework curricula (prescriptive, detailed) + school

Norway: NC (general + subject-specific; prescriptive; whole range) – local/school curriculum (investments in capacity building)

Scotland: CfE + guidance documents; explicitly positioning curriculum-making as the preserve of teachers and schools

Netherlands: 'goals to strive for' (whole range; mandatory, but..) + 'goals to attain' (basics; prescriptive) + freedom but decreasing for basics



Freedom restricted by input regulation?

- *"A clear common direction for work is appreciated by teachers"*
- *"Formal boundaries of goals and contents - without assessment and control - create a legitimized professional space"*
- *"Teachers cry for freedom and call for specification"*
- Hard – medium – soft regulation?

Who constructs the curriculum?

- Varies from specialized groups of experts working with or without input from field consultations, to involvement of many stakeholders aiming at creating ownership
- Finland as an inspiring example of how to set and review goals based on dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders at national and local levels – with teachers in role of experts

Curricular space

- Space offered \neq space taken and used
- Teachers and principals may lack competences (or they feel insecure about how) to cope with the freedom they have to develop the curriculum
- (More) freedom may not be the lived experience
 - Teachers feel constrained by output regulation
 - (Unintended) input-regulative effect of textbooks

What about accountability and assessment?

- In a number of countries (a move towards) GERM-inspired, standards-driven and (partly also) test-based accountability, esp. regarding the basics
- Role of the inspectorate differs from country to country: from formal periodical inspections to (also) a more supportive role to no inspectorate at all (*"Instead of control, the aim is to engage people in curriculum development processes"*)
- Input and output regulation: 'communicating vessels'?

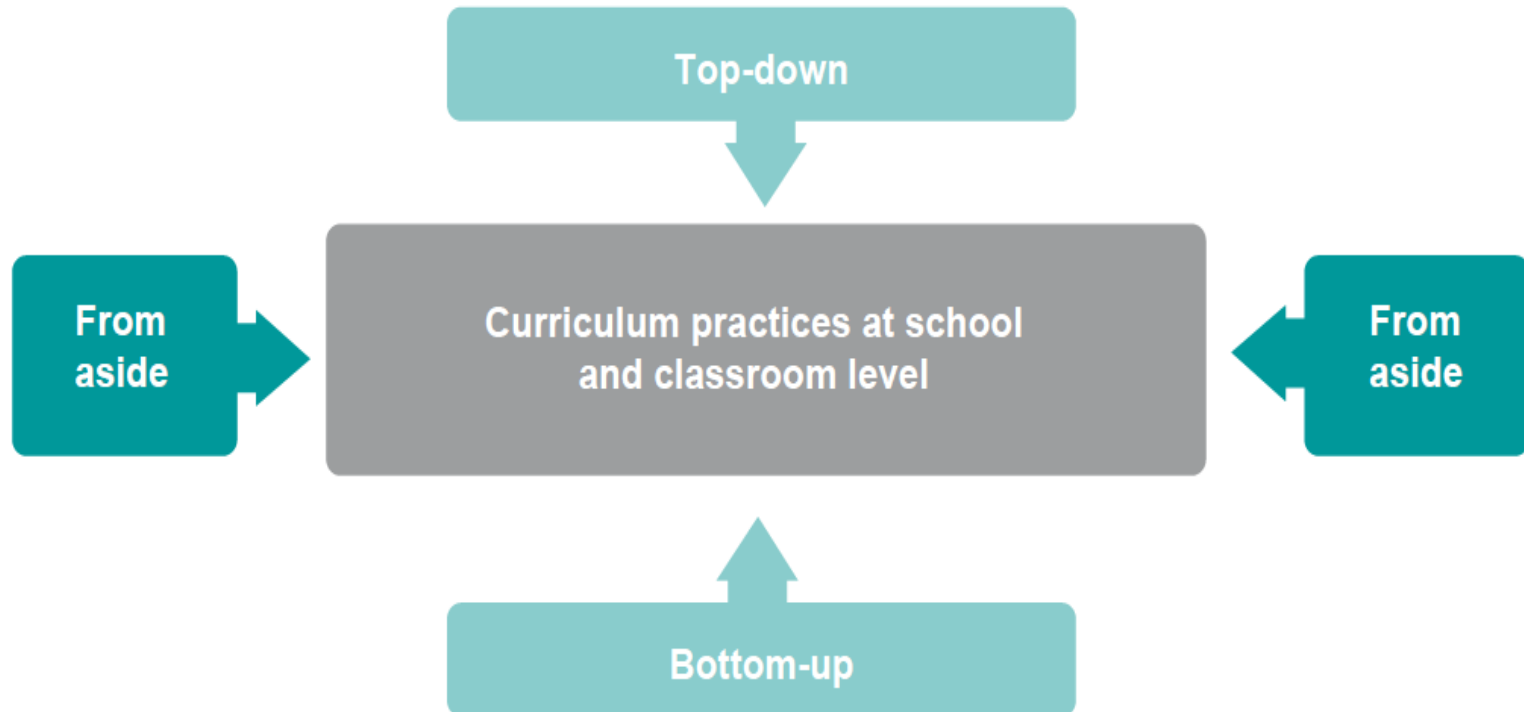
Teachers are the key, aren't they?

- Importance widely acknowledged, but large differences in:
 - teachers' responsibilities in curriculum-making
 - the extent to which teachers/schools are supported and feel prepared to fulfil their (changed) curricular roles
- In Finland great *trust* in teachers' professional skills in (taking responsibility for) for localizing and enacting national curriculum

Generic competences

- Need for generic competences (21st century skills) widely advocated, also in view of creating a (more) balanced curriculum
- Pressing questions: How to operationalize? How to incorporate into the (existing) curriculum? How to assess?
- In some countries counteracted with a move towards more attention for knowledge component

Mixture of top-down, bottom-up, from aside



Editing a Yearbook – a challenge

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