Balancing Curriculum Regulation and Freedom across Europe

Wilmad Kuiper & Jan Berkvens (Eds.)

CIDREE
Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe

CIDREE yearbook 2013

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CIDREE is a network of educational organisations involved in curriculum development and/or educational research, set up in 1990 to establish closer working relationships at a European level.

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Cover picture: Shutterstock - ollyy

Published in 2013 by:
SLO Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development
Enschede, the Netherlands

Printed by: Gildeprint - Enschede, the Netherlands

Order address:
SLO
PO Box 2041
7500 CA ENSCHEDE
the Netherlands
www.slo.nl
www.cidree.org

ISBN 978-90-329-2336-5

How to cite this publication:
Kuiper, W., & Berkvens, J. (Eds.). *Balancing curriculum regulation and freedom across Europe.* CIDREE Yearbook 2013. Enschede, the Netherlands: SLO.

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Foreword

For the last decades, most countries have been trying to improve their education system and find efficient solutions, so that pupils and students will be able to achieve the required skills for living and working in the 21st century. We are all aware that in this competitive world we need to cooperate, exchange our experiences and ideas, try to understand each other's solutions and, accordingly, adapt them to our systems.

While education systems are multidimensional, we should take into account each dimension and not forget other dimensions in order to find out the best possibilities. Decentralization and autonomy are most common words when we are talking about curriculum freedom. Redistributing power from the centre to the schools could make education systems more flexible and efficient. However, Europe shows a wide variety in curriculum regulation and freedom. Some countries have a strong input regulation through highly prescriptive curricula, others use output regulation through tests/exams and inspectorate, others emphasize deregulation by affording schools and teachers space for local curricular decision-making, and others have some sort of a mixture of the above. Anyhow, there are notable differences between countries in balancing central politics and local dynamics. Policy makers, curriculum developers, and schools should work together and take responsibility for achieving an optimum in providing conditions. With this Yearbook, CIDREE pictures different approaches to curriculum regulation and curriculum deregulation in different countries (as well as intriguing pendulum swings over the years), aimed at sharing good practices and, first and foremost, providing insights to learn from.

On behalf of all of CIDREE members, I would like to express our thanks to our Dutch colleagues from the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) for their initiative for this Yearbook and their fine editorial work. These thanks, of course, also go to all contributing authors who made it possible to assemble a broad as well as in-depth picture of the similarities and differences of approaches to the same challenge in different European countries. In view of the universality of the challenges and dilemmas for curriculum

development, I am convinced that this book will be read widely, also beyond the CIDREE community, by researchers, developers, school principals, and teachers engaged in curriculum development.

Gregor Mohorčič
President CIDREE 2013-2014
Director, the National Education Institute Slovenia (ZRSŠ)

Editorial introduction

Wilmad Kuiper & Jan Berkvens

1. Theme of the CIDREE Yearbook 2013

Curriculum issues can be approached from various analytical perspectives. One perspective is the substantive one, which focuses on the classical curriculum question about what knowledge is of most worth teaching and learning within the limited amount of time available for schooling. This question needs to be addressed at all levels of curriculum planning, first and foremost at system/society level. Decision-making about what should be built in and what should be left out of a curriculum in order to avoid overload, and about the extent to which goals and contents of education should be regulated, often can be characterized as a battle field on which various stakeholders bombard and try to persuade each other with all kinds of substantive and socio-political arguments.

The CIDREE Yearbook 2013 focuses on curriculum (de)regulation policies, practices and research first and foremost (but not solely) as regards the compulsory age of schooling across Europe. In particular, it aims to provide curriculum policy-makers, curriculum developers and curriculum researchers in (and outside) Europe with a collection of country papers in which attempts are made to disentangle, interpret, position, and discuss the (often complicated) balancing act between curriculum regulation and curriculum deregulation. 'Curriculum regulation' (Kuiper, Nieveen, & Berkvens, elsewhere in this Yearbook) is defined as a government's intention to prescribe the high-fidelity implementation of directives at the input level (goals and contents, in terms of 'goals to attain' or 'goals to strive for') and at the output level (modes of assessments and examinations, surveillance by the inspection; governance). Those prescriptions at 'the front door' and at 'the back door' of education imply that the room for site-specific curricular choices is restricted. On the other hand, 'curriculum deregulation' reflects a government's intention to refrain from prescription and control at the input and output level by

stimulating school-based decision-making. At the heart of curriculum deregulation is the focus on and trust in schools and teachers having the freedom to make site-specific interpretations of curriculum guidelines and to lead curriculum renewal.
Curriculum (de)regulation pertains to both curricular documents and the process of implementation. The level of (de)regulation marks the curricular space available to decide on curricular input and output - and by whom. Arguments in favour of curriculum regulation may involve: (i) a general attempt of raising the bar and narrowing the gap for all students (serving equity goals); (ii) the provision of more curriculum coherence; and (iii) regeneration of economic prosperity. Arguments in favour of curriculum deregulation may involve: (i) marketization; and (ii) acknowledgement of teachers' professionalism.

For curriculum development agencies it is of major relevance to reflect - also from a historical perspective - on what amount of curricular space can or should be offered to schools while at the same time meeting societal, political, social, academic, cultural and personal demands (e.g. to realize equity). Obviously, the direction of the pendulum swing on the regulation – deregulation continuum varies across countries, and the same is true for (the why of) the force of the swing. Also, all kinds of actors or mechanisms in the education system – for instance, inspection frameworks and teachers' heavy reliance on textbooks - may support or (unintentionally) counteract curriculum policy ambitions to come true at the school and classroom level. Other intriguing issues are to which degree directives and/or guidelines are specified and what curricular components address at the national level (only 'what' or also 'how' aspects?). The idea behind Yearbook 2013 is that much can be learned from an analysis of examples of, motives behind and experiences with searching a proper balance between more or less curriculum regulation and offering schools more or less freedom to make site-specific curricular choices in a number of European countries. Policy, research and practice should all three inform curriculum development activities conducted by CIDREE agencies. And articulating experiences should solidify the curriculum knowledge base.

2. A glimpse into the Yearbook

The thirteen contributions to this Yearbook are all taking a different angle on the theme. During the last decade we have seen the demand for generic skills to be taught, and standards setting to ensure literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills. What knowledge and skills are of most worth is fundamental to curriculum development, but enactment in the classroom asks for adjustments of what is intended in order to make a fit to the local context and student population. The discourse on the needs for and the effects of curriculum regulation and deregulation is very relevant to the daily work of the member institutions of CIDREE. We are all familiar with the tension that exists between the intended, enacted and the attained curriculum, with its concerns about teacher professionalism, equity for students, cries for freedom and calls for specifications. The various contributions to this Yearbook give a rich view on those needs, intentions, tensions and effects and can briefly be summarized as follows.

Estonia: Finding one's own way

How political events shape curriculum development is shown in the first chapter. Estonia's history involves a number of dramatic events, which had large influence on education and curriculum. Coming from one of the oldest educational systems in the world, Estonia experienced Russian domination (from 1940 up till regaining independence in 1992), in which curriculum freedom was not an option. After decades of rigidly following foreign prescription, Estonia is now - as a sovereign country again - finding its own way, with increasing curricular freedom and localized adaptation of learning plans. The contribution shows us how difficult such an endeavour is, when people have experienced a rigid system for so long. In their conclusion section the authors plea for the government to support innovations over a longer period of time, and to keep curriculum development coherent.

Finland: A balance based on dialogue, cooperation and trust

The Finnish chapter addresses the strong features of their approach: intensive cooperation between national and local levels with teachers in the key role as experts, trust in teachers and local authorities, and engaging stakeholders

in a productive dialogue in order to create and maintain balance between the national core curriculum, local curricula and school-specific learning plans. Finland does not have educational control systems like a school inspectorate or national achievement tests covering entire age groups. Instead, school self-assessments and sample evaluations inform curriculum enactment and improvement. Their system is a typical example of a system that combines curriculum regulation and deregulation.

France: Work in progress

The French contribution focuses on the reform of the secondary science curriculum, which is exemplary for the process French education is currently going through. Coming from a long tradition of centralization, the authors show how challenging the search for more curricular freedom is. Institutional innovations boost the implementation of new experimental and local strategies in the field of science education, which was strongly content-driven in the past. Although content parts are still prescribed at the central level, space has been created for local solutions and improvements. This shift has large consequences for teachers, who are not prepared for the way their subject content is changing. Also, their role as 'bringers of knowledge' shifts towards helping students apply transversal skills. Modern applications are envisaged to promote teacher dialogue in order to support each other in making curricular choices.

Germany: Decreasing autonomy at many levels

The fourth chapter shows the intricate system in Germany, where since some years national output standards for the main subjects have been implemented in an otherwise federal autonomous system (*Bundesländer*). Within the federal states, schools now must commit themselves to goal contracts for one to two years, which they develop with local authorities. The German *Länder* now develop high school graduation examinations, instead of the schools themselves. Some innovations seem not to be steered at all; for instance, schools implemented individualized learning in the absence of central directions, leading to a multitude of approaches. A slow and timid move towards more steering is noticeable in German education.

Hungary: A swinging pendulum

The Hungarian chapter shows how this country is - since the beginning of the 1990s -evolving towards more decentralization through the establishment of a mandatory national core curriculum, prescriptive framework curricula, and local curricula. The core curriculum is established at the central level, the framework curricula are meant to support the development of local curricular choices. The past 25 years have been characterized by violent pendulum swings. National identity building is an important aspect of the national core curriculum, including the sense of identity of national and ethnic minorities living in Hungary. Political expectations of what a curriculum should look like, and how prescriptive it should be seem to influence the Hungarian curriculum development process. A shared long-term vision could help to reduce pendulum swings.

Ireland: A growing role for schools

In the Irish contribution to this Yearbook it is analysed how curricular space has developed during three decades in Ireland. Support for teachers as reflective practitioners, the quality of the student-teacher relationship, curriculum customization to account for difference, and skills and competences are the main four issues through which educational development is explored. Although initially the role of schools, and later of school networks, has increased over time, steering was not really decreasing. When input regulation diminished the assessment cadres did not change consistently, damping the curricular reforms. Recent reforms show a curriculum that is underpinned with eight principles, providing a basis for school planning and learner-based curricula.

Netherlands: Curriculum regulation and freedom as a puzzling paradox

The extent to which the goals and contents of education should be regulated has been a complicated balancing act in the Netherlands over the years. Against a backdrop of a long-standing statutory tradition of freedom of education, governmental decisions about 'what knowledge is of most worth' have been delicate. The authors make an attempt to disentangle, interpret and discuss this complicated balancing act between curriculum regulation and curriculum freedom, designated as two 'paradoxical perspectives'. Based

on conceptualizations of the terms 'curriculum', 'curriculum regulation' and 'curriculum deregulation', curriculum policy and practices in the Netherlands during the past 40 years are described and discussed. In doing so, three major episodes are distinguished. During these episodes slight, but in some respect remarkable, pendulum swings are visible. The analysis shows that both curriculum regulation and deregulation are needed to be considered in order to come to successful educational change.

Norway: Seeking guidance and autonomy

The pendulum swing experienced in Norway during the last 25 years, is addressed in the Norwegian chapter. The 1987 and 1997 versions of the national curriculum were meant as 'input guides', not detailing minimum contents to be taught and not aligned with a test system. However, with the introduction, since 2006, of the National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion, curriculum policy combines input regulation (more prescription with the aim to improve outcomes in particular as regards basic skills to be covered within and across subjects), output regulation (via a new assessment system) and providing room for local curricular decision-making. Research shows a gap between what teachers perceive as their responsibility and what they mark as important in education, and what at the national level has been identified as of importance. Consistency, for example, between subjects and pedagogical approaches are seen as less important from the side of the teachers, while democratic values, long-term planning and the feasibility of reforms are valued. Teachers also seem to be less sensitive for outcomes of comparative studies, but are concerned with the achievements of their students. Aspiration to perform in public rankings is also considered less important. Teachers and principals would appreciate more concrete guidelines, but at the same time expect autonomy for the choices of teaching materials and pedagogical approach.

Portugal: Struggling with decentralization

The Portuguese contribution shows a long struggle for decentralization in curriculum over the past 25 years. Coming from a very centralist position in the 1980s, several calls for decentralization have been voiced, but curricula and syllabi are still very detailed and prescriptive in nature. A tendency towards

uniformity seems to be limiting the execution of the rather rhetoric level of the policy documents. It is acknowledged that central steering limits possibilities of gaining innovative experiences. The attempts included the formation of a supplementary curriculum, projects and school networks. In general, the Portuguese curriculum is making a swing towards disciplinary knowledge, with a focus on fundamental subjects and measurable goals. At regional level, the Azores gained the right for the formation of a regional curriculum in order to fit the context better. The Azorean curriculum is based on key competencies, guidelines for each curriculum area, teaching methods, assessment and construction of instructional materials.

Scotland: Calls for exemplification

Scotland's contribution shows how the country has been working on the Curriculum for Excellence over the last thirteen years, focusing their work around the pillars that were identified during a large national debate on education in Scotland. This solid basis helped to keep course since. Although Scotland has been moving away from the perceived prescriptive nature of the previous 5-14 curriculum to give greater flexibility, there have been continuing requests from practitioners and those who represent them for ever greater levels of exemplification. The authors examine the continuing paradox of the broad welcome for greater flexibility along with the demand for 'exemplification'.

England and Scotland: Divergent moves

This chapter is a comparison of the English and Scottish curricula. The 1998 National Curriculum in England was highly prescriptive in relation to inputs. Following reforms showed a general trend towards less prescription. From 2010 there has been an increased re-emphasis on input regulation, along with for schools and teachers constraining output regulation through surveillance by Ofsted instilling accountability and a 'performance culture'. The Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland explicitly reduces prescription in terms of content and represents a considerable relaxation in the nature of input regulation, also positioning teachers as key agents of change. However, it is argued that this apparent shift to weaker input regulation at the national level is partly tempered by output regulation in terms of an accountability system

established by the 'Quality Improvement Initiative' (since 1997), the role of the Inspectorate, and the role played by local authorities. This regulation shifted emphasis from a supportive advisory role to a quality improvement role.

Slovenia: Curricular autonomy and teacher professionalism

Chapter 12 shows how Slovenia, since the 1990s, moved from a strongly centralized curriculum towards its current still - but less - prescriptive curriculum. The attempts of creating more freedom for schools to meet the needs of learners involve 15 – 20% of the space schools can use to adapt the curriculum to the local needs. One of the constraints is that the teacher population is not prepared for the challenges of curricular reform and the changing roles it means for them. Teacher organisations should play a stronger role in voicing the needs and wishes of teachers in the education and curriculum debates in the country. Although several measures have been taken, many responsibilities remain at central level.

Sweden: Steering with outcomes

The Swedish contribution gives a chronological overview of how historical events shape educational and curricular decision-making in Sweden. From governing with curricula, through a more deregulated and decentralized approach, to steering with outcomes in the present. The consequence is decreased space for curricular decisions at the local level. For a long time, the goal was to reach social equality, contemporary goals focus more on quality. (International) rankings have become increasingly important. The influence of educational research on curriculum policy is addressed as well. Whilst there was a strong relationship over the years ('educational engineering'), the relation is vague nowadays.

3. Curriculum regulation and deregulation across Europe: Some reflections

A curricular 'smörgasbård'

Not surprisingly, the thirteen contributions to the CIDREE Yearbook 2013 show that almost all countries are in a process of changing their curriculum. The reasons for, contexts wherein and directions of these changes, however,

vary widely. The curriculum pendulum is in a continuous motion, slightly or violently swinging from regulation to deregulation, or the other way around. Countries swinging towards more regulation do so through developing and implementing curricula with more specified goals and objectives, and/or by taking assessment and accountability measures. Countries moving in the opposite direction tend to loose detail in goals and objectives descriptions and put less emphasis on assessment and accountability, although the latter may vary. What makes the picture more complicated is that some countries show multiple moves along the continuum, in opposite directions at the same time. The curricular landscape in Europe is, so to say, quite a varied *'smörgasbård'*.

Who is constructing the curriculum?

Large differences exist as to how curricular responsibilities are appointed to central and local levels. Some countries (still) have a prescriptive national curriculum (e.g. France) or are re-emphasizing prescription (e.g. England). Others (like Finland, Estonia, Hungary, and Scotland) have a national core curriculum that can - and is - expected to be shaped at local, governing board or school levels. The ways through which core curricula, or more general curriculum frameworks, are developed and reviewed, differ from specialized groups working with or without the input from field consultations, to intricate collaborative development systems seeking the involvement of many.
All contributions recognize the value of involvement of the main stakeholders, i.e. teachers, school leaders, subject experts, policy-makers et cetera, but the way stakeholders are involved differs widely. Finland is the most inclusive, as not only teachers and school leaders are involved, but also parents and students have the opportunity to voice their needs, wishes and concerns for, during and after curriculum revisions. The Finnish even seek wider involvement through new media channels. An important given in the Finnish context is the wide dedication towards the educational vision and underlying values. The Scottish Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) also seeks ownership of the learning plan, with a strong vision and broadly shared educational values based on a wide national debate held in 2002. The enactment of the curriculum at grass roots level will need more time and support to develop before the national goals with CfE are met throughout the nation. Many other

countries are struggling with ownership issues. A clear and long-term vision would benefit wide and shared consensus building, but in many countries educational policy changes alter with the changing of socio-political contexts. Slovenia held a public debate on what was expected from education after the Slovenian state was established in 1992. Since then, Slovenia tries to prevent the kidnapping of education in the political arena in order to stay independent from political gain.

Does 'curricular space offered' mean 'curricular space taken'?

Overlooking the various contributions another phenomenon deserves attention: curricular space offered to schools and teachers (like, for instance, in Estonia and the Netherlands) does not necessarily mean that curricular space is also taken by schools and teachers. The latter appears to be affected by a variety of factors, like the following. Teachers and school principals may lack the competences (or at least they may feel insecure about how) to cope with the freedom they have for developing the curriculum. The authors of the Slovenian chapter, for instance, warn that increasing autonomy is questionable if the level of professional expertise of teachers is too low and if professional norms are not worked out. Another factor is that more freedom may not be the lived experience of teachers, for two reasons. First, they may feel constrained by output regulation which powerfully *"supersedes and counter-balances input regulation"* (a quote from the chapter about the comparison between England and Scotland). Second, by heavily relying on textbooks, teachers themselves restrict the strategic space they have available. So, unintentionally, textbooks have quite an input-regulative effect on teaching practices, representing 'self-imposed prescription' (for instance, England and the Netherlands).

Does input regulation restrict professional freedom?

At first sight, one should think that input regulation does restrict the professional freedom of teachers in developing local curriculum. However, from some of the contributions the opposite emerges. The authors of the Norwegian chapter, for instance, conclude that curriculum regulations in terms of applying a formal curriculum do not necessarily restrict professional freedom. For, the formal boundaries of goals and contents without assessment

that direct instruction in schools creates a wide professional space, legitimized by the government. The authors claim that much depends on how a curriculum is put into practice with regard to other policy tools, such as national evaluation systems. As long as the reform actors are not controlled in terms of what they do or accomplish, they feel free to choose between different recommendations suggested by the formal curriculum. More or less the same line of reasoning is followed by the authors of the Dutch chapter. They advocate the development of a common, comprehensive and curriculum framework for basic education. Such a provision of sense of purpose about the 'what', they argue, could stimulate schools and teachers to take advantage of better use of the space offered for their own curricular choices, particularly regarding 'how' to realize the 'what'. In other words, offering room for site-specific curricular choices - and ambitions - should go with such a curriculum framework that provides specifics concerning goals and contents that are considered relevant. So, freedom that goes along with specification and exemplification (see also Scotland).

What about accountability and assessment?

As it seems, several countries (a.o. Germany, Norway, Scotland, Sweden, and the Netherlands) have been infected by what Sahlberg calls the GERM-virus. GERM stands for the Global Education Reform Movement and describes the drive towards more and more accountability measures in education. Standards that have originally been developed to lay out a consistent and concentric learning plan are turned into assessment and accountability frameworks that, in some cases, put severe pressure on and hard dividing lines in education. The English system is pushing percentages every year for increasing learning outcomes. The Swedish system publishes the outcomes of national and international tests publicly. Norwegian teachers seem not to be very interested in the schools' or nation's position in rankings at all, while the Norwegian government publishes outcomes of comparative studies online. Finland takes another approach and puts the responsibility to be accountable to a great extent on the schools themselves. Instead of rigorous national testing, there is an intricate support system established in order to support students that need learning support. Yearly sample surveys from the national level evaluate the results for a limited number of subjects in schools.

The role of the inspectorate differs from country to country. In some countries the inspectorate is acting very formally, while in others the inspectorate seeks to approach schools from a more supportive angle. Some countries (like Finland) do not have an inspection system at all. School self-assessment is introduced in many nations, but the use of the outcomes differs (Scotland, Slovenia, Finland). Where in Finland the self-assessment helps schools to make improvements and results are not shared publicly, the Scottish inspectorate uses the outcomes for evaluation purposes and inspectorate reports are put on the website. The Finnish want to stay away from parents selecting schools, although they see that happening more often in urban areas nowadays, while the Scottish and the Dutch allow parents to choose schools meeting their wishes.

Teachers are the key, aren't they?

The importance of teachers in education is widely acknowledged. All authors mention the crucial role of teachers and school leaders at some point in their contributions. Large differences, however, exist in the extent to which teachers are prepared to fulfil their roles in curriculum issues. Countries that have invested in the quality of their teachers over extended periods of time leave their teachers with large responsibilities in customizing their education. Others seek middle ground in what is described in central documents, or prescribed in cases where they decide their teachers need such structures. Still others are seeking their teachers' need to extend their professionalism within limited financial resources. Finland notes an important aspect that shows how it values its teachers and the responsibility they take for localizing and enacting the curriculum in their schools: *trust* in their teachers' professional skills. Other countries mention the need for professional teachers, but none describe their teaching staff as being professional enough yet, nor ways how to ensure their development to the expected levels of professionalism. Ireland seems to be making a similar shift as Finland, valuing teacher inquiry, instead of putting them at the receiving end of policy changes, as was too long the case. Teachers in England are under extreme pressure to deliver exactly what they are expected to deliver, which diminishes teachers to post-professional apprentices. In Scotland, the extent to which teachers are really on board with

the current reform seems to be less than one would expect. Teacher agency, as it is called, shows that there is a gap between how well teachers think they cohere with the reform and the level to which they actually do. Similar experiences are reported from Norway, where teachers tend to refer to their own school practice when they feel uncertain about what is expected.

21st century skills and new curricular spaces?

The majority of the countries contributing to this Yearbook mention the need for preparing students to live, work and learn in the 21st century. Almost all countries have prepared their own set of skills, called 21st century skills, transversal skills, competences, and the like. The scope of these competences is based on national, regional and international needs and wishes. It is interesting to notice that the international perspective is either based on 'outward challenges' or 'inward fear'; i.e. preparing the students for act responsibly in a globalized world, or having to be competitive as a nation in a changing world. Although this distinction seems arbitrary, its focus is important for the way students are prepared for the future: either as positive contributors and responsible citizens in a globalized world, or as responsible citizens and economic value contributing to the competitiveness of the nation. These are, of course, opposites, and each country has its own mixture, or blend, of both aspects. Some countries, like Hungary, decided that the curriculum has to play a role in national identity building, as well as strengthening its position in Europe.

What knowledge is of most worth is a perpetual discussion that follows its own pendulum. The need for generic skills or competences is widely advocated, but - at least in some countries - is counteracted with a move towards more attention for the knowledge component. How to incorporate the set of generic skills into the curriculum for basic education is a search that is reflected in many of the contributions. Many choose the path of incorporating these in areas where subject history is little or absent, for example the supplementary curriculum in Portugal. These subjects are usually new and are characterized by limited descriptions of content and objectives, thus allowing the incorporation of skills more easily. Many of these subjects, though, tend to be

terminated after a couple of years for several reasons. In some cases, more time is allocated to 'the basics', in others these new curricular spaces did not deliver what was intended. What certainly seems questionable is the assumption that the trendsetter role of these subjects and projects, or as it was called in Portugal 'a lever function', helps the innovation to seep through to the more established subjects. In England the focus on the 'basics' abandons a broad and balanced curriculum. It is rather unfortunate to find that the created curricular space to be innovative is later used as the argument for the opposite: its low worth because detailed descriptions are missing. Norway introduced generic skills within existing subjects. Currently, countries like England and Portugal are again moving towards more time for the 'basics' or 'fundamental subjects', as these are sometimes called.

Research for informed curriculum policy

The contribution of educational research to the possibility of informed curriculum policy-making is evident in many of the work of the authors. In practice, the socio-political agenda is often of strong influence on curriculum policy, compared to academic studies. The Swedish contribution shows how the influence of educational research grew over the years, and diminished gradually recently. An important issue here is the extended periods of time needed for curriculum reform to take place and educational research to show the impact of reforms. Socio-political agendas, however, tend to work at much shorter timescales. Educational research is, thus, far from always used for making research-informed curriculum decisions. Finland shows the benefits of a well-established and widely shared education agenda, ensuring long-term focus and alignment of research in support to improving education and its outcomes. Scotland does so to a certain extent, but in many other countries educational research needs to ensure its value regularly. Ireland has incorporated research and action at local levels as a hallmark of curriculum reforms since 2000.

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Principal steps towards curricular freedom in Estonia

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Abstract

A national curriculum in general education reflects a society's goals and hopes for future citizens' development. On the other hand, it also reflects the status and level of education in society. In the Estonian case, the number of transitions in the past century has had a strong impact on educational content, as well as on the freedom of schools and teachers in implementing the national curriculum. In this chapter the correlations are described and explained between changes in society, whether violent or through democratic processes, and the regulation of the curriculum. Also research data and some examples that illustrate the problems of curricular freedom for teachers are presented.

1. Introduction

Schooling in Estonia stretches back more than 700 years. The first schools were monastic and cathedral schools that were founded in the 13th century. The need for public literacy and systematic native-language education emerged after the Reformation in the 16th century. At this time Estonia was incorporated into the Swedish Kingdom. The governor's instruction of 1586 made congregations responsible for children's education, and emphasized the development of church schools (Estonica, 2002).

The tradition of public schools in Estonia began in the 17th century. The curriculum as a framework or object of study appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, but educational goals (see Tyler, 1969) and a rudimentary 'plan for learning' (Taba, 1962) already existed. The curriculum in early schools

was not broad – pupils had to learn to read and know the basics of Lutheran morality.

Schooling initially depended on local authorities. Compulsory general education (two to three years in duration) was introduced in 1870. The curricula of that period described teachers' responsibilities not only in school, but also in cooperating with homes and visiting children taught by their parents before formal schooling commenced at the age of twelve, to assess their progress. The teachers were to consult parents and motivate the children to learn, and not forcing them to learn through fear (Eisenschmidt, Wühner, & Wühner**,** 1874, p. 4). Curricula introduced the aims, goals and organization of formal schooling (dividing students into groups, et cetera) in short and stated the list of compulsory subjects. The subjects were introduced in a general way – each subject was described on less than one page. The main principles of teaching were still introduced, for example when teaching the Bible, the teacher had to introduce the stories by heart (ibid, p. 6). Teachers were advised to assess levels of pupil development and plan the next steps according to previous results – this suggests a pupil-centred approach with a lot of pedagogical freedom. At the same time, teachers were instructed to follow the textbooks (ibid).

In 1918, the struggle for self-determination was rewarded with the proclamation of the Republic of Estonia. This necessitated that a national, Estonian curriculum for compulsory education be implemented. In 1921, a new curriculum for six years of compulsory education was introduced. During the first period of Estonian independence, all four national curricula (1921, 1928, 1937, and 1938) followed the similar path: they were framework documents consisting of a general part and subject syllabi (see Läänemets, 1995; Krull & Mikser, 2010, pp. 40-43 for a more detailed analysis). The curricula introduced before World War II were comparable to Estonian national curricula of the 21st century – the emphasis was on the ideas of holistic development of a person, responsibility and democratic values, integration of subjects and learning in and outside classroom, the importance of learners independent, meaningful work (Haridusministeerium, 1928; Haridusministeerium, 1937). Curricula

provided teachers with guidelines for the holistic learning (üldõpetus – in Estonian language), where subjects were merged and integrated around the familiar and relevant themes. This approach was suggested for the first grades but allowed in all grades.

All four consecutive curricula offered general guidelines for schools and teachers without any detailed prescriptions. The teachers were obliged to plan out their own work according to the national curricula, but considering the local conditions and their students' needs. The school council, consisting of teachers, parents and the representatives of local authorities, had the right to offer new subjects to the curriculum of that particular school (Kooliuuenduse päevaküsimusi, 1930, p. 23). Estonian pre-war curricula even surpassed the contemporary ones in some aspects: for example, the texts for the general parts were easy to read and understand (contrary to the complicated juridical phrasing of today's curricula). Teachers were provided with general guidelines for teaching. The methods of instruction were to some extent described but not prescribed.

Ideas about teaching and learning in Estonian schools were influenced by the pedagogical ideas of Johannes Käis and Peeter Põld. These educational leaders worked in line with contemporary pedagogical thought – the ideas of active learning, the integration of subjects with each other and real life, the individualization of learning and the need to support independent study habits by delegating more responsibility (planning, evaluating), and using more group work. The ideas of Käis and Põld were revived in the 1980s and are still relevant in the national pedagogy. During the period of the first Estonian Republic, Hilda Taba, later recognized as one of the developers of curriculum theory, also began her work in Estonia. Later, working in the USA with Ralph W. Tyler, she advocated bottom-up movements in curriculum theory and practice – involving teachers and helping them to raise their professionalism (Taba, 1962). The idea of building up curricular innovations in cooperation with professional teachers has been supported by many curriculum and educational theorists (Fullan, 2001a; Fullan, 2001b; Kelly, 2004).

In 1940, the Soviet Union used military force to incorporate Estonia into the Soviet Empire. The freedom that teachers had to develop and interpret curricula was dramatically decreased – almost everything was prescribed. All curriculum documents and textbooks in the Soviet Union had to observe and rigorously follow the canonized principles of instruction. Alternative ideas were in some case forbidden and others not tolerated. Therefore, the Soviet curricula/ instructional programmes had no need to explain educational aims and approaches as would be necessary in a democratic society with a plurality of ideas (e.g. Krull & Mikser, 2010).

The Soviet school programme (curriculum) was in use in all fifteen republics of the Soviet Union. However, Estonian educational leaders still succeeded to tailor the programme (as best as was possible during the Soviet regime) to suit Estonia's traditions and cultural heritage. In this way progressive and democratic educational ideas were kept alive, secondary education was relatively broad, all subjects had textbooks published in the Estonian language (except schools for Russian speaking students, where Russian textbooks were in use) and workbooks developed by Estonian educators were in use. Even though the school programmes were unified, some specialist experimental schools were allowed, where extended courses in foreign languages (integrated learning of subjects in English or German), science, mathematics, physics, music or sports were taught. Estonian-language education existed throughout the soviet occupation at all levels of education (Ruus et al., 2008).

The Estonian Teachers' Congress in 1987 was a breakthrough event. Teachers demanded the independence of Estonian education. They criticized the existing school system and curricula, and expressed the need to establish a new curriculum for Estonian general education. It was a bold and radical step, where teachers and others (school leaders, teachers in higher education, scientists, writers, philosophers, and pupils) in a very democratic way emphasized various projects and decided about them by voting. An open call was announced for people to prepare a new curriculum. Between 1987 and 1988, subject committees worked on the new subject syllabi, and in 1992, after regaining the independent Estonian Republic in 1991, the schools adopted the

new curriculum for nine years of basic education. Some authors expressed the idea that the changes were not structurally radical (Krull & Mikser, 2010) – the 'red stuff' had just been removed and replaced with themes relevant to Estonia. According to other views (Estonica, 2002; Ruus & Sarv, 2000; Ruus et al., 2008) the changes were more radical – the content of subjects (particularly in the social sciences and humanities) was changed and some subjects were replaced.

2. Attempts to implement a curriculum based on formalized general outcomes

To Krull and Mikser's (2010) opinion a radical change took place in the curricula of 1996 and 2002. It was explained by the complex measures for cross-curricular integration of instruction proposed in the general parts of the curricula. Also formal systems of competences as integral yields of school instruction and education were introduced. After five years of re-independence, the school autonomy was increased through the guidelines for compiling school curricula.

According to some experts (see Opetushallitus, 1999) the main flaw in the curriculum from 1996 was a theoretical unevenness: the general part of the document and the approach to the study process in subject syllabi mostly contradicted each other. The subject syllabi were not all structured in the same way – some of them (language arts and history) were treated in quite a modern way (for example, integrating topics from other subjects and adopting cross-curricular themes), while others (mathematics, science, foreign languages) were presented in quite a classical subject-centred manner.

Krull (2001) mentioned the linguistic performance of the curriculum and its structure being abstruse to the target group (teachers and school staff) and the document itself was too long to comprehend its entire meaning. The most serious expostulations for the curriculum of 1996 handled the intangible opening and generality of competences. Experts from Tallinn University, in their report on the 1996 curriculum (Aruanne, 1998), explained the sequences that might result from the inherent contradictions. According to the experts the subject centeredness in the learning outcomes and their unattainability

for most learners in turn promoted the emergence of selective functions in schools of general education and increased drop-out in elementary schools. Even the national examinations contradicted the principle of the openness of the curriculum. Examinations that were composed or organized outside the school might provide unnecessary restrictions for teachers. There was a tendency to consider only those aspects that were primarily inspected through external examination, which discounted all other important aspects that could be assessed by other means.

As in the national curriculum, the school curriculum had to consist of a general part and subject syllabi. When designing the school curriculum, the interests of parents and students, as well as local knowledge and material resources should have been taken into consideration. Schools had problems with the new task of writing the school curriculum – there were insufficient support materials, lack of in-service training, et cetera. Being a new phenomenon in post-Soviet Estonia, private schools established on the basis of alternative pedagogical approach (for instance, Steiner, Montessori) or of religious principles (for instance, Catholic and Lutheran schools), used their freedom to the full to develop distinctly unique curricula reflecting their particular values. Though, the majority of schools still copied the national curricula making only slight modifications.

In 2002, the national curriculum was introduced via a system with three levels of competencies divided between general, subject and general subject domain competences: communication, value-related (attitudes), and activity competences (or general skills, including learning skills). The guidelines for organizing instruction by school levels became in some parts extremely detailed, prescriptive and formal. They list nineteen general competences for pupils to be achieved by the end of the third grade, seventeen by the sixth, twenty-one by the ninth, and eighteen by the end of the twelfth grade. The general part contained guidelines for compiling the school curriculum in a more concrete and clear manner in comparison with the previous curriculum, but unfortunately at the same time it became more formal and incoherent regarding subject syllabi (Krull & Mikser, 2010).

Because there was no national implementation plan, application of the curricula from 1996 and 2002 was impeded in both cases. The realization of curricular ideas in textbooks and through in-service training was elaborated insufficiently, nor appointed enough resources. It was pointed out that a counselling system was missing (Ruus, 2004), although some international initiatives like Soros, ISSA (International Step by Step Association) and the International Reading Association, to mention a few, did provide training and support for teachers and school leaders.

3. Innovation in the general education system – Two national curricula

3.1 Two national curricula

In 2011, the Estonian Government approved the updated national curriculum as two separate documents – the 2011 National Curriculum for Basic Schools and the 2011 National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools. The 2011 National Curriculum for Basic Schools includes both elementary and lower secondary schools as compulsory education levels in Estonia. On the one hand, the decision to separate curricula was based on the on-going reform of the school network, and, on the other hand, it was a significant renewal in curriculum policy in general. The main reason for this rearrangement was to provide more freedom of choice in upper secondary schools.

Both curricula consist of a general part and subject syllabi grouped according to subject fields and descriptions of cross-curricular topics. The general part sets educational objectives and principles for learning, general competences, the concept of the learning environment, the organization of studies and the weekly amount of lessons for compulsory subjects. In addition, assessment and graduation, exceptions applied to pupils with special education needs and the structure of the school curriculum are introduced. The subject syllabi define subject competences, subjects within the subject area, a general description of the subject field, the volume in course hours per week, and integration with other subjects and with cross-curricular topics. In addition, the subject syllabi determine the learning and educational objectives, learning outcomes grouped by stages of study, learning content, study activities and assessment (Estonian National Curriculum for Basic Schools, 2011; Estonian National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools, 2011).

3.2 Changes in the national curricula in 2011 to ensure school level innovation

There have been no significant changes in the 2011 curriculum regarding learning and educational goals in the updated curriculum compared to those approved in 2002. The similarity of the aims between the curricula might be one reason the Ministry of Education and Research presented them as updated or revised instead of completely new (Tõnisson, 2010). The main changes in the general part of the curricula aim to ensure that the achievement of general objectives and competences, integration within and across subject areas, subject integration via cross-curricular topics and implementation of active learning methods will appear in practice. In order to achieve this aim, the amount of subject content and the number of outcomes have been reduced.

Compared to the previous national curriculum, the learning concept and the learning environment are more precisely explained in the updated version. The learning environment is understood as the combination of mental, social and physical environment surrounding students. The national curriculum's learning concept is based on the constructivist approach of learning. The student is seen as an active participant in the learning process and is expected to participate in setting the goals for his/her studies. The school is responsible for organizing the whole learning process, including a learning environment to support the development of students.

The curricula specify the framework of assessment. To reduce the focus on grades, the curricula emphasize the role of the teacher as to support, provide feedback and guide students in the learning process. To this end, the term formative assessment has been added to the assessment framework. Portfolios are suggested as one method for implementing formative assessment. These could be composed in a subject- or subject field based manner, regarding cross-curricular topics or general competences. The role of grades is meant to provide indicators for assessing the achievement of students entering the next year or graduating from basic school or upper secondary school.

3.3 Increasing freedom in the national curricula

Despite a number of regulations, the freedom of choice has increased in the updated curricula. Flexibility of curricula appears in the subject fields. With the agreement of the board of trustees, the schools are allowed to change the amount of subjects and cross-curricular topics, using electives based on the initiative of the students. At the same time, the schools have to ensure equal opportunities for the achievement of outcomes and general competences for every student. These opportunities would be introduced and specified in the school-based curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to organize studies outside the classroom, for instance in the schoolyard, the nature environment, museums, archives, environmental education centres, companies and institutions as well in virtual study environments.

Besides compulsory subjects, the National Curriculum for Basic Schools sets forth three optional subjects: religious studies, informatics, and career education. The National Curriculum for Upper Secondary schools also includes religious studies, national defence, economics and business, career education, basics of inquiry, psychology, and philosophy as optional courses. Schools are free to make all of these available, taking into account student wishes and suggestions. In addition to the optional subjects prescribed by the curriculum, upper secondary schools are encouraged to design additional internal courses or career courses in collaboration with the local vocational education institutions. In the third stage of study (forms 7-9), the basic school shall assign for students a creative project that is based on cross-curricular topics or integrates subjects. Participating and completing in a certain creative project is one of the requirements for graduation from basic school. The list of topics is proposed by the school. The precise topic, as well the format of the presentation, is chosen collaboratively by the teacher and student(s). The creative project may be completed individually or as group work. With the agreement of the school's board of trustees, the school may follow principles approved by the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education. This freedom of choice is used by eight private schools to date.

4. Teachers' perceptions of Estonian national curricular directives and guidelines

As stated by Goodlad (1994), there may be tension between the national curriculum and teachers' own perceptions and curricular intentions. Taking into account teachers' beliefs are of crucial importance in the successful implementation of a new curriculum (van Driel, Bulte, & Verloop, 2008), understanding these is a prerequisite for designing a new curriculum. Therefore, to assess national and school curricula as perceived, the comparative perceptions of Estonian teachers about the 2002 and 2011 national curricula were studied. In the research two different tools for data collection were used – face-to-face interviews based on a semi-structured questionnaire and a written inquiry with multiple-choice questionnaire items.

In a study conducted by Krull, Mikser and Viirpalu (2013) 150 teachers were contacted to fill out a questionnaire. 103 questionnaires were completed. From these 103 questionnaires, 35 were returned by teachers of the social sciences and humanities, and 34 by sciences teachers and class teachers. Teachers were asked to reply in three sections: (1) teachers as users of curricula, (2) teachers' experience in curriculum development, and (3) their expectations for an ideal curriculum. Some results are the following. When asked to estimate the extent to which the national curriculum and school curriculum have been helpful as a guide for teachers, more than half (58%) of the respondents states that they had been 'helpful in some way', and 39% that they have been 'most helpful'. 60% of the teachers finds that the relative importance of national and school curricula as guides for teaching is about the same. However, 25% answers only to rely on the school curricula as a guide compared to 11% that sais to rely on the national curriculum. When asked to characterize the extent to which the national or school curricula empower or limit their freedom for site-specific decision-making, the majority (74%) of the respondents replies that the curricula do not empower or limit their decision-making freedom. Between 11% and 13% of the teachers indicates that these documents restrict or increase their rights. 39% of the respondents prefer a school curriculum that strictly follows the methodological prescription of the national curriculum, and 35% a school curriculum that is relatively free of such prescriptions.

39% of the teachers prefer a curriculum that presents detailed educational objectives where achievement is easy to observe, and the same percentage of teachers prefers a curriculum that presents educational objectives in more general terms as it is difficult to prove their achievement, and they serve for orientation in teaching only. The main factors causing the greatest problems in implementing the curricula are lack of study aids, shortage of time, overloaded subject syllabi and wordiness, also impracticality and vagueness in describing instructional content (ibid).

Some examples following from research done by the authors of this chapter that illustrate the problems of curricular freedom for teachers indicated above, will now be presented. The research group consisted of a sample of 74 basic and secondary school teachers. All these teachers were interviewed individually, bearing in mind their involvement in the development of the national and/or school curriculum and their teaching experience. Every national curriculum update brings some changes to subject syllabi or requirements for graduation from each school level. These changes mean additional workload for teachers on the one hand, but also problems associated with the lack of knowledge and skills needed to implement the new approach in terms of the subject or teaching methodology on the other. The new requirement for graduation from upper secondary school – writing a research paper – has caused concern for some teachers about their ability to guide the students in their research, students' real involvement and interest in this kind of work, the lack of time and the increased workload. One geography teacher with five years of teaching experience explained: *"If I have seven to eight lessons every day, where do I find the time to deal with a student who does some piece of research? If (s)he is really enthusiastic and interested and wants to do it him(her)self, then it's OK ... But I do not know how to manage with those, who start to do this work, but who are weak and do not want to do it and who are just lazy."*

The national curricula describe precisely the physical environment, materials and equipment needed in the school for the teaching and learning process. The teachers' feelings about these descriptions vary depending on their school's

actual conditions. According to many teachers, the reality and curricular descriptions or requirements and the study materials and equipment have to match, but they do not. One teacher of Estonian language and literature with twenty years of experience stated: *"Actually, integration between subjects was also written into the previous national curriculum, but it does not work in reality yet. It is similar in the current curriculum. More attention needed to be paid to this in the school. And everything else the curriculum contains, does it match reality? That I have a classroom where I can change the order of tables and so on ... That I can use technical equipment ... Not all schools can reach these conditions. This is the worst gap I see ... because I do not even know what textbooks I will use in the next academic year in the upper secondary classes. There are such big changes in the programme, but no new textbooks yet; they are still being written."*

Teachers notice controversy between the goals in the different national strategies and the developmental plans. National strategic development aims should be mirrored in the national curriculum in a balanced manner. One technology teacher with ten years of experience argued against the 'vague' principles in the curriculum: *"Let's say that we have to look at what the main aim of our state is and proceed from that. Then we can draw up real plans and programmes. What kind of education do we need? Do we want to receive investments on the basis of our cheap labour? Or do we want to get really good quality workforce to achieve and use innovation of the economy. These are totally different starting points."*

This teacher has touched upon a sensitive problem in Estonian policy making. Estonia does not have a national education strategy. Although the first draft was prepared at the beginning of the 2000s by the Estonian Educational Forum, it was not accepted by the ruling coalition in parliament. However, there is a development plan by the Ministry of Education and Research, dealing with the main areas of the Ministry's responsibility (Estonian Human Development Report, 2011) and the project of the education strategy is in the process of adoption.

5. Discussion

In almost 20 years, since the Estonian republic regained its independence, curricula for general education have been renewed three times. During these improvements some principles introduced in 1996 have not yet been achieved in the daily practice of schools in 2013. Not all teachers are certain about the general competencies or the methods of active learning. From one curriculum to the next, the direction has been towards better integration of subjects. Most of the subject syllabi are also described through an outcomes-based approach. At the same time, some syllabi have experienced a backlash by introducing quite prescriptive content. On the other hand, teachers do not try to use all the freedom of choice provided in the national curriculum, including the subject syllabi. They prefer to follow the textbooks in order to 'ensure' their students attain good results in tests and exams arranged by the state.

Kreitzberg (2006), professor of education and former minister of education, once wrote: *"If we want to retain comprehensive schooling, we have to set pluralism and freedom in a sensible framework. To provide the curriculum with a satisfactory relationship between freedom and strict principles – this is the art – but neither can be denied."*

Kreitzberg also stressed the role of subject experts in the process of developing the curriculum. Until they dictate the content and main principles of the curriculum, it is not possible to overcome curriculum overload. The other factor of overload is societal expectations that schools can defuse, integrate, prevent and compensate for problems that remain elsewhere (Hopmann & Kunzli, 1997). Therefore, the general part of the Estonian national curriculum is wordy, containing longer or shorter lists of general competencies, competencies for general subject domains and single subjects, cross-curricular themes and their descriptions. Krull and Mikser (2010) have concluded that the general parts of Estonian national curricula reflect the pragmatic needs and interests of a certain era or the personal preferences of the authors. On the other hand, the lack of coherence between the general part and the rest of the curriculum has partially decreased but still exists, as mentioned by Finnish experts about the 1996 national curriculum (Opetushallitus, 1999). The same experts remarked

at a meeting at Tallinn University (13 February 2013) the move towards a more neo-liberalist approach to learning and teaching in the 2011 national curriculum. A lot of attention has been paid to the physical environment of schools, but teachers seem to have been neglected. According to the Finnish experts, the student is seen as a consumer and the teacher as a servant. This view may be due to their understanding that a curriculum has to also contain teaching methodology and some pedagogical advice. In the 2011 national curriculum, some hints about teaching methodology are actually 'hidden' within the descriptions of teaching and learning processes in the general subject domain syllabi.

The introduction of important principles in different curriculum documents and even in slightly different ways has resulted in explanations of assessment that are confusing for teachers. The situation is better now than in 1996, when ideas about *assessment for learning* (this time called *process assessment*) were made impossible to follow by the subsequent treaty of the Minister of Education (see: Decree of Assessment, 2000). The term *formative assessment,* used in the latest national curricula, has probably caused the most of confusion among teachers. Connections between formative assessment (an approach to individual development) and standards-based output control seem to be elaborated vaguely. Although the principles of formative assessment are neither unknown nor unused by Estonian teachers, they do find the new terminology and legislation for these principles in the national curriculum disturbing. In a number of cases, teachers have reported controversial attitudes towards formative assessment. While some have already seen it as an every-day practice for some time without the need for special legislation, others are afraid it makes organizing the learning process more time-consuming.

To encourage schools in using more site-specific elements and teacher creativity, the Ministry of Education and Research is planning to reduce the impact of state examinations for teaching and learning. The first step has already been made: the amount of state examinations was changed in the last versions of the national curricula – two examinations prescribed by the state (Estonian language and mathematics) for basic school and three (Estonian

language, mathematics, and a foreign language) for upper secondary school. The second step – changing the goals of the examinations – is in progress. State examinations were introduced in 1996, when the main aim was to get a basis for the clear and objective comparison of the achievement of outcomes. From year to year, the aims were broadened, connecting graduation examinations with universities entrance exams. Therefore, the threshold for a positive result was raised from 20 points to 50 points on a 100-point scale to select best candidates for the universities. Now, the Ministry plans to change the goal of these examinations. They will be used primarily as feedback to students on their achievement, accordingly increasing the freedom of choice for graduates. For instance, graduates can choose 'wider' or 'narrower' content examination in mathematics.

Estonian national curricula in general education permit a healthy amount of freedom for schools and teachers to act in accordance with the needs and interests of their students and the community. Main problems in using this freedom may be a lack of knowledge and skills in implementing innovation, tensions between outcomes-based syllabi, teachers preferring to teach according to textbooks, and external assessment. School principals, headmasters and other leaders have the responsibility to fall in line with the changes themselves, while also supporting the professional development of their teachers (Kõiv & Lamesoo, 2012). As shown by examples of good practice, innovations are successfully implemented in cases when schools' cooperation with the community is a normal way of operation (Kärner, 2011).

The state and the local governments' responsibility could be to support priority innovations over a longer period of time, and keeping curriculum development coherent. Therefore, the initiation of the legislation act of the agreement on educational strategy should be an important basis for the continuing development of the national curriculum in general education.

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Curricular balance based on dialogue, cooperation and trust – The case of Finland

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Abstract

This chapter addresses the educational administration system in Finland focusing on one of its key elements, curriculum development, and furthermore, on the relationship between the national core curricula and local curricula. First of all the curriculum development system is described and then focus on the curriculum reform of the national core curricula for pre-primary and basic education, launched in 2012. This reform demonstrates a situation which is characteristic for Finland and internationally quite unique, simultaneously amplifying the roles of national policy and local development work. The curriculum reform process calls for intensive cooperation between national and local levels with teachers in the key role as experts.

1. Introduction

The Finnish educational administration system is rather unique compared to many other countries. In the last few decades, the national core curricula and the local curricula as well as the processes through which they are developed have been given a key role. The existing system has more players and more interaction than ever before, based on a mutual relationship between national and local decision-making. The impact of the joint curriculum work is displayed in the development of education and teaching in Finland (Atjonen, 2005; Halinen & Järvinen, 2008; Holappa, 2007; Rokka, 2011). It is also reflected at the three levels of curriculum work and education development

where Finnish teachers can exert their expertise: they have a part to play in school-specific, local and national processes (Jauhiainen, 1995; Sulonen, 2004; Syrjäläinen, 1994).

Finland does not have educational control systems like school inspections or national school achievement tests covering entire age groups. Instead of control, the aim is to engage people in development processes such as curriculum development. Reforms are accelerated by a variety of supportive means as well as by keeping the processes transparent and collaborative, thus promoting the commitment of different stakeholders to joint goals, and generating an atmosphere of trust between national, local and school level actors. In Finland, curriculum development combines the perspectives of research, administration and practical teaching into a productive dialogue shared by the different players. In recent years, the Finnish education system has been able to ensure sufficient national uniformity, thus, on the one hand, providing educational equity and equality, and, on the other, to cater for local needs and competence, establishing good learning results and warranting quality teaching. The results of international evaluations and research such as PISA exemplify this rather clearly. Since PISA 2000, Finland has been one of the top countries with high level of student achievement and very small differences between schools. However, the rapidly changing world poses challenges to schools and the entire education system. At the same time, national evaluation and research in Finland expose development needs like gender differences in students' achievement and growing local differences in educational resources and outcomes. Thus, there is a constant need to develop Finnish education with respect to these three key goals – equity, equality, and high quality.

Also important to notice at the beginning of this chapter is that early childhood education and care (ages 0-5) has just been moved from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health into the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Culture, thus corroborating the continuum of the entire school system. Pre-primary education is an independent part of early childhood education. It is voluntary for 6-year olds, comprising the year before children enter basic education. Basic education is the compulsory, common, nine-year education for

all, and it starts at the age of seven. There is no streaming or tracking in it. After completing basic education students are free to apply for either general or vocational upper secondary education. Approximately half of the age cohorts choose general and the other half vocational education. Both ways they may proceed to tertiary level studies.

2. A centralized or decentralized system – Which path will Finland take?

In decision-making concerning education development and curricula, development usually takes the direction of either stricter national regulation or greater local authority, i.e. deregulation. Questions concerning the relationship and balance between national and local authority, as well as between the authority of political decision makers and education experts, are topical in a lot of countries, so also in Finland.

The deregulation periods of the 1980s and 1990s were in Finland followed by a more centralized curriculum system (Nieveen & Kuiper, 2012). However, compared to many other countries, the Finnish approach still remains considerably more decentralized. In their analysis of Finland's current development, Nieveen and Kuiper see signs of both regulation and deregulation. From the 2004 basic education core curriculum onwards and in the present reform, the goal has, indeed, been to reinforce decision-making in those two directions simultaneously. On the one hand, this means clarifying and strengthening the aims of the national core curriculum and the national policies which guide local work in order to promote the coherence of the system, and thus educational equity and equality. On the other hand, it means increasing the role and impact of local curriculum work and local strategic development aiming at the improved commitment and creativity of local authorities and school staff and thus high quality of teaching.

The shift towards centralized regulation and steering is based on several weak signals such as requests coming from schools and providers of education as well as a shared concern regarding the slight decline in learning results and indicators concerning student wellbeing. It is important to understand that education in Finland is provided by local authorities. Usually they are municipalities, but may also be private organizations. Schools operate under

the jurisdiction of the education provider. Only very few schools are owned by the state. There are also differences between municipalities and schools that are gradually growing. Finland's standing in international assessments such as PISA (Sulkunen & Välijärvi, 2012), PIRLS and TIMSS (Kupari, Sulkunen, Vettenranta, & Nissinen, 2012) is still good. In the past few years, however, a negative trend has been detected in the national sample-based assessments of learning achievements in different subjects (Laitinen, Hilmola, & Juntunen, 2011; Lappalainen, 2011; Ouakrim-Soivio & Kuusela, 2012; Rautapuro, 2013) and extensive national reviews on student health and wellbeing (e.g. Kämppi et al., 2012). Local education authorities, principals and teachers have expressed their need for a clear, common direction for their work pointing out that the providers of education should be supported by national policies helping the education sector to compete with the other functions of municipalities for ever-smaller resources. This was clearly highlighted in the feedback from local authorities regarding the new draft core curriculum for basic education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2012b). National steering is also appreciated by principals and teachers (Kartovaara, 2009; Sulonen et al., 2010) and the national policies are trusted and valued in Finland. National policies can be traced back to parliamentary acts and decisions and elaborated through an extensive, multi-faceted cooperation process where researchers and teacher trainers, municipal and school staff contribute together with students, their parents and other key stakeholder groups.

Simultaneously, the shift towards decentralization can be traced back to the fact that local authorities and schools are well trusted in Finland. The purposeful and effective implementation of national goals and policies depends to a great extent on the quality of local and school-specific planning and decision-making. Hence, the performance and quality of the entire education system can be seen as dependent on the way education is organized at the local level, including the local curricula and other development processes, and the commitment and activeness of local authorities, school principals and teachers. The emphasis on local autonomy and authority does not mean Finland is encouraging a competition between schools or establishing a 'school market', as is sometimes the case elsewhere. On the

contrary, the present government has expressed its concern over a trend which is emerging in large cities in particular, with parents starting to pick schools for their children. Wanting to reinforce educational equality and equity, the Government Programme 2011 states that the *"fundamental premises of the organization of basic education are safe, accessible, high-quality schools, and the comprehensive and uniform delivery of primary education... Segregation between schools will be prevented."*

Several evaluations concerning the education administration system (Atjonen et al., 2008; Kartovaara, 2007 and 2009; National Audit Office, 2009; Sulonen et al., 2010) indicate that the current system is working rather well. School staff and local authorities are reported to find the system well-defined and to value the national core curricula both as regards their content and functionality. They appreciate the open and collaborative processes in which they are developed. They are also reported to find that there is enough room left for local decision-making and the stakeholders' own development ideas. Recent surveys (e.g. Atjonen et al., 2008) show that teachers know the national educational goals quite well.

The success of the system could in part be attributed to the fact that instead of external control systems, there is a continuous dialogue between the national level, local authorities and schools. It is also dependent on how the results of various development projects, evaluations and research are utilized. For instance, national assessments of learning achievement are sample-based, and the results are used to improve the education system, curricula and teaching, not to compare schools against each other, or to control them or hold them accountable at national level. Moreover, the statutory obligation that local authorities and schools have to assess and develop their work is focussed on self-evaluation. The commitment to continuous improvement is also demonstrated in practice. In recent years, the state and municipalities have provided funding to a large number of development projects which have promoted and deepened the implementation of the national core curricula and tackled the challenges brought about by changes in society such as growing cultural diversity or the impact of ICT.

Another fact contributing to the success of the system is the high level of teacher education (nearly all teachers hold a Master's Degree), wherefore teaching and administrative staff are able to utilize research and assessment information. National authorities can rely on the motivation of teachers, principals and local authorities, and their capability of planning and developing their work. Correspondingly teachers, principals and local authorities are to a large extent confident that they have extensive authority over their own work, and that their work is supported by national policies and authorities.

In the following sections, we will examine the tasks of different elements of the Finnish education administration system (Figure 1). Teacher education, organized by university teacher education faculties, and study material, produced by private publishing companies, are not part of the official administration system, but due to their strong impact on everyday teaching and learning, they comprise essential parts of the system as a whole. Teachers are free to choose the material used in teaching and learning, and they act as critical consumers selecting the best material to comply with the goals set in the curricula (Atjonen et al., 2008).

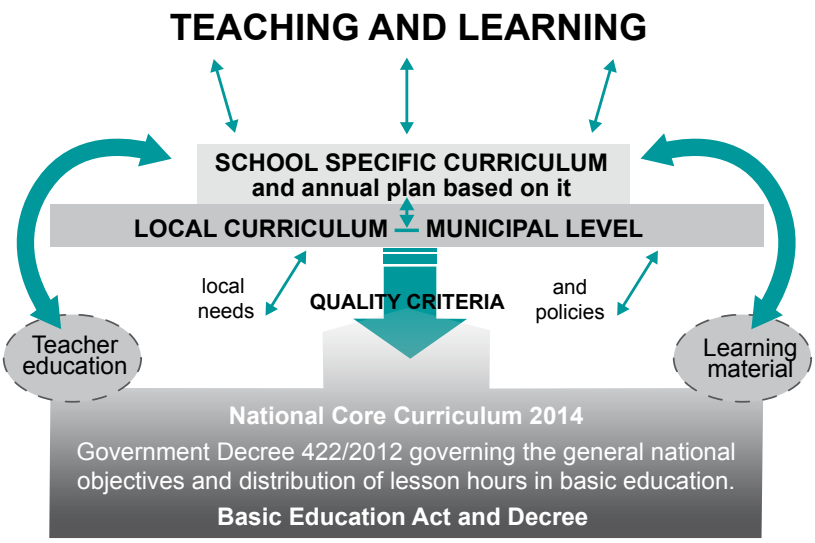

Figure 1: Administration of preschool and basic education in Finland

3. National policies – Setting the goals in collaboration

It is a long-standing Finnish policy to secure educational equality through national steering and support. Key steering tools to that end include education acts and decrees, as well as the national core curricula. They define the common goals and key operating principles for local authorities, and for schools as the actual implementing parties of education. Most education acts and decrees are passed by the Finnish Parliament. The Basic Education Act defines the main national goals and principles of pre-primary and basic education. It also defines the compulsory subjects in basic education. The Basic Education Decree regulates the minimum amount of lesson hours that must be provided for each grade, as well as the maximum duration of the school day. It also stipulates about pupils' rights, instruction, evaluation and assessment. Some decrees are issued by the Finnish Government. The Government Decree on the General National Objectives and Distribution of Lesson Hours in Basic Education is of primary importance. The Decree specifies the main goals, defined in the Basic Education Act, and regulates how the minimum number of lesson hours, defined in the Basic Education Decree, shall be divided between different subjects. All education acts and decrees are prepared by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The preparation of legislation always involves hearing key stakeholders. The Ministry can invite for instance teacher unions, the national association of parents, student associations, and representatives of various municipalities and organizations to give their views and suggestions.

In close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) is an autonomous state agency responsible for the implementation of national policy aims and the overall development of education. The FNBE is the decision-making authority of the national core curricula for pre-primary, basic and upper secondary education. The FNBE is also responsible for the preparation work for the national core curricula for each school form. The national core curricula describe how the main goals, stipulated by education laws and decrees, are to be implemented in various areas of school work, as well as define the objectives and key content of different school subjects. The core curricula are prescriptive to the providers of

education (municipal or private) who are obliged to draw up the local curricula based on them. As explained earlier, the preparation processes of the national core curricula are open and interactive, based on extensive cooperation with and contribution from all key stakeholders (Figure 2).

Qualified teachers in Finland have to have a Master's degree either in education or in the subject they teach. Teacher education in Finland is provided by the teacher education departments of several universities. Teacher education is comprised of theory studies plus a practical traineeship at the teacher training schools which are part of the education. Curriculum development is carried out in cooperation with the teacher education departments of universities and their training schools. This is crucial due to the major impact teacher education has on the quality of teaching and thereby on learning, notwithstanding the fact that universities are autonomous as regards the provision of teacher education. The processes of curriculum development utilize the expertise and research data provided by teacher education, as well as the expertise of teacher educators. In return, universities obtain useful information for developing teacher education and directing their research activities. Moreover, student teachers get an understanding about the role of the curriculum in their daily work.
Cooperation is also carried out with publishing companies. In addition to the curriculum, study material influences teachers' work quite strongly (Heinonen, 2005). Textbooks and other study material are not inspected by government officials. Municipalities and schools have the authority and responsibility for the choices of the study material they use. In practice, decision-making is quite often delegated to teachers. Even though publishing is based on commercial interests, publishers work very responsibly in regard to the national goals. The national core curricula are well observed in the provision of textbooks and other study material, and some of the best teachers and other education experts are involved in their preparation. Teachers pay a great deal of attention in order to choose the best study materials, and they are usually confident that the material supplied is of high quality.

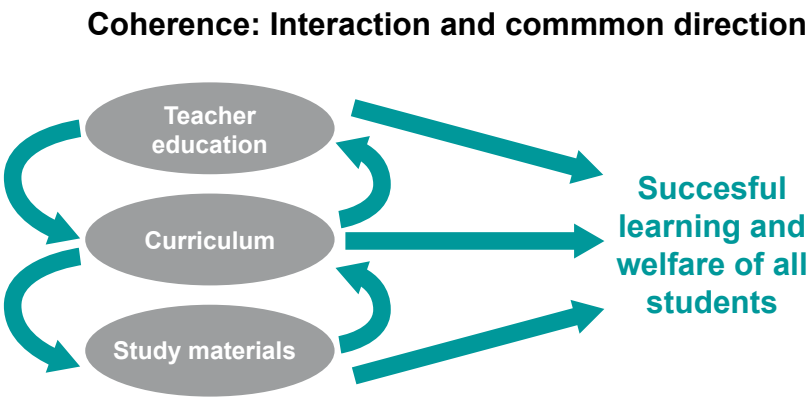

Figure 2: The interaction between curriculum work, teacher education and study material publishing ensures shared goals and operational coherence

4. Local curriculum work – Building a bridge between student needs and education goals

We take basic education as an example. The main principles are similar for other forms of education. In Finland, basic education comes usually under the jurisdiction of local authorities, in most cases municipalities. There are a small number of private education providers who the Government authorises to provide education upon specific request. Only about 2% of basic education students go to schools operated by private education providers. All basic education providers, both municipal and private, have a statutory obligation to draw up a local curriculum based on the national core curriculum. It may be a joint curriculum for all schools under the jurisdiction of a municipality, or the municipality can authorize and instruct each school to prepare a school-specific curriculum. In most cases it is a combination with the main guidelines defined by the municipality and the rest by the school.

With official prescriptive status, the local curriculum plays key role in meeting the national goals for education, and in creating a good foundation and common direction for the daily work at school. The curriculum is like a local map which describes – in more detail than a map of the country – the landscape and the main routes for the municipality and the school. It is a strategic and pedagogical tool which outlines the operations of education providers and schools, and supports pedagogical leadership (Figure 3). The local

curriculum has to be drawn up so that it supplements the national goals with the respective goals of the municipality and school. It defines the core values and the main tasks, the concept of learning, the operating procedures, and the ways in which learning environments and ICTs are to be developed in order to serve teaching and learning. The curriculum describes the main principles for choosing teaching methods. They define how students are assessed and given feedback. The curriculum prescribes how support is provided for students with learning or developmental challenges, and how the school cooperates with parents and other partners.

The local curriculum of basic education also specifies the detailed goals and contents of all subjects for different grades, how the number of lesson hours in different subjects is divided for each grade, and what selection of foreign languages and optional subjects are provided for the students. In the Finnish curriculum system, teachers have a lot of autonomy to choose their teaching methods and study material. By participating in the local curriculum processes teachers are able to influence all the elements of curricula, which supposedly increases their commitment to the common goals. The local planning processes provide opportunities for a wide range of innovative solutions and methods. The local authority is obliged by law to evaluate the functioning and quality of the local curriculum and to develop it. Based on the curriculum, each school prepares an annual action plan (year plan) and teachers prepare their respective work plans. The curriculum is also the basis for individual study plans which are prepared for students with difficulties in learning or school attendance, or students with an immigrant background.

The local curriculum also establishes the basis for assessing the students' learning processes and achievement. According to the Basic Education Act, students must be assessed against the goals specified in the curriculum for their learning, working skills and behaviour. Moreover, the curriculum is an essential source of information for parents, other schools and additional interested parties. According to the Basic Education Act, the sections in the local curricula that have to do with student welfare and care, and the school – home connections must be prepared in cooperation with the local social and

healthcare authorities. The involvement of students and parents in preparing the curriculum is regarded as particularly important when defining the values for school work, the school's educational goals and operating culture, as well as cooperation between the school and parents.

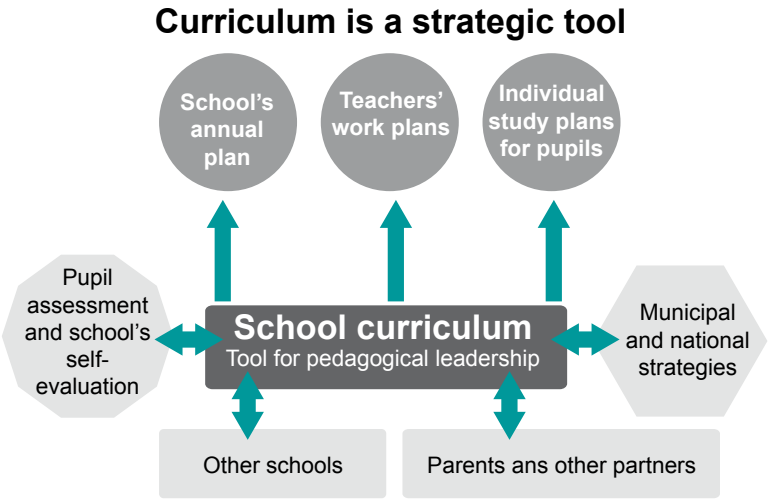

Figure 3: Local curriculum as a strategic tool

Drawing up the local curriculum entails similar processes and cooperation as the work with the national core curriculum. A key goal is to fully employ the professional competence of the local staff. Schools and local authorities are encouraged by national authorities to engage in mutual cooperation (Figure 4). It is important to include the entire staff, all students and parents in the process. The methods sustaining the process differ from place to place, often including workshops and meetings, student council activities and a variety of surveys. Cooperation with other parties, such as social and healthcare authorities, security authorities, youth work, libraries, cultural institutes, religious communities and different associations and enterprises is also important. In the local curriculum work, as in the national curriculum process, the goal is to make sure that different parties are supplied with sufficient information about the goals and objectives and operating principles of education, and by contributing to their development, the parties also commit themselves to promoting student learning and wellbeing, together with the school.

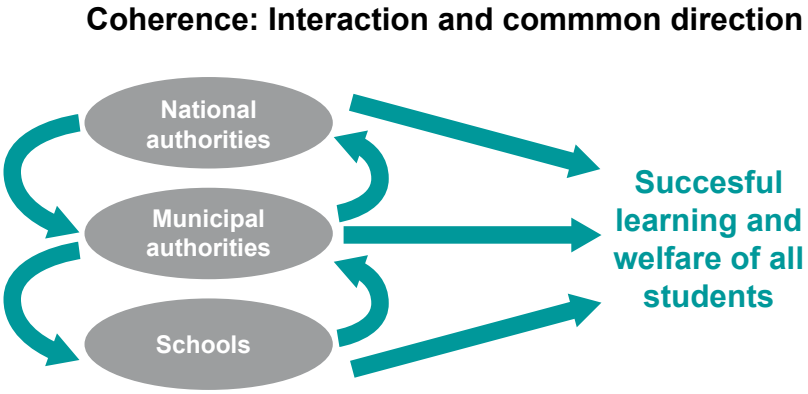

Figure 4: Mutual interaction between the national and local level and schools in the promotion of shared goals and operational coherence

5. The Finnish curriculum system in historical perspective

The current curriculum system in Finnish education is the result of consistent development work for over forty years. There have been numerous changes as regards procedural issues yet the present work approach, based on cooperation, can be traced back to the early 1970s. Development has been pushed forward by a strong will for educational equality, much enhanced by the fact that teacher education has been at Master's level since the beginning of 1980s, providing the entire country with high-level teaching professionals (Holappa, 2007; Luukkainen, 2004). Learning and education have always been valued in the Finnish society and a rather extensive political consensus has prevailed as regards the development of education. This means that improvements in education have been incremental, without any rapid changes in direction. The education sector is also a special one in the context of Finnish society: developments in the social and healthcare sectors, for example, have been much more turbulent.

At the beginning of the 1970s, Finland introduced comprehensive education, which meant the creation of the present basic education system. Comprehensive schooling means that the first nine years of education are common for all, without any streaming or tracking. It was a massive change, preceded by an intense political and social debate. In 1970, a national curriculum was established for the new comprehensive school. It was the first

curriculum to be executed with the same content throughout the country. Coherent, centralized and top-down steering enabled the full reform of the entire school system. The 1970 curriculum consisted of two independent parts. The first part was pedagogically quite progressive and educationally in-depth; the second one defined the subject-specific goals and contents in a detailed, prescriptive way (Malinen, 1985). The impact of these two separate parts can still be perceived in the Finnish way of thinking. The first part continues to influence the development of basic education, but even now when the two 'parts' are combined in one document, it is sometimes difficult for teachers to see the connection between more general goals and principles, on the one hand, and more detailed goals and content of school subjects, on the other hand.

However, towards the end of the 1970s, there was a willingness to increase local responsibility and authority in education provision, and the foundation for the present education administration structure was created. In 1985, the first national *core* curriculum for basic education was crafted, and each local authority was obligated to draw up a local curriculum. In most cases, the work was carried out by a municipal curriculum team, and the curriculum was then sent to schools for implementation. Quite often the work was more a matter of form, and local curricula adhered in detail to the national core curriculum (Malinen, 1992). In those municipalities where teachers were allowed to actively participate in the local work, teachers found the curriculum to be a useful and practical document which supported their work (Atjonen, 1993). These active municipalities emphasized the local substance in the curriculum, and local and school-based study material was widely prepared, which indicates that the contributors were inspired by and committed to the reform.

The spirit of deregulation prevailing throughout the Finnish society in the 1990s provided further encouragement to strengthen the local curriculum work. This development was also influenced by the fact that class teachers now had higher academic qualifications than before. Moreover, there were success stories told about local authorities which had actively contributed to the 1980s reform process. The economic depression of the early 1990s in

Finland had a part to play in the sense that best - and most cost-effective - practices were sought for ensuring the quality of education and teaching in these financially difficult circumstances. With the 1994 core curriculum, Finland took a big step towards a professional, school-based curriculum process. Through an extensive national development project called 'Aquarium', several local authorities and schools had the opportunity to directly influence the national core curriculum and simultaneously draw up their local and school-based curricula. Cooperation between municipalities and schools increased to a great extent. Participation and shared brainstorming inspired teachers, and they became more aware and more professional regarding curriculum issues. There was a shift in curriculum thinking from considering the curriculum a process instead of a product (Atjonen, 2005; Syrjäläinen, 1994).

At the beginning of the 21st century, the first national core curriculum for pre-primary education was established, and the national core curriculum for compulsory basic education was once again renewed (Finnish National Board of Education, 2000 and 2004). This was based on a profound reform of education legislation in the late 1990s and the inclusion of pre-primary education into the education system. The national core curricula were written this time in a way that steered local work more powerfully than in the previous decade. One reason for this were observations provided by various national evaluations concerning the inconsistent quality of local curricula. National regulations also directed municipal authorities to better regard the internal coherence of basic education, and to increase cooperation between the lower (1-6) and upper (7-9) grades of basic education, which often operated as separate units. Municipalities were also encouraged to better account for strategic goals at local level and to utilize the results of the development work carried out in schools (Holappa, 2007). National curriculum development was arranged through regional networks directed by the FNBE, giving feedback for the preparation of the national core curricula and simultaneously supporting curriculum work at local levels. The responsible role of local authorities in the drawing up of the local curricula and their autonomy in education had gained strength through the added-on know-how about curriculum development in the reforms of the1980s and 1990s. In the 1990s, only a limited number

of schools were included in the curricular processes, but at the start of the new millennium curriculum work embraced all schools and municipalities. Currently teachers are familiar with the goals specified in the local curricula and national core curricula and they consider the curriculum as the most important basis for their work (Atjonen et al., 2008).

In 2010, the national core curricula for pre-primary and for basic education were partly renewed due to legislative changes. New regulations concerning the support system of learning and school attendance had taken effect earlier in the same year. The reform clarified and reinforced the national core curricula, while increasing the significance of local decision-making and modus operandi in the implementation of the goals of the reform. The reform also rather brilliantly demonstrated Finland's particular way of simultaneously strengthening both the national and local levels of decision-making.

Finland has, once again, embarked on a new period of reform. In June 2012, the Government issued a decree which prescribed new national goals for pre-primary and basic education, together with a new distribution of lesson hours for basic education. Based on this, the FNBE commenced the preparation of pre-primary and basic education core curricula in August 2012 (Finnish National Board of Education, 2012a). The reform will deepen the themes of the 2004 and 2010 reforms, while considering the roles of education and teaching learning against the backdrop of our rapidly changing world. It is important to rethink educational values and schools' operating methods and culture. One of the most challenging tasks has to do with the definition of such generic competences that students should be able to resort to in the globalized world of the next decades, while striving for a sustainable future. These are competences that students will need in their further studies, in the world of work and as citizens in society (Halinen, 2011; Halinen et al., 2013). These competences cannot be taught and learnt in any one subject alone, instead, they require a variety of integrated studies. The competences suggested in the present draft of the basic education core curriculum refer to competence areas such as thinking and learning, multimodal literacies, and ICT skills, appreciation of the diversity of cultures, languages and views of life,

abilities to collaborate, interact, communicate and express oneself as well as entrepreneurship and other skills needed in working life, abilities to take care of oneself and other skills needed in daily life plus social participation and influence. School culture is another focal area of development: schools working as learning communities, the significance of social relations, a collaborative way of working, promotion of health and security, etc. In the reform, it is not enough to find out WHAT should be taught and learned at school. The main thing is to understand how the world around education is changing, how competences needed in that world are changing, and based on that, try to find best possible answers to the question HOW. How should schools operate, how should teachers teach and, first of all, how are students to learn so that they will be able to understand and value themselves, to take responsibility over their own learning processes, to encounter the changing world and to live in a sustainable way? Sustainable development and well-being is not regarded only as an important learning theme but as the purpose of education.

During the preparation process, the national core curricula and the local curricula are being examined as holistic pedagogical tools, in order to construct a full range of routes stemming from students' own needs and goals as well as from the goals set for learning and education by the society. The curriculum is regarded both as a collaborative process and a continuously developing plan, and its successful implementation requires systematic national and local follow-up and evaluation. In the curriculum process, the core values and the concept of learning are carefully reconsidered, as are the goals of teaching and learning. There are five main areas of school work defined in the curriculum for meeting the needs of students and the goals of education: instruction and guidance, support for learning and welfare, assessment and feedback to students, school's learning environment, and school culture. School culture can be seen as a combination of all other curricular elements, reflected in the daily life of every school and in every lesson. Figure 5 illustrates the basic elements of the curriculum:

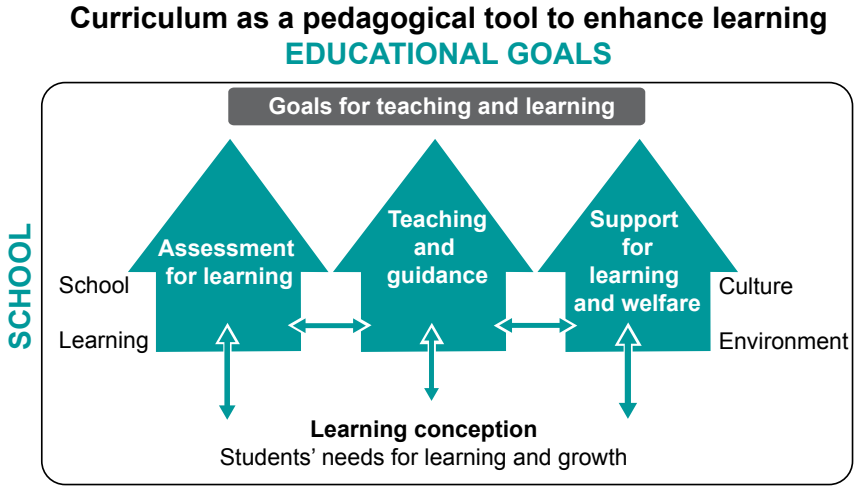

Figure 5: Curriculum as pedagogical tool to enhance learning

6. Curriculum work as a learning cycle

During the existence of Finland's present basic education system, the Finnish National Board of Education has developed the planning process of the national core curricula and local curricula, as well as the curriculum documents, in ways that have helped establish a powerful instrument for the development of education. Curriculum development in Finland inspires an on-going dialogue about the key issues in education while it connects different operating levels and parties in active working processes. Principals and teachers often distinguish and recall key milestones in the development of Finnish education according to the curriculum reform in question, instead of referring, for example, to a certain government programme or amendment of law. Within curriculum reforms, close cooperation and interaction between the state, municipalities and schools establish a genuine circle of learning. When goals are interpreted jointly and it is possible to influence their content, they are found to be meaningful and significant for daily work. When the entire steering system acts as a learning system, the quality of the goals and the work processes improve, all parties are more committed to the goals, and mutual trust prevails (Halinen et al., 2013; Sulonen et al., 2010).

While functioning as learning systems, the reform processes take on board much of the information and expertise accrued since the launch of the previous reforms. Great attention is paid to the experiences of teachers, students and parents. The present status of education is examined in relation to the changes taking place in the world around school, and the impact of the changes especially on teaching and learning is reflected. At the same time, there is a need to build on existing strengths and to retain and further develop what has been assessed to work well, so that this success continues in the future. The reform process of the national core curricula draws on expertise aggregated from national, regional and local development projects, on information created through evaluations of learning achievement and other relevant evaluations, and the findings of national and international research. Decisions made and directions chosen in other countries are carefully observed, and best practices are applied when they befit the Finnish context.

Policies included in the national core curricula are implemented in practice through the local curriculum process and other development processes. It is worth noting that local curriculum work is not just about the implementation of national policies, but also always contributes to the construction of local policies, goals and operating methods, based on local needs and evaluation results. National policies set a common direction for the work of all municipalities and schools. The willingness and drive to commit to national guidelines and to find best ways to reach the goals of the reform are generated through local processes.

7. What are the next steps?

The 2012 - 2014 reform of the national core curriculum provides an opportunity to bring the process-related collaboration to unprecedented level. The reform is also more focused on the evidence-based and future-orientated aspects of the work than the earlier endeavours. The starting points, strengths and development needs of the reform undergo detailed analysis. Extensive amounts of Finnish and international research and evaluation data, and experience obtained in development work, are examined and utilized. Together with institutes and experts focused on futures research, the FNBE has created the 'Future of Learning 2030' barometer (Linturi & Rubin, 2011).

The idea is to systematically disclose the views of experts from the school sector and other sectors of society on development trends in education, and to look for weak signals and irregularities that may call for early attention. This year the barometer was utilized for the first time with students, and it is likely to provide inspiring views into the future. It has been emphasized that education systems and schools are not just to react to the changing world but be aware that every day, through their choices and acts they are building the future.

The FNBE has also built partnerships with university teacher education departments and training schools, as well as Regional State Administrative Agencies. This is in order to stimulate research on curriculum work, as well as to organize training and support for municipalities and schools, resulting in added-on cooperation and a proactive approach. The aim is also to involve parents and, more importantly, students in curriculum work at both national and local levels.

While the development process of the core curricula is on the way, the FNBE hears several parties, cooperates actively with organizations and individuals who are interested in education, and invites a large number of education sector experts to contribute to the work. The process of producing the actual texts of the core curricula is carried out in working teams of researchers, teacher trainers and local education administrators, as well as a large number of principals, teachers and student welfare staff. The teams can also invite external experts who will not participate in the actual meetings, but instead monitor the work on a joint digital platform commenting the various draft versions. In this way, the work will involve more than 300 people with different expertise and views. They represent all parts of the country as well as its various language and culture groups (Halinen et al., 2013). The researchers who are involved in the process bring in a large spectrum of pedagogical and subject-specific information and insights through their research and monographs. Working in teams of such magnitude as described here is necessary not only to ensure the quality of the process, but to supplement the FNBE staff which is limited and tied to its regular duties as well.

At carefully chosen points over the curriculum process, the FNBE requests feedback on the draft versions of the core curricula from all education providers. For the first time, the FNBE also publishes the drafts on its website for everyone interested to read and to comment on. The first round of comments in autumn 2012 launched an active discussion on the website, with nearly 1.300 written statements of opinion, and prompted more than one hundred education providers to give feedback on the drafts. The comments not only addressed the direction of the reform, but also provided a multitude of detailed suggestions on how the draft text could be improved. While feedback is extremely valuable for the preparation of the core curricula, it also gives municipalities, schools and different stakeholders a chance to reflect what is significant in the reform and start to comply with the changes well in advance. This provides a shared starting point for local curriculum work while it strengthens the local ownership of the process.

8. Conclusion

The purpose of the Finnish curriculum system is, through cooperative process orientation, to open possibilities for professional learning and development and to ensure best possible preconditions for schools to operate and for students to learn. Instead of inspections and national achievement tests, resources are allocated to the main aim – promoting the interaction of teachers and students, and supporting learning. When teachers are working in this changing world, in a huge contextual turbulence, and meeting more and more diverse needs of students, families and society, they need to be trusted as the best experts of their own work. And consequently, when the content of teachers' work is turning to be more diverse, teachers need to be supported, not controlled. Learning should be on the top of the system.

The reform does not take place without constraints. One of them is the capacity of teacher education to react and to develop along with the reform. Another challenge concerns research. Even though researchers are involved in the preparation process of the core curricula, the process itself has been researched to a very small extent. Comprehensive, in-depth research is required both as concerns the processes of national core curriculum, local curriculum work and the complex relationship between them.

A further challenge is retaining the unique multifaceted and transparent process nature of curriculum work. Organizing such cooperation calls for resources and a constant volatility in national and local funding may be harmful for the process in its current form, i.e. as a diverse, extensive process of brainstorming and teamwork. On the other hand, the constant evolution of sophisticated digital tools and social media may open up new opportunities. Through these, the curricula, whether still in process or ready-to-use, could become even more accessible, and could get better visibility in formats which are appealing and which cater to the needs of more and more users in increasingly flexible ways. In these processes, it is particularly important to really listen to the needs and preferences all stakeholders, especially the students.

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The French science curriculum - Work in progress?

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Abstract

The French curriculum in secondary school has a long tradition of centralization. It could be considered as a disciplinary-centred or content-driven curriculum. The French education system is currently facing several changes, with a curriculum reform in compulsory education (since 2007) and a reform in higher secondary schools (in 2010). In 2013, the law of the 'school revision' creates the Écoles Supérieures du Professorat et de l'Éducation (ESPE) for teacher training and brings about once more the common base of knowledge and skills for compulsory school. In this chapter the regulation and deregulation in school curriculum in France are analysed, with a main focus on the science curriculum for lower secondary education.

1. Introduction

With Nieveen and Kuiper's conceptual framework underlying their analysis of curriculum regulation and freedom in the Netherlands (2012) in mind, we studied in France the intended science curriculum by means of an analysis of formal curriculum documents and the curriculum-in-action by conducting observations of teaching practices. The French Ministry of Education prescribes teachers and schools the educational objectives and contents to be achieved, but at the same time there is room for local solutions. Consequently, there are two questions at stake. Firstly, to which extent are teaching practices consistent with the intended science curriculum? Secondly, to which extent is there room for schools and teachers to come with own solutions? In Ekholm's

political steerings model (see Nieveen & Kuiper, 2012; see Kuiper, Nieveen, & Berkvens, elsewhere in this Yearbook; see also Nieveen & Kuiper, 2012) schools and teachers are designated as 'the periphery'.

In France, schooling is compulsory for children aged 6 to 16. Intended curricula are defined by the Ministry of Education and include national syllabuses. Each class is expected to reach the level of education defined in the syllabus so that all pupils are ready to take the national tests. Lower secondary education in France is unselective (*le collège unique*). Within a single framework, it is today related to all the pupils at the end of elementary school and split in four years (grades 6, 7, 8 and 9 regarding pupils aged 11 to 15). Teaching in lower secondary school is organized by discipline, undertaken by specialized teachers. For science and mathematics, there is one teacher for each of the four disciplines (mathematics, earth and life sciences, physics-chemistry, and technology), each of them coping with a national program and specialized inspectors. At the end of grade 9, the pupils get a national diploma (*DNB: Diplôme National du Brevet*), which is not a prerequisite for entering the higher secondary level. The DNB is (a large) part of school continuous assessment, and includes one oral and three written tests. The success rate is about 85%. Social conditions allow students to obtain scholarships for studies: for these students, good results at DNB qualify for obtaining additional grants for 'merit'. During grade 9, students have also to decide upon the next step in their school career: either a professional or a general and technological orientation. That is to say: first year of CAP (*Certificat d'Aptitude Professionelle* - a vocational certificate which is prepared in two years in vocational secondary education), or one of the three programs of study of the second higher degree (general, technological or vocational higher education). The choice and the orientation are based on the interests of the student and school performance throughout the year.

2. Forms of opening or deregulation

Several successive reports raised the difficulties linked to the strict disciplinary division of French science teaching. Since 2000, French educational policies have tended to introduce variations in the unselective secondary school, both in its organization and in the curricula (Dutercq & Derouet, 2004). Indeed, institutional innovations or measures boost the implementation of new,

experimental, local strategies or pedagogical projects, such as 'diversified career', 'cross-disciplinary work' or 'discovery journey', the promotion of ICT, dispersion of the class unit, interdisciplinary activities, and school life activities. The introduction of pedagogical councils in every secondary school - meant to boost, coordinate and evaluate projects - also contributes to new school governance. Another challenge, for the school curriculum as well as teacher training, is the claim on new aims, citizenship education, environmental education, health education, various pedagogical projects, et cetera. Questions are: how to articulate those and whether or not to anchor those in the disciplines, knowing that the contributions of the disciplines to these 'new actions' have still been badly defined (Coquidé, Lange, & Pincemin, 2009)?

Successive reports advised reshaping the science programs, in particular by merging and by reorganizing the teaching of these programs within six 'big themes of convergence': energy, environment and sustainable development, meteorology and climatology, statistical ways of thinking in the scientific view of the world, health and security. These topics are established in accordance with the program of each discipline concerned, where their contribution is also mentioned. For each disciplinary teaching, it is a question of contributing, in a coordinated way, to the acquisition by the pupils of knowledge relative to these various topics, elements of a shared culture. This step must create more coherence to the education received by the pupils in the fields such as health, security, and the environment, which are essential for future citizens. It also aims, through topics such as meteorology and energy, to make pupils realize that science is more than the simple juxtaposition of its constitutive disciplines, and that it gives access to comprehending a complex world, in particular through the ways of thinking that it implements.

These pedagogical devices or projects mentioned above must lead to teamwork between the teachers (Marcel, Dupriez, Périsset-Bagnoud, & Tardif, 2007; Coquidé, Godinet, Pastor, & Pincemin, 2008). The institutional texts tend to promote 'collective or interactive learning'. They also aim at presenting knowledge and at introducing values or morals on certain scientific subjects

that can lead to controversy. As a consequence, teachers will have to extend their knowledge with content and skills that previously was not perceived as belonging to their discipline, and in which they had no formal training in the past. In addition, they must be prepared for positioning their subject in a societal perspective, regardless of their own values and position.

3. The introduction of the common base of knowledge and skills

The common base of knowledge and skills was defined by the Orientation and Program for the Future of School Law (April 23rd, 2005). Indeed, it was the first time in France, since the laws of Jules Ferry in 1882, that the content of teaching became registered by law. Its construction is the result of a historical long process, started by the Langevin-Wallon's report in 1947, which affirmed the need for equipping all French youngsters with a common culture within the framework of compulsory education. In order to stop the drop-out of a large number of youngsters not mastering basic competences, the Law just mentioned focused mission of education system: to guarantee equity, to ensure success of all the pupils by the acquisition of a common base of knowledge and skills seen as a *"cement of the nation"*, to support professional insertion of youngsters. Indeed, the common base does not replace the disciplinary programs, but it prescribes the objectives to define what "*no one is supposed to be unaware of at the end of the compulsory schooling, under penalty of being marginalized or handicapped*". It constitutes a general framework, for the organization of a fundamental lesson, for the definition of stages of training and for the design of differentiated training courses taking into account diversity between pupils.

The common base of knowledge and skills represents an overall educational project for compulsory schooling. In principle, compulsory education and its social stakes are placed at the centre instead of being considered mainly like a preparation for higher secondary school. The general objectives defining the end of compulsory education cycle were considered unifiers for the disciplinary contributions. That is the reason why it concretely translates a need for going towards more transversality between the school disciplines. Hereby, it appears to be highly innovative.

As regards the preamble, the definition of the common base explicitly takes support on the proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union as regards to key competences for lifelong education and training. It links the compulsory education stakes with the requirements of personal development and social aspects like citizenship and economic proficiency. The common base in France, as in every country of the European Community, relates to the growing interest for educational performance of educational system and the constitution of a common framework of references for the definition of key competences (European Commission, 2006). Using the European terminology, the competences are presented in a homogeneous way and are conceived as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes to be implemented in real life. A first comparison between key competencies and certain competences of the common base shows however at the same time convergences and differences (Coquidé et al., 2008).

In France, the common base of knowledge and skills entails seven competences (Box 1), which are retained and distinguished from the disciplinary programs of teaching. This distinction is grounded, as all the disciplines must contribute to the development of various base competences. These seven competences are indeed transversal and their mastery by students must be the object of specific evaluation. They all must be controlled, without compensation between them. The booklet of competencies has to be validated for the DNB diploma. In fact, obtaining the DNB requires the validation of each competency to certify mastery of the common base, but also obtaining an average score calculated from the grades acquired in different disciplines. Therefore, DNB validation, which juxtaposes a dual logic of certification, is felt by teachers as contradictory in respect to the expectations from the institution. It generates avoidance strategies or bypasses to extricate them from skills assessment (Loisy, Coquidé, & Prieur, in press). Just in 2013, the examination tests have been redefined by the Ministry of Education and clarified for a better articulation of these two aspects of DNB certification.

The common base of knowledge and skills

Seven competences
- Mastering the French language
- Speaking a modern foreign language
- Basic knowledge in mathematics and scientific and technological culture
- Mastering common information and communication technologies
- Humanistic culture
- Social and civic skills
- Autonomy and initiative

A definition of the concept of competence
'Each major skill composing the base is designed as a combination of fundamental knowledge for the times we live in, abilities to implement this knowledge in various situations, as well as attitudes which are vital throughout life. These include openness to others, interest in seeking the truth, respect for self and others, curiosity and creativity.'

A homogeneous presentation of each competence's contents in three parts: Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes

Box 1: The common base of knowledge and skills (official Bulletin of State education n° 29 of July 20th, 2006)

The common base of knowledge and skills and the individual booklet of the pupil would have strong incidences on the awaited practices of the teachers, with an incentive to collective methods of work.

4. The coordination of teaching practices

The common base of knowledge and skills, together with the new educational missions (education to citizenship, environmental education, health education, et cetera) supposes coordination between the teachers of earth and life sciences, physics and chemistry, mathematics, technology, physical education, history and geography. However, previous analyses showed difficulties to institute teamwork because of institutional reasons, for instance the cellular organization of the class, and because teachers find it difficult. However, in France collective work among teachers has regularly been encouraged by a regulation which recalls that the teacher is never alone and that the teacher, within the school community, is a member of one or several pedagogical and educational teams. A study in the secondary level in 2000-2001, found that

six out of ten teachers were implied by joint work (Braxmeyer & Do, 2002). New teaching methods, such as 'diversified career' (Coquidé, 2001), 'discovery journey' or the development of the use of ICT exemplify the support provided for teachers' team work. 'Diversified paths' (1996-2005) was not subject to strict time frames and programs. Teachers were encouraged to work in a team and thematic approaches were advocated to promote a link between academic knowledge and understanding of the contemporary world. The discovery journey is organised by the whole school educative team for student's discovery of world of business. In lower secondary education, a student spends at least ten days together with people from the professional world.

However, many teachers and school leaders state that they mainly count on volunteers to develop joint work. Still, how to get teachers involved in group work remains a sensitive topic. An analysis of 'diversified career' and 'discovery journey', both devices for multidisciplinary teaching in lower secondary school, has indicated in particular the gap of the *'invisible limit'* of each scientific discipline associated with each teaching speciality (Lebeaume, 2007). Moreover, the results of a national survey show how professional performances, associated with the process of inquiry science-based prescribed curriculum, are marked by the habitus of the teachers and their specialities (mathematics, science or technology fields) (Prieur, Monod-Ansaldi, & Fontanieu, in press). Dialogue between teachers of different disciplines could potentially be hampered in case of different professional representations about same subject teaching. So, joint teaching practices remain marginal.

The coordination of teaching actions is a rather recent concern in the analysis of teaching work (Grangeat & Gray, 2008; Marcel et al., 2007). The analyses available highlight the conditions of these joint actions, like their institutional and organisational constraints. For example, collective projects are facilitated by the support of local authorities and, as Barrère (2002) emphasizes it, these joint actions largely depend on the inter-individual relations, nourished by complicities, common affinities and teaching involvement. In the same spirit, the individual booklet of skills of the common base describes levels and must become a tool for pupil evaluation to be shared by teams of teachers. However,

the latter still have little collective assessment experience and expertise (Hasni, Lenoir, & Lebeaume, 2006; Houchot et al., 2007). These regulations, which ask for a great coordination of teaching, seem to suppose that this prescribed coordination is carried out in fact. However, it is a real challenge. For example, competence 3 states that mathematics, physical sciences, earth and life sciences, and technology must exercise the skills and knowledge common for students to have a comprehensive and coherent representation of the world at the end of lower secondary school. A long introduction, common to these four disciplines, promotes an investigative approach.

In order to understand how teachers of physics and chemistry, and earth and life sciences have appropriate tools to implement learning situations and assessment of skills in science, we have analysed the assessment situations, proposed by the ministerial website, and a number of situations described in two academic local websites (Orléans-Tours and Creteil academies). These academic sites, for teachers and powered by teachers working in relation to an inspector, are indeed local production of assessment situations. The analyses of these sites were conducted in 2010-2011, the first year of the validation of skills booklet (Dell'Angelo, Magneron, & Coquidé, 2012). The ministerial national site *Eduscol* specifies elements of scientific and technological achievements as expected. For example, for the same jurisdiction of the booklet 'Practicing science' three acquisition dates are to be included in level 2 (about grade 5, 10 years) for three elements:

- Perform a sequence of inquiry.
- Manipulate and experiment, formulate hypothesis and test it, test several possible solutions.
- Express and exploit the results of a measurement and research using scientific vocabulary in writing or orally.

In level 3 (about grade 9, 15 years), four elements are:

- Retrieve and organize relevant information.
- Manipulate, measure, calculate, apply instructions.
- Reason, argue or perform an experimental technology, demonstrate.
- Present the approach and the results, communicate using appropriate language.

The national website *Eduscol* proposes activities developed according to the same matrix, for preparing and sitting for an evaluation (Box 2). The degree of competence is assessed through the 'helpers' (in the process, know-how knowledge) that will be, or not, provided to the student. Their introduction, or not, allows to understand a dynamic aspect of the construction of skills. Situations proposed on the national website are contemplated to be used both in terms of learning that assessment.

- Title of the scientific subject
- Class referred
- Duration of the proposed situation
- Problem of "real life" to introduce the theme of learning situation or of assessment
- Platform of work
- Set point given to the student
- Fields of science knowledge, indicators of success
- Knowledge and skills
- Aids or "helpers" delivered on student's demand as needed
- Expected responses of students

Box 2: *Worksheet 'matrix' proposed on the national website site Eduscol, designed to help teachers developing learning situations and assessments*

The situations provided to the two local academic sites were developed by teachers. They were built and tested in the same year as those placed on the national website *Eduscol*. They represent an interpretation by an academic group of teachers of capacity and competence "*to practice a scientific and technological problem solving*". The analyses highlight difficulties and differences in teachers' interpretation of the skills, and of assessment on various points (for example: teachers' interpretation of complex task or of the links between learning and assessment). The multitude of texts, published since 2005, on methods of teaching and assessment have generated difficulties for teachers, who are perplexed by a lot of documents perceived as contradictory injunctions.

5. National project, local implementations

5.1 School organization: Prospects for a local framework

In the ministerial recommendations, the question of setting up a framework for dialog and collaboration, necessary to implementation of the base is supposed to be '*flexible*' and it is relying on the sole local initiative of the teachers and school leader. However, previous studies show that if the coordinated practices of teachers are highly recommended by the institution, tensions appear between regulation or national recommendation, and between interpretation or local implementation. For several researchers (Dubet, 1999; Dutercq & Derouet, 2004), these difficulties are related to the existing discrepancies between the political project, the teaching organization and the curriculum choices (programs, teachers' training, the relationship between teachers and pupils, et cetera). The studies make it possible to interpret the effective practices of teachers at a local organizational level. These tensions imply a variety of unstable and changing implementations at school level.

The common base, while leaning on the local educative teams and by leaving the responsibility to the schools to find solutions for implementation, makes it possible to impel a revival of joint work and a better coordination of teaching. Issues that the teachers, the pedagogical and educational teams or the school leaders have to solve, very largely exceed the simple framework of the common base. This common base framework can become not only a true asset to give direction to compulsory education, but also initiate deep questioning concerning the organization and functioning of the schools. To allow these local adaptations, *Article 34 of the Act of April 23rd 2005 Orientation*, as we will see later, provides the opportunity and encourages schools, within their pedagogical freedom, to adapt the curriculum or the school organization with forms of pedagogical experimentation.

5.2 A necessity for teacher collaboration

Educational reform has, indeed, an impact on the professional practices and the knowledge taught. Thus, the multi-field approach prescribed in the curriculum imposes the move from a solitary teaching work to a more

cooperative one. The reform constraints teachers to confront their points of view, to discuss their practices with colleagues and partners not always selected. This is quite different from the usual way of teacher cooperation, which relies on affinity (Barrère, 2002). Supportive to the reform, modern communication modes like internet favour dialogue between teachers, new forms of real communities of practice in some cases, opening new ways for the design of resources (Gueudet & Trouche, 2013). Recently in France, the Ministry of education has promoted new forms of teacher training, mainly based on teacher collaboration (Gueudet & Trouche, 2013), that appears to be particularly relevant to support teachers towards more open ways of teaching sciences, giving more responsibility to pupils. These teacher education advanced methods require of course new skills for the people who educate teachers (Gueudet, Pepin, & Trouche, 2012). The development of these new forms of teacher training seems to constitute a real challenge. At school level, teaching piloting and organization, as according time for joint works, are very important for coordinating practices. Similarly, digital tools offered by the ministry or by schools, for teaching and for student assessments or evaluations, provide opportunities for information sharing, or conversely, compartmentalize the activity of teachers. An empirical study undertaken by the observatory hosted by the French Institute of Education of the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon (Prieur, Aldon, & Pastor, 2012) shows the important role of the school leader in driving the collective work for the implementation of the common base. The school leader should inform teachers, organize shared working time and provide collaborative pedagogical tools. However, in practice school leaders find it difficult to support joint work, like assessment, and a lot of them continue to promote subject centred thinking.

5.3 Local possibilities for innovation and experimental teaching

For several decades, policies have aimed at the improvement of pupils' success by a change of practices in the class. However, the origin and the nature of these innovations, which developed in various historical contexts, varied a lot. A qualitative jump was operated in France with the law of orientation and program for future of the school in 2005. *Article 34* of this law offers to French schools a possibility of local adaptations, pedagogical 'experimentation',

experimental organization or teaching. This *'Article 34' experimentation* allows, after approval by the LEA (the local institution '*Académie*'), for broader upheavals within schools, since the possibility of derogating from the regulation is allowed. The 'right' to test, to set up innovative practices, thus benefits from a new coherence and a new visibility. This new policy allows, with certain conditions, schools to be flexible and provides spaces to make own choices. Directly related to the '*success of all pupils*', it influences the learning time and aims at making it effective. Within this framework, teaching innovations take the forms of projects defined by concerted objectives, clearly specified by a team within the school. The device is evaluated each year. Through the exploitation of various teaching methods, the project aims at proposing approaches adapted locally to specificities of the pupils, teams or schools. These projects can be consulted on the local school website.
A synthesis of the innovations, by topic and by level is realised each year by the ministerial online library of teaching experiments. An overview of these projects shows the fields covered by the '*experimental projects*'. The innovative projects' orientations follow either national priorities, pedagogical instructions set by the *Académie,* or school initiated projects.

National priorities: ICT in education, establishment of the common base of knowledge skill (flexibility, interdisciplinary modules, et cetera), teaching modern foreign languages (intermediary level groups, flexibility in time and group organization), promotion of sciences (test of an integrated teaching of sciences and technology in lower secondary schools).

Pedagogical instructions set by the Académie: reading skills, measures for pupils with specific needs (e.g. individual assistance), equity and equal opportunity, valorisation of vocational training, seem strong axes of some experiments.

School initiated projects: to answer the problems faced daily by educative teams:

- Projects that participate to the implementation of national recommendations via innovation: valorisation of vocational training, integration of handicapped children, guidance competences acquisition, et cetera.

- Projects that try to solve teachers' problems: transitions from one degree to the next, from one cycle to the next, rhythms of work of the pupils and search for new organisation of schedules, pupils' motivation, drop-out prevention under the heading individual assistance, et cetera.

5.4 An example of experimental teaching: Integrated science and technology teaching

Within the framework of these possibilities, an integrated science and technology teaching approach (*Enseignement Intégré de Science et Technologie, EIST)* is tested, since 2006, in grade 6 and 7 of voluntary *colleges*. It entails the construction of an integrated science teaching based on the programs of three disciplines (earth and life sciences, physics and chemistry, technology), and developing inquiry-based science education. A team of three teachers (one for each discipline) per voluntary school is made up, and each teacher is in charge of the teaching of these three fields. This experimental local curriculum transformation has opened an old debate in France: Is it useful, in lower secondary school, to start with made up disciplines taught by teachers with disciplinary speciality for all the secondary level? Or by teachers not having had specific teacher training in all subjects? For example, for scientific teaching, will integration be better ensured by a single science teacher or by several specialized teachers (in earth and life sciences, in physical sciences, or in technology) who coordinates their teaching? The fear of teachers to lose their specialization and their original subject becomes reduced in time, the financial perspectives (time which is necessary for the coordination of a teaching team, et cetera) and the administrative backgrounds (questions of teachers' recruitment and organisation of their training, et cetera) are paralysing objective reflection (Coquidé, Fortin, & Lasson, 2012).

6. Conclusion

We used the example of lower secondary science education for discussing the current curriculum debate. The implementation of the common base of knowledge and skills shows large disparities throughout France. These disparities, as we discussed before, are related to the local conditions, dependent on the social context, the geographical location of the school, but

it also depends on the attitudes and the projects of the educative team. From a scientific point of view, this led to a need for better apprehension of local curriculum, local appropriations or adaptations.

The common base of knowledge and skills is a national project. The re-writing of the various national disciplinary programs in relation to the contents of the common base remains under the central responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Its effective implementation is left only on the initiative of local teachers and school leaders. It must enable local adaptations and it is possible to analyse here that a form of responsibility and development of school autonomy are being reinforced. With the *article 34* and *right of innovation*, the school initiatives are also affirmed. These transformations of the French curriculum seem to allow and to encourage the periphery to find their own solutions on how to reach the aims of improvement, and perhaps a beginning of challenging the professionals. The work is in progress and the road will be long and tortuous.

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Reflecting curriculum trends in Germany - A conceptual framework for analysis

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Abstract

In Germany, the sixteen Bundesländer *decide - each on their own - how the syllabus should look like and to which extent the schools are given space to construct their own curriculum. For several years, another instrument has been increasingly impacting curriculum practice in the schools: national education standards for seven main subjects. The standards focus mostly on competencies to be achieved according to different levels of quality. The standards are expected to stimulate schools to bring a certain level of cohesion across schools - even across the* Länder *boundaries. This marks an important development. Never after World War II has it occurred that all* Länder *agreed upon a common standard system for the school curriculum. This can be attributed to the* Länderhoheit *– a kind of regional autonomy, which each* Land *enacts and protects. Another development is that schools in Germany must nowadays develop one- or two-year goal contracts with governance authorities. These* Ziel-Leistungs-Vereinbarungen *focus on profile areas of the individual school. The curriculum is part of this contracting system. Additionally, individual schools are given various degrees of autonomy depending on the* Land *where they are located. Within this framework of relative autonomy, a school can attune its own curriculum to local demands and profile choices. Last but not least, schools have to work on getting and using data-driven feedback. This means that the curriculum work is framed by a mix of external parameters.*

In this chapter a conceptual curriculum framework for understanding what works in the domain of curriculum and its implementation is presented. The framework is called the curriculum triangle. Its aim is to help analyse curriculum materials and textbooks, not however the political and structural system of impacts on the school curriculum.

1. Introduction

Analysis is a reflective art, both in research and in practice. As a reflective art, curriculum analysis serves different purposes:

- To explore the curriculum and the extent of its apparent or hidden impact on practice;
- To discover incompatibilities between the curriculum aims and the implementation;
- To understand the prevalent patterns of curriculum use by practitioners;
- To identify starting points for curriculum improvement;
- To find patterns and gender biases in the curriculum;
- To learn about coherent and dissonant parts in curriculum materials;
- To compare what various curriculum systems have in common and where they differ.

Thus, reflective curriculum analysis can be important for both theorizing and practical curriculum work. The broad spectrum of purposes makes curriculum analysis a daunting task. Additionally, curriculum analysis often involves curriculum comparisons, which are particularly fraught with pitfalls (see for example Keitel & Kilpatrick, 2002). These might be some of the reasons why curriculum analysis does not appear to be a widespread, popular discipline. Yet it is a giving exercise because curriculum teams in schools as well as at other places gain *systemic clearness*. Clearness in this context refers to an understanding of the framing factors of a curriculum process so that the results are more likely to last, to have an impact, and to stimulate learning in creative, future-oriented ways.

This preparatory function of curriculum analysis does not impede the development of creative ideas and features of the curriculum, which go beyond traditional horizons. Both is needed, a rigorous analysis and an independent, creative view of the curriculum. Elsewhere in Europe, syllabi and schoolbooks have been analysed according to their impact on the school curriculum and instructional practice (see for example the international comparative studies of Hopmann & Riquarts, 1999). Curriculum analysis projects were also carried out in Sweden. Implementation issues were integrated and curriculum process models developed (e.g. in Switzerland and Germany, see Hameyer, Frey, Haft,

& Kuebart, 1986). Häussler and Pittman (1973) adapted a conceptual guide for curriculum analysis from the US (by the Institute for Science Education, Kiel University). There are other approaches like the content analysis studies of PISA to validate tests based on the mandatory curriculum.

2. Changes and challenges

In Germany, transforming the school curriculum is not the result of a national effort rather than efforts within individual states (*Länder*) with a growing range of choices. A big impact stems from new systems of control by external evaluation, accountability demands, and changing patterns of leadership as mentioned in the abstract (e.g. Rolff, 2009). The degree of diversity between the schools depends on how power, trust, theory and practical wisdom converge in common goals. These potentials of problem solving are important 'players' in the metaphorical concert of curriculum transformation. On top of that, the charm of the unexpected challenges all 'players' and the 'conductor', i.e. the school leader(s), to adjust the concert arrangement towards a consistent level of quality (Hameyer, 2009).

In this context we would like to introduce the curriculum triangle as an instrument. Before we come to the triangle itself, we would like to refer to selected trends in curriculum change from a European perspective so that the background of a curriculum that changes over decades comes into play. There is a widespread trend in Europe to look at school and curriculum quality in a much more precise way than before. Monitoring and evaluation systems, standards and national benchmarks have been put into place (mostly initiated by central and regional authorities). For example, some cantons in Switzerland use quality and qualification plans (Q2E, for a brief presentation see Heidegger & Petersen, 2005). This means that nowadays curriculum development is very much a matter of professional learning and continued development of competencies within and across schools. In Germany this can be seen in various ways where curriculum change is much more driven by the syllabus and by what the market offers than by developments from schools themselves. In contrast to the Netherlands, however, schools are usually not allocated additional time for curriculum work nor are they

trained in curriculum development. An exception is the growing efforts of private foundations, which have started various programs in this domain (Bertelsmann Stiftung, Deutsche Kinder- und Jugendhilfe Stiftung, Robert-Bosch-Stiftung, Jacobs Foundation).

At the same time, there is no evidence that teachers have been sufficiently trained for systematic quality-based efforts. Many from inside and outside schools express concerns that teacher education, pre-service and in-service training only enables teachers to practice curriculum design and renewal on a limited scale (Handelzalts, 2009). In addition, there is a lack of knowledge in schools when it comes to medium- and longer-term planning. In spite of this gap between the quality demands *across* schools and the given knowledge to implement goals *inside* schools in professional ways, schools have to master the challenges and choices that come with expanded freedom on a local level. We can specify some of the current challenges in terms of four major demands:
The *quality demand*, i.e. to compare and compete with other schools, also to look at the quality of teaching and its impact on what the students learn; in addition, to improve the school curriculum quality according to internal and external standards.
The *equality demand,* i.e. to improve educational possibilities for all students, including the gifted, talented and the disadvantaged (PISA showed that German schools achieve relatively poor results compared to other countries in the world; nearly ¼ of all the students have extremely limited capabilities in basics of reading and text comprehension).
The *diversity demand*, i.e. to take into account heterogeneous, sometimes diametrically opposed groups (e.g. poor vs. rich, employed vs. unemployed, social security vs. economic poverty, integration vs. segregation, minorities and migration background issues).
The *competency demand*, i.e. a shift from the academic knowledge towards abilities (competencies) to use knowledge reflectively. This also includes mastering knowledge-based methods to solve key tasks in life and work. In addition, this demand entails the redefinition of how to learn and how to apply knowledge in practical situations. Thus, competency development comes into the forefront of syllabus work and curriculum renewal (Hameyer, 2009).

The scope of local or school-based curriculum development (Skilbeck, 1998) has, to some extent in several countries increased, i.e. schools have gained more autonomy *and* more duties, especially to create their own curriculum or adapt existing curricula in contextually-sensitive ways. These demands have to be (made) compatible to the local and regional needs as well as to national standards and the syllabus. At least in Germany, there is still on-going irritation regarding how to handle this double-bind situation. The exceptions are schools, which are self-conscious, proficient in program development and professional work. The current state of autonomy means that schools are facing a widening array of choices. This is also reflected in the growing number of documents relevant to the development and implementation of a curriculum.

3. Curriculum triangle

This section focuses on a conceptual framework for curriculum analysis in order to analyse and reflect on curriculum materials, including textbooks. The triangle approach (figure 1) includes the teacher's choices to interpret and use a curriculum or textbook in various settings of practice. The core ideas, components and the design of a curriculum or textbook are part of the frame of analysis. The intention is to provide a tool to reflect how teachers and students use a curriculum. The curriculum analysis framework can help to understand the intended and enacted curriculum as well as the interplay between the two. Thus, the match and mismatch of a conceptual curriculum design can be identified particularly in view of (i) users' needs and ideas, (ii) patterns of curriculum enactment, and (iii) situations where a curriculum is developed, implemented, adapted, or changed. Figure 1 shows the components of the curriculum triangle framework.

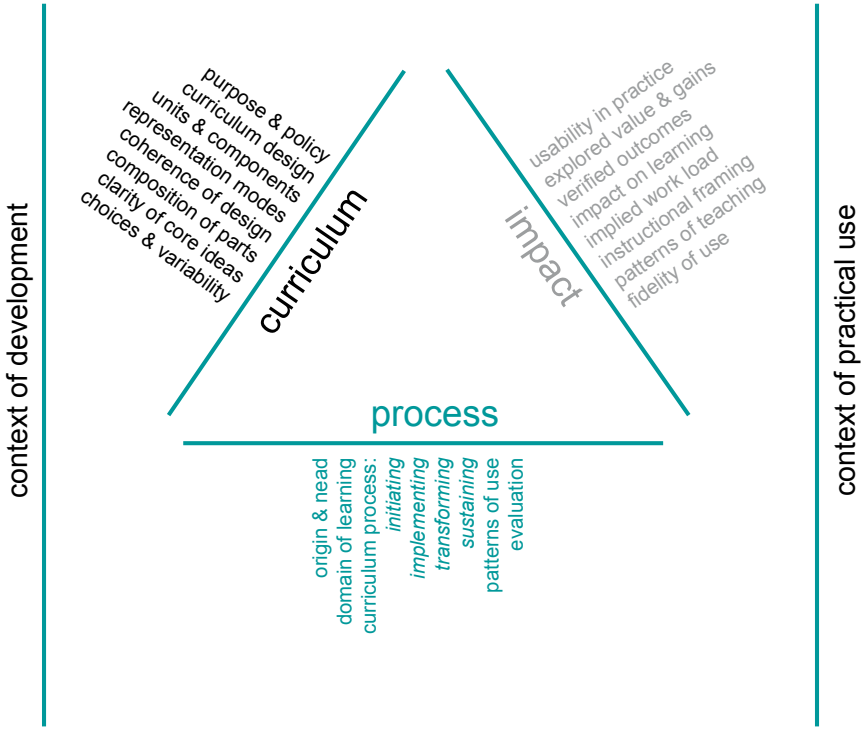

Figure 1: *Curriculum triangle*

The triangle provides three perspectives of a curriculum: the curriculum itself including its design; the curriculum development process as well as the implementation and patterns of its use. Finally, the impact of the curriculum on learning and instruction is also a unit of analysis. The framework should not be seen as a vacuum but embedded in contexts. Of particular relevance in this regard are the context of the development of the curriculum (the development process) and the context of its impact, in other words: matters related to its practical use. It is our contention that the development process of a curriculum, as well as aspects surrounding the impact of the curriculum, both shape the curriculum in a major way. In some cases, these two sides are completely separate from each other whereas in other cases process and impact are closely interrelated.

The triangle underlines the recommendation to combine the three perspectives shown therein. The verified curriculum impact, i.e. outcomes, for example can influence the revision of a curriculum whereas the curriculum design may have been shaped by the development process. Therefore, the triangle can also serve as a tool to reflect upon the tacit and real faces of a curriculum in view of its design, process of development, various patterns of its use, its explored impact, and the gains as seen by the users and recipients. Core needs of curriculum practice can be clarified by this model. It can also be helpful when it comes to identifying hidden or underlying purposes.
For example: enhancing individual growth, creating learning choices, linking to core rationale, securing optional use, development coherent units, ensuring curriculum gains, supporting patterns of variation, exploring curriculum impact, supporting flexible use.

4. Curriculum competencies

4.1 A set of curriculum competences

Several studies show that schools lack competencies to improve their own curriculum and, even more so, to create new curriculum designs in view of internal and external requirements (see for example the report of the school inspection from Hamburg: Bernt, Birenheide, Diedrich, & Leist, 2010, especially page 63). In this section we depict a set of competencies required for curriculum work inside schools. In section 4.2 we give information about several cases of curriculum development to illustrate what is needed to implement curriculum guidelines and the core rationale at stake.

According to several studies analysing school sites and the demands of curriculum design, teachers are not professionally educated for curriculum design and development roles. In domains such as project management, curriculum knowledge or teamwork, schools are more likely to improvise than to proceed systematically. Some competency requirements, which would make the work at school more professional and effective are curriculum competencies, project competencies, team competencies, communication competencies, evaluation competencies and retrieval competencies. Table 1 shows detailed breakdowns of these competence groups.

Table 1: Competence break downs

curriculum competencies	project competencies	team competencies
• defining a rationale • designing a curriculum • developing a coherent curriculum system • setting up a process model for implementation and feedback • structuring curriculum units and modules • using key concepts and fundamental ideas • testing beyond one´s own practice what works • evaluating a curriculum and its use	• planning curriculum work over longer time spans • linking different stages of project work • using project models for cross-case management • defining indicators of success • presenting results	• understanding the secrets of group dynamics • sharing work effectively • clarifying the starter aims • contracting team work • identifying and managing team conflict • using methods of brainstorming and idea production • sustaining team work over difficult times • setting up different roles and commitments within the team
communication competencies • presenting clearly, also using advanced organizers • giving and receiving feedback • sharing rules of communication and feedback • coaching others and being coached • focusing complex stories down to a few major insights • summarizing the easy and difficult points • reflecting one´s own patterns of communicating • deliberating rather than stating • using concepts from research (such as theme-centred interaction, cp. Richards, Burlingame and Fuhriman, 1990) • listening and paraphrasing • clarifying a problem before valuing it	**evaluation competencies** • formulating indicators of success • applying formative evaluation methods • interpreting complex survey data (data-driven analysis) • combining process and outcome data • writing a clearly structured report for non-participants • exploring the impact of curriculum use	**retrieval competencies** • knowledge management • briefing and debriefing • knowing where to find important information • using expertise • retrieving knowledge from data baselines • simplifying complex information for practical use • supporting information work inside the school • reporting interim findings on demand in clear ways • storing knowledge effectively over longer time spans

4.2 Illustrated needs for curriculum competencies

Example A: Age-level curriculum development in Bünde, Germany

Bünde, a small city nearby Cologne, has a secondary school that integrates science teaching through grades 5 and 6 (11 to 12 year old children). Classic science subjects are only taught in the classes for older children. The school not only rebuilt the science curriculum sequentially, but also transformed its core ideas to be more in line with a prescribed curriculum of the *Land*. From the beginning, this was supported by changes in the contextual system of practice (e.g. teacher allocation, timetables, team building, making parents familiar with the Bünde-model; see Langer, Henze, Hesse, & Ransiek, 2007). In addition, the school introduced a counselling system for all the students with dedicated counsellors. The school provides students with numerous counselling and advisory offers. Whether a student has trouble deciding on a career path or has trouble with a teacher or at home or whether he has psychological troubles, there is a dedicated support structure in place. All support systems are connected to each other. The teachers are trained to fit into this comprehensive structure, which is implemented for all ages in the school, and make use of it. In addition, students document what they learn and what they work on in a portfolio that is used as a reference during feedback discussions. During these discussions students are encouraged to show what they have mastered and where they did not achieve their goals. Mostly at the end of a feedback session, they express their needs for further learning and support. This advisory system creates rich knowledge about learning difficulties and potential shortcomings of the current curriculum. At the same time, feedback is guaranteed as a part of learning and instruction and is thus incorporated into the local school system. The model is not just the idea of somebody who happens to think highly of feedback, but the result of school knowledge, i.e. experiences with continued, embedded feedback at other schools, knowledge and experience about effective learning, self-efficacy, appreciative methods for instruction and a clarity regarding how to implement self-guided learning in science teaching.

Example B: National curriculum framework for primary science education

At the turn of the past century Helmut Schreier, professor of education and science at Hamburg University, together with the main author of this article,

took the initiative to develop a curriculum framework for science teaching in primary schools in Germany. This idea stemmed from a perceived need to secure more space for science issues in the primary education curriculum in all *Länder* of Germany based on a centrally articulated need. At the same time, it was felt necessary to strengthen the core ideas of science issues in the curriculum and to provide clarity about what the different realms of science could be. Different from the tradition of curriculum making, this was a system-wide process of curriculum reasoning with the aim to involve outstanding experts from universities, teacher education and educational science to create the framework. Through combined efforts various authorities and decision-makers were included in this process, which was supported by the German Association for Science Education in primary schools. The implementation process is still on-going with some needs for readjustment and continuation (for more information, see Hameyer & Schreier, 2002).

Within this adaption process, domain knowledge was transformed in many ways, based on the premise that it should motivate students to be curious about natural science issues. The goal was to build a core of competencies so that students can better understand and explore the world of nature, explain astonishing phenomena, discuss cultural diversity, reconstruct and construct technological inventions themselves and progress from a global perspective on history, or reconstruct reality from interdisciplinary perspectives. It is important to stress that this approach had to take into account the enacted curriculum or syllabi in the various German *Länder* as well as the contextual differences between schools and state policies. Also, knowledge about sustained development in the schools had to be considered when developing the framework. Additionally, any new concept – such as the framework – had to be communicated, discussed, adapted and made familiar to a large number of stakeholders and, of course, teachers.

Example C: Individualized learning plans

A growing diversity regarding the students' social backgrounds and the composition of learning groups increases the need for teachers to work more individually with their students. Many schools have developed a variety of ideas and instruments for individualized learning plans such as learning

diaries, student feedback for teachers, individualized feedback for students, learning stations, presentations of one's own work, research projects over longer periods, individual report sheets, learning reports in a portfolio, competency development models, open classroom teaching, project work, and many others. A lot of these approaches were first fleshed out in primary schools, partly also in special education with secondary schools incorporating these educational practices later on.

5. Curriculum design

Curriculum design is one side of the triangle. Design is not only a matter of visual and easy-to-read attractiveness, but also a conceptual issue of how subject knowledge and learning domains are structured so that the core aims of the curriculum can better meet what is known about motivated learning and the coherence of knowledge codified in the curriculum.

Currently, many curriculum examples in Europe draw on the insight that any kind of knowledge imported into a curriculum must meet educational codes of meaningfulness. This implies that schools reflect the curriculum not only based on the classic (or traditional) notion of what students should learn. The traditional theories of education and the theories of syllabus content are no longer the one and only points of reference with regard to the creation of curricula: Based on developments in the field of curriculum research over the last decade, it seems that curriculum design is gradually changing, at least partly. Key concepts used in the curriculum field come into play, sometimes only tacitly. The following examples indicate key directions into which developments are heading.

Spiral design

According to Bruner's theory of the curriculum (Bruner, 1960 and 1996): 'energy transformation' in science education or 'power and control' in history teaching, as examples, would be dealt with repeatedly at different age-levels and steps through the curriculum.

Sequential design

The curriculum is organized step-by-step, e.g. from local to global issues, from the simple to the complex, from the Middle Ages to the 21st century. The nature of complexity may vary, but the fundamental idea remains the same (e.g. extended pollution or economy development in different countries).

Modular design

Modular design involves curriculum choices in modular units. There is usually no specific sequence. The teacher decides what to use and when and what to omit. The curriculum follows the philosophy of educational choices and the need that a teacher uses the curriculum as a stimulating pool of ideas.

Concepts design

The design is based on fundamental concepts and ideas such as energy, freedom, power, peace, time, social transformation, diversity. These structure the curriculum content and learning activities, sometimes in a spiral way. A fundamental concept may open the way to inquiry work, or to specific tasks to be solved, or to make use of self-study materials.

Process design

The design places activity-oriented, inquiry-based components at the centre of the curriculum. Students are expected to explore the world by observing, experimenting, analysing, discovering. Types of self-guided discovery are front and centre. Some places to learn are located outside the school. Many of these explorative learning projects are associated with science teaching and cross-discipline work.

Child focused design

The design is based on units trying to put emphasis on the child's point of view ('my garden', or 'animals in my region' are typical examples of lesson plans stemming from child-focused designs). Such approaches were developed by the Institute of Science Education in Kiel, other educational institutes and partly also by book companies.

Life-bound design

The design is based on key problems of society (in German *Schlüsselprobleme*; Klafki, 1991). Amongst others, Klafki identified the global peace process, environmental sustainability, social equality and coping with technological advances as key problems of society. Curricula can be conceived along these key problems, especially due to the intersecting nature of the key problems (peace and social equality are for example in many cases linked with one another).

6. Conclusion

Staff development, leadership and teamwork are gradually given higher priority in policy and training programs. At the same time, the current work of teachers is under debate. A lack of trust concerning the effectiveness of schools and their suitability to prepare students for future tasks is a driving force in the many ambitious, sometimes exhaustive public debates about how schools should work (Hameyer, 2009). Schools are expected to be proficient at any kind of problem-solving to compensate for what many consider an increasingly complex world. Many say that schools can survive in such a complex world only if they develop into professional learning organizations with the aim to increase their willingness to learn from other schools, networks and other professional communities of practice.

Any effort to change an educational system requires enormous amounts of time. A comparative international study showed that even small-scale innovations in primary schools take between 4 to 7 years until the innovation is fully established and institutionalized (Hameyer, van den Akker, Anderson, & Ekholm, 1995). The empirical findings in Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands and the US are in line with what we know from school development research: educational professionals do not necessarily initiate their own professionalization. There are many examples from other countries that show how professional learning can be anchored and sustained over longer periods of time (e.g. through the foundation of professional schools, by starting cooperative partnerships, doing action research, preparing for medium-term projects, incorporating tandem work into curriculum practice, building networks across professional communities, etc.).

Transforming curriculum knowledge. 'I teach mathematics' or 'I am a mathematician' – is jargon often used in secondary schools in Germany. Such teachers think they teach a subject, not students. The same is true for teachers who studied natural sciences, but not for those who studied arts. Rarely would an arts teacher say that he/she is an artist or would a music teacher pretend to be a musician. In contrast to secondary schools, these self-images are rarely ever used in primary schools. Primary teachers are considered to be first and foremost pedagogues or multi-talented experts for children, while a secondary school teacher almost never uses this educational self-image for herself or himself. The language sometimes reveals tacit views of professional identity and the prestige of a subject.

Transformation can have different faces. This is true for the product as well as for the process of transforming knowledge. Domain knowledge can be transformed into a curriculum subject by various methods such as:

- reconstruction (e.g. astounding phenomena);
- reduction (e.g. content domains by fundamental ideas);
- focus (e.g. on exemplary content or findings; heuristic methods);
- integration (e.g. by using cross-subject concepts such as time);
- reconceptualisation (e.g. by ideas such as child-centeredness);
- selection (e.g. by using exemplary value criteria, pars pro toto);
- simplifcation (e.g. by looking for basics that are easy to understand).

Looking ahead at possible developments in Germany is difficult due to the autonomy of the German *Länder*. However, one paradigm shift that was observed and that will likely continue is a (very timid) shift towards national central standards of education. While these standards are mainly output-focussed, they still have an impact on the curricula of the *Länder*. As the process of autonomy and accountability continues to evolve, it also stands to reason that more schools will try to stand out through their structure and curriculum. The increase of accountability can also be seen in the testing process: more and more high school graduation exams are nowadays being developed and administered centrally by the *Land* instead of the individual schools. Eventually, this might lead to a Germany-wide central examination

procedure. This, in turn, would likely impact curricula in all *Länder*, which would then be likely to become more homogenous. Finally, while multiculturalism has long been a part of the German curriculum, it has so far been fairly centred on Europe (Faas, 2011). The on-going globalization process coupled with the continuing push of new media into the classrooms might entail a shift in curricula towards more global issues.

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The curriculum pendulum swings in Hungary

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Abstract

In this chapter an analysis is presented of how the current Hungarian curricula system has evolved. International curriculum trends and the sharing of responsibility among educational levels are analysed as a background for developments in Hungary. Besides giving an overview of the history of curriculum development in Hungary, the chapter also presents the relationship between subjects and cross-curricula in Hungarian curriculum regulation. Special focus is on the space between the central and the local levels and their regulative roles, and on the evolution of the two-level and the three-level content regulation. The framework curriculum is discussed as an intermediary genre, which could be a tool for implementation at the national and local level.

1. Introduction

The idea of the National Core Curriculum (NCC) - a new, framework-like regulation of Hungarian public compulsory education (6-18 year olds) - evolved in 1989 at the beginning of Hungary's political transition to democracy. After intense debate and based on about half a dozen of draft documents, a two-level curriculum regulation was introduced in 1995 (NCC, 1995), on the basis of the first NCC and along with local curricula. After a three-year preparation period, the new system began to take effect in 1998. In 2000, with the introduction of so-called 'framework curricula' based on the NCC, the two-level content regulation was substituted with a three-level one (MoE, 2000). In 2003, the second NCC was published. The major change was that the detailed

content-related requirements – the normative curriculum content – were omitted (NCC, 2003). In 2007, the third NCC was issued, which augmented the previous NCC with the key competences recommended by the European Union (NCC, 2007). The new government, which came into power in 2010, defined the goal of education policy as: to reconsider the complete system of content regulation, including the NCC and the system of framework curricula which implements the NCC, and the content-related issues of the pedagogical programmes and local curricula of schools. In the meantime, it emphasized the continuity of the three-level model of content control. Key changes introduced by the new 2012 NCC are that the mission of the document was re-defined and that, with the introduction of general knowledge content, concrete curriculum contents were re-introduced, while the two-pole (central and local) and three-level content regulation were continued. In this chapter an attempt is made to give an overview of the recent events and the current development of the process (NCC, 2012).

2. The history of curriculum development in Hungary: Pendulum swings

2.1 The 1990s

From international trends of content-related development and regulation of public compulsory education for all 6-18 year olds of the last two decades, it is worth to highlight those that are most relevant in terms of understanding the processes in Hungary. Concerning the modernization of content and the regulation thereof, local central education management experts, educational scientists and curriculum experts who were up to date with the international trends of curriculum research exerted the strongest influence. Their experience affected the system in Hungary. After the transition to democracy and as a result of the intense debate about future trends of education, it was the challenge to find the right balance between curricula and examination, i.e. input and output regulation. A two-pole and three-level content regulation consisting of a central core curriculum, framework curricula and space for local curricular developments, was introduced. The possibility of local curricula was supported by five pieces of legislation, including the current one.

The intense atmosphere of the 1990s was characterized by the fact that research on pedagogy in Hungary was determined by a declarative, program making element and an intention to implement this, and also to introduce a new system of values, to create schools structured in a better way, to introduce new teaching methods and, in general, to reform the system of education as a whole. Therefore, it is not surprising that the changes introduced by the 1995 NCC induced much tension and debate. As the results of the research on the implementation of the first NCC by schools show, it is clear that schools have taken most steps of modernization in the years after the democratic transition. The institutions of education, which enjoyed a considerable freedom while cooperating with local governments maintaining schools, introduced numerous changes. This role of introducing content-related innovations was new to them. Schools had to respond to the new situation very fast, as the demands of school users had changed drastically due to the new demands of the labour market, the growing rate of youth unemployment, the opening up of the borders, the European perspective, the fast change of techniques of communication, et cetera. At the same time, at the low point of the demographic wave, the parents' ability to enforce their interests strengthened considerably. As a consequence, the institutions of education, threatened by the dismissal of teachers and by school closures, found themselves among unusual market conditions and had to adapt their educational offer to the demand. The education system – a system that is normally slow to react – became rapidly plural and its structure and programmes became increasingly complex, almost impossible to understand.

The general status of Hungarian public education in the early 1990s is described with two concepts of crisis: adaptation (see Halász & Lennart, 1998) and stabilization. Another main positive stabilization factor was the institutionalization of the new system of content regulation, that is, *the regulation based on the National Core Curriculum (NCC)*. In other words: the increasing rate of legal and financing solutions following the NCC and thinking in harmony with the NCC became the norm. In the 1990s, many countries (e.g. England, Spain, Portugal, Finland) switched to two-level content regulation, consisting of national core curricula and school curricula.

The knowledge content of the core curricula is intended to provide social cohesion and to serve as a basis for a unified national set of knowledge. In most countries, the responsibility for the content and quality of education is shared between the central and regional or local levels, which is reflected in the multi-level nature of content regulation. In Hungary, however, a political issue related to the selection of relevant content is present: in centralized systems tensions accumulate and then lead to reforms of curricula. If the indicators of *"What is the level of decision-making in education systems?"* (OECD, 2012) are interpreted, a technique of removing social tensions is identified: the technique of sharing the right of decision-making. This could be about school time but along with it, the competence of defining educational content. Shared decision-making is the institutionalization of pluralism of interests and values (Sáska, 2013).

2.2 The 2000's

As content regulation becomes a tool of modernization, most of the European curricula are supplemented with new fields of knowledge to respond to the economic and social changes and demands. As a globalized world poses the similar challenges everywhere, 'new curricular subject areas' (e.g. environmental protection, health protection, media, financial education) are visible and comparable in several countries' core curricula. Another general development is the definition of key competencies: competencies that among the present circumstances are regarded as indispensable. In most European countries, this process has become a major process in the field of education in the late 1990s and the early 2000s (OECD, 2001). With Hungary's accession to the European Union, the development of key competences in education has become of utmost importance. The concept of competence-based content development and regulation is supported by the new strategic education development goals defined by the European Union (European Council, 2000) and the PISA surveys of the OECD. In Hungary, the European key competencies became common requirements of the public education system in 2007, with the fourth NCC. At the same time, the significance of defining the cross curricular field increased continuously.

3. Curriculum regulation

3.1 The evolution of two-level and three-level content regulation

In Hungary, content regulation operates in a system that evolved two decades ago, with the the Act of 1993 on Public Education and of the first NCC in 1995. Since, the system of content regulation has remained practically the same, albeit the NCC's of 2003 and 2007 followed the NCC of 1995. The Act on Public Education provided for, and at the same time, guaranteed the regular supervision and modification of the core curriculum (every three years and, later, every five years). However, in the *two-pole and three-level model of regulation* each element – such as legislation on public education, the national core curriculum, the framework curricula and (as a part of the schools' pedagogical programme) local curricula – had a special scope. Policy analysts describe the changes that have occurred in the legal regulation of content control in the last 20 years with the metaphor of a pendulum swinging between the role of the state (central level) and of the institution or school (local level).

After the transition to democracy, school boards had the right to make decisions about the content of teaching and – being autonomous entities – also on the quality of education through processes of self-review. Approximately 3,400 local governments (responsible for schools) organized school operations on the basis of their own sets of values in social contexts that were more diverse than before (Sáska, 2005). The evolution of professional autonomy was expected to bring along enhanced performance and quality under the assumption that the elimination of the unifying and bureaucratic system of centralization known to hinder willingness to work and innovate would liberate the competencies (see Ferenc Gazsó's statements about independence of schools with regard to the Act of 1985 on Public Education). (Gaszó, 1988, p. 151-163). A school system evolved that separated social groups, which was evidently due to the fact that the centre lacked the capacity that would have been able to counterbalance local interests (Berényi, Berkovits, & Eröss, 2008; Eröss & Kende, 2008; Kertesi & Kézdi, 2005).

There are various views as to the scope of liberty in the documents. In the last one and a half decades more than 65 framework curricula were written centrally, numerous program packages supported from EU grants were created, and – pursuant to legislative provisions – all schools operate on the basis of their own local curricula. Some say that core curriculum as a genre has generated and is generating further central development.

It should be noted that it took almost two decades for the NCC-based regulation system to stabilize. For those involved it also took time to orientate efficiently and to use the documents of the various levels more or less efficiently. Content regulation is a complex and multi-levelled process, and the path that leads from the curricula to teaching is a chain of interpretation determined by fragmented and complex interests rather than a hierarchical chain. This is especially true in the decentralized system the Hungarian educational system has turned into in the last two decades: a system that emphasizes the autonomy of and the sharing of responsibility between the actors.

3.2 The space between central and local: The framework curriculum

The government that came into power after the general elections of 1998 reformed the regulation on the content-related activity of schools considerably. A main feature of the reform was that the implementation of the core curriculum – functioning as the central curriculum – within the *two-level* content regulation system seemed to be doubtful and random. To guarantee that the objectives defined at the governmental level were reflected in local regulatory documents, intermediary tools were required. Within the framework of existing legislation, such tools were framework curricula and other tools (e.g. educational programmes). Figure 1 shows the still existing three-levels structure of curriculum in Hungary.

Act on School Education, 2011
Governmental Decree of the NCC (16 May 2012)

Ministerial Decree of Framework Curricula (FWC), 2012-13

Require and assume local decisions, meanwhile: changes in the operartion of schools

Pedagogical Programme/local curriculum (LC) March 2013.

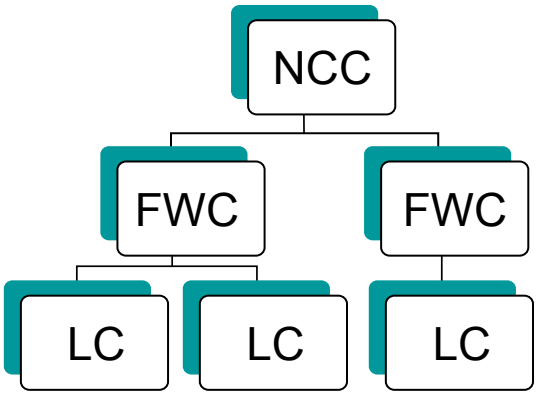

Figure 1: The levels and genres of content regulation in Hungary

Consequently, the system of regulatory tools related to the central content input became *three-level.* The Act on Public Education, amended in 1999, specifies that in the phase of teaching basic knowledge, the framework curricula, based on the subject areas defined in the NCC ensure the content-related unity of education elements and the interoperability of schools.
A framework curriculum *prescribes* the obligatory and common requirements of education, the number of classes required, the performance of requirements and the rules on divergence from the framework curriculum. Figure 2 presents the model for a framework curriculum.

Thematic unit/ Development goal		**Number of classes**
Prior knowledge		
Educational and development goals of the thematic unit		
Requirements– Knowledge/development goals	**Connection points**	
Key concepts/concepts		

Figure 2: The Hungarian model for a framework curriculum

The legislation and the curriculum documents intended to enhance the integrity, systemic nature and interoperability of the educational system. Central curriculum documents specify the values, knowledge and abilities

regarded as *basic knowledge*. Therefore, these documents provide a valuable – although incomplete – picture about the changes of the notion of knowledge. Framework curricula support implementation of the curriculum documents by schools, as they:

- are easy to overview due to the shared content features yet, at the same time, reflect the differences between subjects;
- represent the harmony of knowledge dissemination, personal development and ability development; in other words, they are development-oriented;
- create/recommend connections between subject contents;
- elaborate and detail documents focussing on themes, supporting the planning activity of teachers;
- promote the development of discursive thinking;
- define the results expected from the development by the end of two-grade cycles, and thus promote a continuous monitoring of students' performance.

An objective of the introduction of framework curricula based on the NCC was to control the seemingly excessive curricular freedom of schools and to shift emphasis to the integrity and interoperability of the system (Figure 1). At the same time, the new regulation entailed the subject-based description of educational content, and, with the introduction of modular subjects, intended to stabilize the education of the subject areas added to the NCC recently.
To achieve the above objectives, the framework curricula restored pre-NCC conditions in some fields, yet, in other fields, continued to implement the reforms. The introduction of grade-related requirements and attainment levels provided the conditions for promotion to the next grade.

The ministerial decree introducing the framework curricula re-defined class types, defined the rules on attendance of classes, maximized the daily workload for students, and, if compared to previous legislation, offered a much more detailed regulation about the preparation of local curricula. But, above all it provided rules for the school-level divergence from the central curricular documents. The decree created the system of 'curricular accreditation', which

gave institutions the opportunity to diverge from the framework curriculum. Curricular accreditation was one of the major events in Hungarian public education in 2001-2002. The assessment criteria and procedures the trained experts used for accreditation proved to be adequate for the qualification of curricula.

3.3 Output regulation

The Hungarian and international (PIRLS, TIMSS, PISA) assessments of student performance have a strong effect on Hungarian education. In 2005, the secondary school leaving examination was introduced. Following this examination, the National Competence Assessment was introduced, which surveys comprehensively the literacy of students of grades 6, 8 and 10 as well as their ability to solve mathematical problems. The secondary school leaving examination and the national competence assessment now operate as powerful regulators of content, as the requirements of the secondary school leaving examination and the tests of competence assessment influence local curricula and the practice of teaching.

3.4 Adaptation patterns

The introduction of the NCC focused on strengthening the professional autonomy of teachers and schools as well as on the modernization and centralization of the content of education. The preparation of the NCC did not involve major investments into, for example, curricular models, study tools or other developments at the classroom level. In the ten years after the democratic transition, the implementation process of the NCC was characterized by the accumulation and dissemination of existing developments instead of introducing new ones. In addition, national documents on curricular content will not prepared simultaneously in subsequent years, which led to continuous alertness in the field of education. Regarding the implementation of the 2007 NCC, it was found that 31.6% of the schools incorporated a fully regulated framework curriculum into their local curricula. A considerably lower rate of schools (20.0%) opted for the adaptation of a given curriculum, which means that more than half of the schools (51.6%) used a framework curriculum or an adapted version of a framework

curriculum. A substantial number of schools (17.4%) prepared their local curricula with the adaptation of several framework curricula. Only a relatively few institutions (17.4%) decide to implement a local curriculum that was prepared exclusively by themselves. By the end of 2000, most institutions had defined and elaborated the forms of adaptation (Vágó, Simon, & Vass, 2011).

4 The new core curriculum and the system of framework curricula

4.1 The role and changes of the National Core Curriculum

The NCC is the most important tool of the ministry for content regulation in Hungary. In order to promote the reform, education management defined two principle objectives in 2010: on the one hand, the redefinition of the mission of the educational system and its role as a conveyor of values, and, on the other hand, the supplementation of the core curriculum with general knowledge content. The concept of learning as defined by the NCC is very similar to the one described by Albert Szent-Györgyi: *"The task of schools is to teach us how to learn, to make us hungry for knowledge, to show us the joy of well-done work and the excitement of creation, to teach us to love what we do and to help us find what we love"* (Nagyházi, 2010).

As a consequence, a new system of objectives was defined: the dissemination of knowledge, the parallel development of skills, abilities, knowledge and attitudes required for learning and for work, and the strengthening of national and social cohesion. Another task is to encourage students to be actively committed to truth and fairness, to the good and the beautiful, and to develop mental, emotional, social and physical abilities needed for the development of a harmonious personality. It is for this reason that the NCC attributes an important role to national traditions, the development of the sense of national identity, including the sense of identity of national minorities and ethnic minorities living in Hungary. It prioritizes knowledge about the country and its wider region (the Carpathian Basin), yet also puts emphasis on content that underlines Hungary's as a part of Europe. It also contains general or global issues and emphasizes our mutual responsibility related to sustainability.

The existing Act on Public Education regulates the scopes of the central and the local levels as follows: on the basis of training periods and school types, it defines the weekly timeframe for the classes which are obligatory from September 2013 onwards (broken down by grades), and states that institutions are entitled to make decisions about maximum 10% of the given timeframe. Table 1 shows the breakdown per group of grades in percentages. For the obligatory timeframe of teaching, the central policy defines framework curricula, which are based on the obligatory NCC, and offer recommendations for the timeframe to be used freely by the institutions.

Table 1: The time breakdown per subject area in percentages

The rates of subject areas on the basis of the number of classes of related subjects			
subject areas	**Grades 5-6 Version A***	**Grades 5-6 Version B***	**grades 7-8**
Hungarian language and literature	14.3%	14.3%	11.3%
Foreign languages	10.7%	10.7%	9.7%
Mathematics	12.5%	12.5%	9.7%
Man and society	10.7%	12.5%	9.7%
Man and nature	7.1%	7.1%	14.5%
The Earth - our environment	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%
Arts	8.9%	7.1%	6.5%
IT studies	1.8%	1.8%	3.2%
Way of life and practical skills	3.6%	3.6%	1.6%
Physical education and sports	17.9%	17.9%	16.1%
Homeroom classes	*3.6%*	*3.6%*	*3.2%*
Free timeframe	*8.9%*	*8.9%*	*9.7%*
Total	***100.0%***	***100.0%***	***100.0%***

Note:

- *In case out of the subjects to be selected obligatorily in grade 5 the subject 'Homeland and people' is chosen in the subject area 'Man and society'.*
- *In case out of the subjects to be selected obligatorily in grade 5 the subject 'Drama and dance' is chosen in the subject area 'Arts'.*

The Introduction section of the NCC has been modified considerably over time. The mission of the document is re-defined and the intention to create schools based on values gained more focus. New elements were defined, like:

ethical education, a sense of national identity, patriotic education, self-knowledge, community skills, family life education, physical and mental health, responsibility for others, volunteering, sustainability, environmental awareness, career guidance, economic and financial education, and media awareness education. These new elements are reflected in the European key competencies.

The first chapter of the NCC describes the development fields and educational objectives (see table 2). Implementation of these fields is guaranteed by the framework curricula. The development fields and their objectives may be incorporated into the development requirements and content elements of the individual subject areas and subjects, or they may become subfields of subjects or separate subjects of the local curricula of schools. The development fields inform teachers' work in the first four grades of primary schools, can be used in upper grades for theme discussions in homeroom classes, or used to develop extracurricular activities and programmes. Table 2 shows the development fields and developmental objectives.

Table 2: The development fields and development objectives NCC

Development fields – educational objectives	**Competency development, dissemination of knowledge, knowledge building**
	Key competences
Ethical education	
Sense of national identity, patriotic education	Communication in the mother tongue
Citizenship education and democracy education	Communication in foreign languages
The development of self-knowledge and community skills	Mathematical competency
Education aimed at physical and mental health	Competency in natural sciences and technology
Family life education	Digital competency
Responsibility for others, volunteering	Social and citizenship competency
Sustainability and environmental awareness	Entrepreneurial ability and competency
Career guidance	Aesthetic and artistic awareness and ability for expression
Economic and financial education	Efficient and independent learning
Media awareness	
Teaching methods of learning	

With the modification of the NCC in 2003, the detailed requirements were removed, for instance the revolution of 1848 (history) and Sándor Petőfi (literature). The majority of society and professionals, however, did not accept these modifications unanimously. The reason for these modifications was the way the concept of knowledge had changed. The emphasis shifted from content to learning ability, due to what is sometimes referred to as the information explosion. This approach is justified in many respects, but its consequences do not necessarily help reduce social disparities, as students' socio-cultural background becomes a major factor of school performance.
The political opposition opposed to the changes of 2003 and wanted to restore the content requirements. The global crisis of 2008 however, challenged the regulatory framework again, as in a globalized world a greater value was attributed to local identities – this may be regarded as a European trend – and the importance of national identities (including the common cultural language or the code system that makes dialogue between generations possible) came to the spotlight. This called for a revised NCC, augmented with general knowledge content.
Another factor that was taken into consideration is the ever-growing quality gap between schools: good schools became better while the quality of weaker schools continued to deteriorate. This has been the case for the last twenty years. In order to create social opportunities for all, the content of education became re-regulated. The revised NCC guarantees - at least at state level - that the content defined is conveyed to all students in the course of their studies. This does not mean that all students will have the same level of knowledge of the content, but that the content will be taught. Another objective of the reform was to promote a curriculum-based approach, corresponding with current international standards and practice for learning. In other words, to contribute to the evolution of constructive processes in the field of curriculum policy in order to protect and enrich the values accumulated over the last two decades.

In summary, the NCC was modified considerably:

- The Introduction re-defined the mission of the NCC, underlying the importance of common values and education.
- The development fields and educational goals were re-defined and supplemented in consideration of the above mentioned common values, and students' changing motivation, learning habits and emotional needs.
- The subject areas specified in the previous NCCs were augmented with general knowledge contents at three levels of education (grades 1-4, grades 5-8, grades 9-12).

4.2 General knowledge content elements

The NCC guarantees the right of every citizen to acquire knowledge as extensive as possible by defining those content elements, competencies and attitudes. These defined elements are obligatory for public education. Together, the selected basic elements form a prerequisite of cultural, content-related and social innovation. The NCC concept is based on the assumption that in order for the members of a society to understand each other, there must be a common knowledge content (general knowledge) which is assumed to be shared by all grown-up citizens. This is a 'common language' which serves as a medium for inter-generation dialogue in the spirit of mutual understanding and respect. The NCC attempts to strike a balance between the value conveyor traditions of knowledge and the new development objectives and content. It allows for interpretation and specification, including differences resulting from the school types or curricular programmes. Table 3 shows the subject areas of the NCC.

Table 3: The subject areas of the NCC

Subject areas of the NCC	Structural features of the subject areas	
1. Hungarian language and literature 2. Foreign languages 3. Mathematics 4. Man and society 5. Man and nature 6. The Earth - our environment 7. Arts 8. IT studies 9. Way of life and practical skills 10. Physical education and sports	**Principles and objectives** **Development goals** grades 1-4 grades 5-8 grades 9-12 **General knowledge content elements** grades 1-4 grades 5-8 grades 9-12	Knowledge is expanded in a spiral-like manner, that is, on the basis of recurring themes (development goals). Knowledge is not seen as a closed system. The structure does not reflect the order and levels of the acquisition in classrooms.

4.3 Subjects and cross-curricula in curriculum regulation

Educational changes based on societal requirements (e.g. citizenship, environmental education, et cetera - UNESCO International Seminar, 2009) pose new challenges for the traditional subject frameworks of school systems that, in many cases, are centuries old. These modifications, sometimes referred to as 'adjectival educations' are of growing importance, but advocates of adjectival educations often feel that the embedding of their respective fields into the educational system is only guaranteed if regulated at the national level, preferably as an obligatory subject. In Hungary, representatives of 'adjectival educations' feel that this is the only way to ensure that the objectives of the given field could be achieved. However, the introduction of a new obligatory subject at the national level is an enormous task, with many consequences. It requires teacher training capacity as well as a timeframe in timetables, which may be done only at the expense of other subjects.
In addition, if an 'adjectival education' became a new subject, it would serve as a precedent for other adjectival educations and, thus, the emergence of more and more new subjects would make the system unmanageable.

Two alternatives for creating new subjects are decentralization of the new subject regulation, and the incorporation of these new fields as cross-curricular fields. An example of the first could be found in China (Wang, 2012). The regulatory system gives scope for the schools to define – all or some – subjects they intend to teach, which enables local decision-makers (should they consider it important) to introduce new content as a response to new social demands. This requires intense support on the part of teachers and the development of teacher training (Jakab & Varga, 2003), especially when teachers gain a wide scope of freedom and responsibility. An example of the latter is the establishment of cross-curricular fields. Whitty, Rowe, and Aggleton (1994) describe two models: a liberal subject-based model and a permeation model. The liberal model allows for teaching of various special subjects that 'produce' an educated individual who leaves the system as an environmentally and socially aware person with skills marketable on the labour market. The permeation model introduces cross-curricular themes that permeate the subjects connect them in a conscious manner.

Responsibility is a key issue of the incorporation of cross-curricular themes into school practice. The teaching staff as a whole – that is, each teacher – is responsible for the achievement of the educational goals related to these themes. Shared responsibility is the key message here: the success of cross-curricular themes is only guaranteed if teachers work towards common objectives. Nevertheless, shared responsibility poses two major challenges. The first is that the prerequisites of the implementation of shared responsibility are joint planning and professional cooperation among teachers. This calls for institution-level implementation interventions. The second challenge is that institution-level interventions should not substitute implementation support at the level of the individuals. All teachers must be prepared for their cross-curricular tasks in harmony with their fields.

The introduction of a new cross-curricular field will only be successful if all teachers have access to professional support and if there are implementation mechanisms available that make institution-level harmonization possible. This is a process that requires financial resources and time. In addition, its outcome

practically depends on the attitude of the teachers' professional community as a whole. It is understandable that – as referred to above – many prefer simple solutions and opt for the introduction of separate subjects, which has deep tradition. Having said that, research on the implementation of cross-curricular themes shows that support given to teachers is not sufficient. This underlines that education policy makers must concentrate on the development of innovative and supportive systems.

5. Conclusion

The NCC is implemented through framework curricula. Framework curricula should include subject categories and class plans in each education phase. The framework curricula define the phases of education and those institutions that operate in line with local curricula based on a chosen framework curriculum. The Act on Public Education reduced the rate of institutions' free timeframes from 20% to 10%. As a result, the framework curricula have become central documents that perform the task of local curricula too. The new legislation unambiguously prescribes the role of framework curricula as a tool of the implementation of the 2012 NCC.

The compilation of the framework curricula – documents that convey, interpret and concretize the NCC – attributed a major policy role to the Institute of Educational Research and Development (OFI). The framework curricula cover the system of public education as a whole, including all of its educational phases and school types: not only obligatory classes but programmes recommended for the free timeframe as well. The Institution still continues to support the adaptation of new content regulation by schools and operates the system of framework curriculum accreditation. OFI operates an electronic support system for the implementation of the framework curricula in schools and further developments with EU support are offered to schools.

Finally, research is intended to provide developmental support for the harmonization of macro- and micro-level activities and to promote the reform with professional recommendations. The research development activity was supported by the EU project '21st century public education (development

and coordination)'. The research outcomes were used for constructing the framework curricula for the various phases and school types of public education improving implementation of the reform. A more balanced relation between the requirements for new education, new contents and traditional disciplines was established. It also enabled the embedding of abilities, skills and competencies subjects. Figure 3 shows how the first three research development tasks provide input to the development of framework curricula.

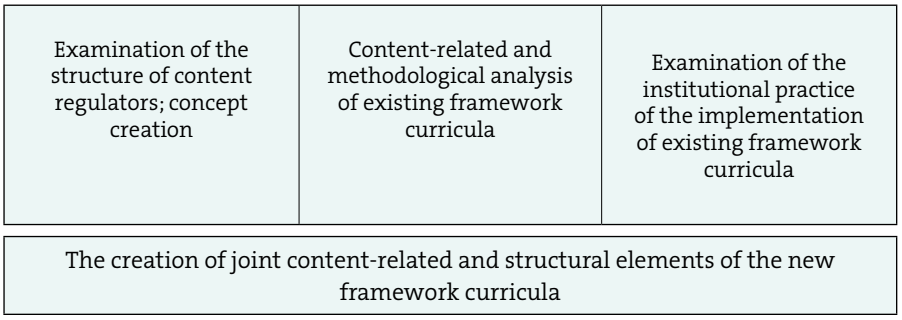

Figure 3: The research-development-innovation process of the compilation of framework curricula (2012/13)

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Moving up the line - Schools at the hub of policy development in Ireland

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Abstract

How much curricular space has been, or should be, afforded to schools during the period of compulsory schooling in the Irish context? In this chapter, the nature of debates about system development and improvement in light of a growing role for schools are explored. Four arguments for a flexible approach to curriculum development and implementation are highlighted drawing from the literature on educational psychology and school sociology: support for teachers as reflective practitioners, the quality of the student-teacher relationship, curriculum customization to account for difference, and skills and competences.
The interaction of these influences on curriculum development and implementation is examined from a historical perspective and from an analysis of current and future requirements in education. Important milestones in curriculum development and implementation are highlighted over three decades. The impact of schools' engagement in the policy formulation process is discussed as well as the potential to significantly re-shape teaching, learning and assessment in the future.

1. Introduction

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) was established in 1987, to advise on curriculum and assessment at first and second level and to report to the Minister for Education and Science. The NCCA became

a statutory body in 2001 and the brief of the statutory Council, as outlined in the Education Act (Government of Ireland,1998), is to advise the Minister on matters relating to "*...the curriculum for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools and the assessment procedures employed in schools and examinations on subjects which are part of the curriculum"* (41.1 a, b) and "*... from time to time to review the curriculum, or any part of the curriculum, for schools and the syllabuses taught and to advise the Minister"* (41.2). The Council was designed as a model of social partnership. It has twenty-five members, each appointed for a three-year term, representing the Department of Education and Skills, teachers, school managers, parents, business and trade unions, and other educational interests. It has been suggested that the establishment of the Council was significant in that it allowed for the dissemination of local initiatives in the curriculum development process.

As stated by Granville (1995): *"The NCCA acted to some extent as a conduit for the flow of ideas from the periphery to the centre while also providing a more structured national framework for the implementation of emerging curriculum and assessment."* In order to improve this conduit role, Granville p. 156) called for *"a suitable mechanism to mediate this loose coupling"*. Arguably, the establishment of the NCCA on a statutory footing in 2001 afforded that improvement, placing the Council *between* local initiatives and national education policy. Since the establishment of the NCCA, concerns about the technical rationality of national curriculum debates and the fate of local curriculum innovations have been ongoing. An overview of curriculum policy in Ireland over the last quarter of the last century usefully summarized curriculum debate in a series of oppositions between debates that happen very little, and debates that happen frequently, with 'frequent debates' about how change is managed, rather than its meaning, about who controls and decides, rather than what is decided, and about the relationship between curriculum and economic success rather than the common good (Gleeson, 2000). In the decade since then, the domination of Gleeson's rational technical paradigm has been challenged through wide-ranging consultation on macro-curriculum issues, and engagement with schools themselves to puzzle and power through curriculum and assessment policy issues in all their complexity and ambiguity. The next section explores four influences with

a strong basis in the sociology of schools and psychology of learning which can be considered foremost among arguments for a flexible approach to curriculum development and implementation in the Irish context, beginning with recognition of and support for teachers themselves as reflective practitioners with a key role in shaping policy.

2. Context

2.1 Teachers as reflective practitioners

Influenced by Schon's (1987) notion of beginning teachers becoming *reflective practitioners,* educators and policy-makers alike have come to place significant emphasis on the value of teacher-inquiry and the importance of providing time and supports for teachers to engage in review and reflection of their own practices in order to question, analyse and change through dedicated opportunities for self-reflection and action (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995) in a process which is deeply contextualized and entirely relevant to their own teaching experience. Arguably, if teachers are to drive the lifelong learning agenda in schools, they should be lifelong learners themselves and lifelong learning should be regarded as the master principle for the future renewal of the teaching profession (OECD, 2005; Schleicher, 2012).

This kind of difficult, contingent and uncertain learning for teachers may best be situated in close proximity to the work itself – the teacher's own classroom where the teacher's practices and beliefs are seen as central to on-going improvement (Elmore, 2006). Valuing classrooms as sites of learning also opens up the locus of decision-making so that teachers and students in very particular contexts engage in meaningful conversation with one another, with colleagues and with the wider school community about what works in teaching and learning and why. Thus the teacher's voice and the student's voice become key to the curriculum development and implementation cycle. Research into students' experiences of lower secondary education has highlighted the critical role students and teachers can play in identifying successful pedagogical practices and ways to improve learning (Smyth, Dunne, McCoy, & Darmody, 2006).

2.2 Student-teacher relationship and engagement

From their earliest learning experiences, the level and type of autonomy afforded to students themselves has been identified as central to the quality of their interactions with adults. Student autonomy is considered crucial in promoting independence, self-initiative and responsible choice through creating an appropriate space for students to experiment, to make judgements, to choose activities, and to express ideas (Laevers, 1995). The traditional view of education as development and expansion of the intellect alone, has given way to an appreciation that student autonomy is key to their engagement with school and that this is not just intellectual, but also emotional. It has been argued, that education is a *profoundly* emotional activity and that students learn best when they are in positive relationships with their teachers (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, & Walsh, 2004).

Commissioned research for NCCA, which explored the issue of student well-being from a number of perspectives highlighted the significance of student relationships for well-being and progression (O'Brien, 2008, p. 180): "*It is not just the content of curricula and subjects that are significant to well-being in school. Students' happiness in school is related to how these are implemented. It is clear that a sense of belonging and good relationships within the school community foster feelings of well-being. Thus, educators, school leaders and policy makers need to ensure that the ways in which the formal and informal curricula of schools are implemented enable the development of good relationships*. Findings from a longitudinal study of second-level education in Ireland have pointed to the significance of teacher-student relationships for engagement in learning and school retention and highlighted the association between disliking school and dropping out (Smyth, 1999; Smyth, Dunne, Darmody, & McCoy, 2007; Byrne & Smyth, 2010, p. 180): "*Positive teacher-student relations emerge as central to student engagement and learning. While school climate may appear to be a nebulous concept, the study indicates the powerful way in which day-to-day interaction between teachers and student shapes school retention, as well as a range of other outcomes, including academic achievement and personal/social development.*" Two reviews of the teacher-student relationship (Cornelius-White, 2007; Roorda, Koomen, Split, & Oort,

2011) have presented substantial evidence that this relationship is of *supreme* importance in actual achievement. While this is not proof that control of the curriculum is necessary for positive relationship with students, these findings sit more easily with a flexible as opposed to a rigid curriculum.

2.3 Individual and social difference

The range of individual and social differences among students and across schools is greater now in Ireland than at any time before. Schools cater for children whose first language may be other than Gaeilge or English and who may have learning difficulties and/or challenging behaviour. The practice of *mainstreaming* and the increasing readiness to accept multi-cultural attitudes underlines the acceptance of social and individual differences in schools.
A related consideration is the socio-political role of the school, particularly in relation to addressing educational disadvantage. There is a recognition that because school achievement has traditionally been influential in determining life opportunities including education and employment, the enhancement of children's educational achievement in disadvantaged communities (the focus of DEIS), has the potential to create more equal opportunities. Promising results from the most recent evaluation of DEIS programs support this view (Weir, Archer, O'Flaherty, & Gilleece, 2012). Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) is the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion and was launched in May 2005. It remains a key policy instrument of the Department of Education and Skills to address educational disadvantage. The action plan focuses on addressing and prioritizing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years). DEIS provides for a standardized system for identifying levels of disadvantage and an integrated School Support Program (SSP). Findings on interventions designed to support DEIS schools are pertinent because they show that children in schools serving disadvantaged communities are substantially behind in some areas of the curriculum and that some flexibility is necessary to take account of this. The same argument can be applied to the need to mainstream students with learning problems; only by having flexibility can these individual differences be catered for.

2.4 Skills and competences

The need to improve the quality, relevance and significance of skills and competences in compulsory schooling has been recognized in recent proposals for curriculum reform at primary and second level in Ireland and at European Union level. '*The urgency of addressing this issue is further underlined by the current situation in which Europe faces high youth unemployment and, in some cases, serious skills mismatches*' (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2012, p. 7). It has been argued that broadly-based skills provide a basis for new learning rather than 'here and now' content and as such, place the learner at the centre of the learning endeavour. Engaging students in *self-regulation* - the self-directive process used to acquire a range of skills, such as setting goals, selecting and deploying strategies and self-monitoring their effectiveness, has become key in making this shift from content to learners (Barrett, Fox, Morgan, Fidler, & Daunhauer, 2013; Diamond, 2013). This approach to curricular reform, which favours the development of students' skills, is based not on subjects but on learning competences with a broad range of applications and a particular relevance to learning-to-learn. For example, it has been argued that *spatial skills* strongly predict achievement in science, technology, engineering and maths and that supporting learners to develop these skills in a range of tasks and contexts may be more effective and less demanding on time than traditional content/subject based approaches (Uttal et al., 2013).

3. Three decades of curriculum development and implementation

3.1 Key features of curriculum development and implementation

Returning to the argument about the nature of debate and development in Irish education, and the four aforementioned arguments for flexibility, this section examines curriculum development and implementation from a historical perspective and from an analysis of current and future aspirations in education. Table 1 examines developments in compulsory education over three decades focusing on (i) measures of curriculum clarity and coherence; (ii) articulation of curriculum objectives and outcomes and definitions of standards and assessment; (iii) pupil and teacher roles; and (iv) processes of curriculum development and implementation.

Table 1: *Curriculum development and implementation: Key features*
(Note (P) relevant to Primary only (JC) relevant to Junior Cycle only)

	Curriculum clarity and coherence, focus (scope)	*Objectives, outcomes, standards and assessment*	*Pupil and teacher roles*	*Process of curriculum development and implementation*
First decade: 1990-2000	▪ Significant numbers of aims across subjects. ▪ Lack of coherence for curriculum priorities. ▪ Overload and overlap across subjects.	▪ Significant numbers of objectives. ▪ Extensive elaboration of content. ▪ Detailed teacher guidelines. ▪ Absence of clarity on expected standards. ▪ Standards determined by national assessment (JC).	▪ Teacher-focused curriculum (input model). ▪ Prioritisation of content. ▪ Limited visibility of pupils in curriculum documentation. ▪ Aspiration for child-centred learning (P).	▪ Curriculum developed centrally, (following limited consultation with schools in final, 'pilot') phase of development and disseminated through support services. ▪ One-size-fits all implementation with a focus on information giving.
Second decade: 2000-2010	▪ Several additional Teacher Guidelines for schools (expanding curriculum). ▪ Attempt to prioritise and rebalance subjects to reduce overload and overlap. (JC)	▪ Additional objectives (P). ▪ Introduction of outcomes (JC). ▪ Attempt to reduce content (JC). ▪ Additional guidelines (P). ▪ Absence of clarity on expected standards. ▪ Standards determined by national assessment (JC).	▪ Exploring balance between teacher-led and pupil-led activities. ▪ Exploring potential of key skills to support teaching and learning. ▪ Work with schools to gather examples of curriculum in action (photos, videos). ▪ Aspiration for child-led learning (P).	▪ Move towards working with schools in developmental and exploratory initiatives in the development phase. ▪ Some local/customised support for schools (Regional Curriculum Support Service, Associate Facilitators). ▪ Some support for school clusters.
Third decade: 2010 and beyond	▪ Clarity on purposes and priorities for pupils as well as subjects. ▪ A leaner curriculum. ▪ Efforts to integrate teaching and learning across the curriculum.	▪ Outcomes replace objectives. ▪ Agreement on national priorities for pupils and an important role for key skills. ▪ Standards exemplified using annotated examples of pupils' work. ▪ Standards determined by combination of national assessment and in-school assessment.	▪ Increased emphasis on pupil-led and pupil-centred learning. ▪ Important role for key skills and learning dispositions. ▪ Opportunities for teachers to share practice within and across schools through school networks.	▪ School networks to the forefront in curriculum development ▪ Strong focus on capacity building with schools. ▪ Greater focus on supporting individual schools and school networks and on schools supporting one-another.

3.2 Key milestones in curriculum development and implementation

Although the contents of Table 1 provide only a limited snapshot of developments, it is possible to identify some notable milestones in the shift towards support for teachers as reflective practitioners; a greater focus on the quality of student-teacher relationships, increased personalisation of learning, and recognition of the value of important life-skills and dispositions as foundational to further learning and development. Below some of the key milestones included in Table 1 are explored.

First decade: 1990-2000

At primary level, we see swings of the pendulum between regulation and deregulation beginning with the rigid pre-1971 primary curriculum which was highly circumscribed and monitored through the Primary Certificate examination. This was followed by a very flexible approach evident in the philosophy of the 1971 curriculum which was published in just two handbooks and which provided examples rather than specific content or outcomes. In contrast, the 1999 curriculum provided extensive elaboration of content in 23 books, comprising over 3,650 pages and almost as many objectives (Department of Education and Science, 1999). The curriculum includes a suggested minimum weekly time framework, which specifies time allocations across the twelve curriculum subjects over the course of a week. The national longitudinal study of children in Ireland, the '*Growing Up in Ireland Study*' (McCoy, Smyth, & Banks, 2012) examined the influence of school and teacher characteristics on time allocation across subjects in primary school. Findings showed that teachers' allocation of time across subjects was highly consistent with the advisory timetable in the 1999 curriculum, e.g., the extent to which teachers feel they have control over various dimensions of their teaching is not found to impact on time allocation). In curriculum reviews (NCCA, 2005; 2008), teachers identified lack of time to engage *all* children in the full curriculum as a key issue and highlighted the particular difficulty of dividing (time) and conquering (all subjects). The tension between autonomy for schools in theory and the elaboration of content and specification of time allocations in practice is worth noting. However, despite its size, there was a sense that the 1999 curriculum emerged somewhat incomplete and the development of several

additional sets of guidelines for primary schools became the focus of work in the following decade.

Meanwhile, at lower-second level, a new Junior Certificate programme was introduced at the beginning of this decade to provide a coherent unified programme with equal access to certification for all students in the junior cycle of post-primary schools. However, during the 1990s, the first reports on the new unified Junior Certificate programme suggested that the mismatch between the re-designed curriculum and the terminal examination had resulted in the lower secondary system resetting itself back to the status quo despite the new labelling. It was believed that, for the most part, the assessment reforms associated with the new curriculum were not delivered, leading to a new curriculum being strangled by an old examination system (NCCA, 2011, p. 4-5). There was a sense that the *"systematic patterns of thought"* underpinning the assessment were left standing, and reproduced in the new design and structure for the curriculum itself (Pirsig, 1974, p. 102).

Second decade: 2000-2010

In the decade following publication of the primary curriculum several sets of additional guidelines were developed to complement and extend the curriculum. Teachers reported feeling underserved and overwhelmed by the sheer volume of curriculum documentation (NCCA, 2005, 2008, 2010a, 2010b). As teachers struggled to implement the vast menu-based curriculum, the extent to which children experienced holistic, integrated learning - the touchstone of the 1999 child-centered curriculum - was called into question (Murchan, Loxley, Johnston, Quinn, & Fitzgerald, 2005). In curriculum reviews (NCCA, 2005, 2008) and subsequent work with schools to reduce curriculum intensification and overload (NCCA, 2010b), teachers were critical of the sheer breadth and depth of the curriculum which they considered difficult to access and navigate and they reported that children's textbooks and workbooks were more helpful than the curriculum for classroom planning.

In contrast, the development of overarching Frameworks during this decade - for ICT and early childhood (Aistear) - signalled an important shift from a focus

on teachers and detailed specification of objectives towards learners and what they would achieve: "*The ICT Framework is not a curriculum area or a syllabus [or] an add-on to teaching and learning but … a tool to help teachers to integrate ICT in teaching and learning"* (NCCA, 2007, p. 3). And: "*Aistear is a curriculum framework rather than a curriculum. Aistear defines a framework of this type as a scaffold or support which helps adults to develop a curriculum for the children in their setting"* (NCCA, 2009b, p. 4-5). In affording schools greater autonomy to determine the types of learning experiences needed to work towards learning outcomes, the frameworks by their own admission, demanded 'a knowledgeable and highly skilled professional, who engages in reflective practice in partnership with colleagues' (NCCA, 2009b, p. 19). It is of note that both frameworks are cross-sectoral, aiming to achieve greater continuity and cohesion in children's learning and development during the period from birth to the end of the second year of primary school, in the case of early childhood and during the period of compulsory schooling in the case of ICT.

During the 2000s, developments at junior cycle focused on a process of re-balancing Junior Certificate subject syllabuses in an effort to address what was widely seen as an overcrowded curriculum with a view to creating more space for active learning and student engagement originally envisaged for the junior cycle reforms of the 1990s. The rebalanced syllabuses were written with learning outcomes, describing what the learner should be able to do (rather than *know*) after a period of learning. Learning outcomes were intended to improve the alignment between teaching, learning and assessment and in turn, to encourage learners to be self-directed, to take responsibility for their own learning and to actively gauge their own progress (NCCA, 2004). However, the Junior Cycle in this era afforded limited scope for real curricular innovation at local level. Subject choices were determined by regulation (a list of subjects set out for different school types), parental preference, and resource availability (time, teachers and facilities). Arguably, this centralized model resulted in an effective alignment between the school curriculum, national examinations and provision across schools, providing ease of mobility between and within schools and to a certain extent reducing the scope for inequality within the system. However, the limited list of options for curricular components afforded

school communities very little scope to customise the curriculum to respond to local and community contexts and particular learning needs. In this highly centralized model, subject knowledge gained totemic status (NCCA, 2010c, p. 22): "*In the current definition of subjects, success is represented in terms of the mastery of an ever-increasing amount of knowledge without significant reference to the quality of the learner's engagement with content.*"

Towards the end of this decade there were moves towards embedding key skills in the curriculum and exploring their potential to positively impact on teaching and learning. However, as with previous reforms, the overwhelming feedback from stakeholders focused on the need to change the high-stakes, external examination which remained a strong block to curriculum change in the first instance.

Third decade: 2010 and beyond

The Framework for Junior Cycle (DES, 2012), an overarching policy document for developments at junior cycle, presents the core of the proposed new junior cycle described in twenty-four statements of learning. The statements, underpinned by eight principles, provide the basis for schools to plan for, design and evaluate their own junior cycle programmes. It is clear that the intention of this curriculum reform is firmly grounded in flexibility and discretion for schools. While subjects still play a strong role in the new curriculum, there is also a clear effort to articulate the purposes and priorities of junior cycle education. There is a strong trend towards a leaner curriculum, with fewer learning outcomes and a focus on key skills (competences).

The messages of the last decade regarding the need to dismantle the assessment have remained a key feature of discussion in the early stages of this reform. The evidence from a longitudinal study (Smyth et al., 2007) was unequivocal: the path though junior cycle is a path towards the examination and the closer the terminal written examination becomes, the greater its influence on how and what students learn, and how teachers plan and teach. The rhetoric for change at junior cycle has emerged from research evidence, public and political consensus, and professional concern. The reality of

change will emerge from changing the examination. In this current decade of reform, it has been clear that curriculum reform at junior cycle must include significant assessment reform as well as curriculum reform. In his foreword to the '*Framework for Junior Cycle'* (DES, 2012) the Minister for Education and Skills stated that the focus of assessment should now be on supporting learning and committed to phasing out the traditional Junior Certificate examination. This externally assessed examination will be replaced with a school-based model of assessment that will include formative and summative assessment and involve schools and teachers in on-going assessment and reporting of students' progress and achievement.

In a recent initiative to gather views on priorities for the next phase of curriculum development at primary level, the image created of the *future learner* was one who develops a range of skills including language, literacy and communication skills with other learners and adults in a range of relevant and engaging cross-curricular learning contexts and who is supported to learn at his/her own level and pace (NCCA, 2012). Findings have shown the need to support learners to develop important life-skills and dispositions across a broad range of learning contexts. Within the leaner, more child-centered curriculum, dispositions will be a key part of the 'content' of children's early learning and development as set out in the Framework for early learning, which defines them as 'enduring habits of mind and action' (NCCA, 2009a, p. 54). A disposition has been described as, 'a pattern of behaviour exhibited frequently and in the absence of coercion, and constituting a habit of mind under some conscious and voluntary control, and that is intentional and oriented to broad goals' (Katz, 1993, p. 6). Inherent in this definition, is an assumption that the learner is afforded opportunities to exercise control over his/her own learning.

The involvement of school networks right through the development process has been a distinctive feature of curriculum developments across primary and Junior Cycle since 2010. NCCA staff have worked closely with networks of schools trying out the various elements of the reform and also getting involved in school-based curriculum development, e.g., through developing video-footage of what classroom innovations look and sound like at primary

level and through writing school-based short courses and school approaches to key skills at Junior Cycle. A feature of the school networks is to encourage teachers to share practice within and across schools.

4. Conclusion

Looking at the place of schools in the development of curriculum and assessment policy since 2000, we see schools moving up the line - from participation in pilot projects at the *end* of the development phase; to engagement in exploratory initiatives *during* the development phase; to partnership with NCCA, in a range of school networks from the *outset* to inform and shape curriculum development and implementation.
Traditionally, curriculum policy in Ireland has been developed centrally, implemented universally, and monitored and evaluated externally through inspections and accountabilities at primary and second level and high-stakes examinations at the end of compulsory schooling. However, in spite of the relatively centralized school system in Ireland, findings from the longitudinal study at second level noted that schools themselves can leverage discretion over certain aspects of curriculum policy - in terms of classroom organization and process (Smyth, 2009, p. 5): *"...schools can make a positive difference to student engagement and performance in a number of ways – by adopting a more flexible approach to ability grouping and promoting the take-up of higher level subjects, by using diverse teaching methods to actively engage students in learning, by focusing on positive behaviour rather than negative sanction in responding to pupil misbehaviour, and by promoting a positive climate with good relations between teachers and students."*

Despite the general consensus about the importance of teacher and student reflection and action at local level, decisions about curriculum development and implementation have traditionally been made not by teachers but by at least three other agencies (the NCCA, the Teacher Education Section (TES) of the DES and the Support Service - The TES incorporates the work of the former In-Career Development Unit and the areas of the DES which had responsibility for pre-service teacher training at third-level). In previous decades these organizations consulted with teacher representatives in the service of a

policy target, e.g., a curriculum change. Decisions about the in-service needs of teachers have generally been decided in light of the need to bring about particular change in the system, leading to a culture of change as *event* rather than *process*, placing change as something demanded by the system rather than a constituent component of professionalism. This model of change has placed teachers very much on the receiving end of policy changes at national level. Thus, messages about curriculum policy travelled from the NCCA to the TES to the support services and, finally, on to teachers. In this linear model, the change message has been generated at one end of the line and implemented in another. The distance between the curriculum message and the classroom and students has also made it difficult for the information on implementation to be fed back to the NCCA to inform future curriculum reviews. Recent years have seen greater recognition of the important role of teachers and school managers (as the gatekeepers of policy change in their classrooms and schools) in shaping the curriculum development and implementation process (NCCA, 2009c, p.16): *"Strategies for change need to open up more and be genuinely participative, so that all involved at the level of the school in very particular contexts can engage in meaningful conversation and reflection with one another and the wider school community about what works in teaching and learning, about how improvements can be made, about how change can be brought about. Truly participative change strategies involve policy decisions being made by those who will realise them."*

Valuing teacher inquiry as a worthwhile exercise in itself and inviting teachers to generate a view of their learners' needs and their school's priorities has enabled the NCCA to open up the locus of decision-making at policy level so that teachers and students in very particular contexts engage in meaningful conversation with one another, with colleagues and with the wider school community about what works in teaching and learning and how improvements can be made. Working closely with individual schools and clusters of schools as learning organisations in networks for staff reflection, research and action at local level has been an important hallmark of curriculum reforms since 2000. Given the potential for these networks to both tap into teachers' and students' reflections and innovations and to

build capacity for *the thinking school* they provide a critical site for leadership and for curriculum development and implementation. In this context it is of note that students' experiences of lower secondary education highlighted the critical role students and teachers can play in identifying successful pedagogical practices and ways to improve learning (Smyth et al., 2006).

While measures of control are themselves cyclical to some extent, and highly responsive to social change, economic needs, and the prevailing political culture, they are moderated by the engagement of schools in the process of developing and implementing curriculum and assessment policy. Ireland's National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy (DES, 2012) provides a good example - a response to PISA 2009, the Strategy, identified targets for curriculum and assessment improvement. In taking up this brief, NCCA has partnered with school networks as learning sites to help inform and shape the proposed changes. It has been suggested that such high-level educational policies can trickle through the education system and result in increased controls on both teachers' and students' learning (McNeill, 1986, 2000; Cuban, 1993) so that the extent to which learners' experience control over their own learning, is a derivative of how much teachers control their own practice (Sarason, 1990). It follows then, that organizations involved in system-wide policy change, like NCCA, should be less concerned with finding a solution centrally and disseminating it for implementation locally and more concerned with posing key questions to the system itself - to school leaders, teachers *and* learners - and empowering those working on the challenges to find solutions. *"In this context, agencies like NCCA are viewed more as facilitators, supporters and encouragers of collaboration to address challenges being faced by schools on a daily basis"* (NCCA, 2009c, p. 9). Our next steps in NCCA involve creating structures and supports to ensure that the voice and experience of learners are included in deliberations and developments through a range of processes including use of social media, and ultimately to continue to open up the debate by working with schools, teachers, practitioners and learners to build capacity for change and to inform curriculum and assessment development and implementation (NCCA, 2012).

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Curriculum regulation and freedom in the Netherlands - A puzzling paradox

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Abstract

The extent to which the goals and contents of education should to be regulated has been a complicated balancing act in the Netherlands over the years. Against a backdrop of a long-standing statutory tradition of freedom of education, governmental decisions about 'what knowledge is of most worth' have been delicate. In this chapter an attempt is made to disentangle, interpret and discuss this complicated balancing act between curriculum regulation and curriculum freedom. First the terms 'curriculum', 'curriculum regulation' and 'curriculum deregulation' are briefly conceptualized. Based on these conceptualizations, curriculum policy and practices in the Netherlands during the past 40 years are described and discussed. In doing so, we distinguish three major episodes.

1. Introduction

In the Netherlands, as part of a policy emphasizing more outcomes-based education, there is an increased focus on basic student knowledge and skills in reading and writing, and in arithmetic and mathematics. Expectations are that also English will acquire this status. This policy emphasis seems to reflect the 'global education reform movement' [GERM] (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Sahlberg, 2011), with a strong focus on literacy and numeracy as one of the common features. However, there is more than 'the basics' to put on the stage as an answer to the classical curriculum question as to *what is of most worth*

teaching and learning in education (within an allocated amount of time). Claims on aims are also, continuously and often on an ad-hoc basis, made by a rich variety of stakeholders with regard to other subjects (like science subjects, social science subjects, physical education, arts), cross-curricular themes and societal issues (like environmental education, health education, financial education, over-weight, and bullying), and cross-curricular competencies reflected in 21st century skills (including, for instance, digital literacy). All these claims often result into (a feeling of) overloaded curricula. Careful deliberation and decision-making on what and why to prioritize and what and why to leave out the curriculum are of major importance.

In dealing with these processes as well as their results - in terms of, for instance, a national curriculum framework - also other curriculum questions are at stake. These include the following: To what extent and how to regulate from a national level what should be learned and/or taught and to what extent and how to monitor what has been taught and learned? But also to what extent local curricular decision-making should be allowed and school-based curriculum development could be supported? What roles, when, how, and by which players to fulfil when developing, reviewing, implementing, and monitoring a national curriculum framework? And, last but not least, how to organize debate and decision-making about what is of most worth teaching and learning?

In the Netherlands, there has been hardly any regulation at the national level regarding the goals and contents for primary and secondary education for about 400 years (van Damme, 2011). The only exception is the examination system at the end of upper secondary education (which originates from the middle of the 19th century). Not only restraint in curriculum regulation is deeply rooted in Dutch society. The same is true for school autonomy, which formally dates back to a constitution legislated in 1848. Part of this constitution is a prominent article declaring the so-called 'freedom of education', pertaining to the freedom to found schools, the freedom of school policies, and the freedom of school organization. This principle of freedom of education provides schools with ample room for site-specific curricular choices.

In this chapter an attempt is made to disentangle, interpret and discuss the complicated balancing act between curriculum regulation and curriculum freedom in the Netherlands. In order to do so, we first give a brief conceptualization of the terms 'curriculum', 'curriculum regulation' and 'curriculum deregulation'. Based on these conceptualizations we next analyze and discuss curriculum policies in the Netherlands during the past 40 years. In doing so, we distinguish three major episodes.

2. Curriculum, curriculum regulation, and curriculum deregulation

2.1 Curriculum

In our generic definition, a curriculum is 'a plan for learning' (Taba, 1962). It refers to the content and purpose of an educational program together with their organization (Walker, 1990). Decision-making about planning and learning may occur at various levels (van den Akker, 2003): system, society, nation or state level (macro); school or institution level (meso); classroom level (micro); and learner level (nano). Also, it may be conceptualized from various angles (Goodlad, 1994): socio-political, technical-professional, and substantive. The socio-political perspective refers to the influence exercised by various stakeholders. The technical-professional perspective is concerned with methods of curriculum design, evaluation, and implementation. The substantive perspective refers to the already mentioned question as to what is of most worth teaching and learning.

A curriculum may contain statements about all or several of the following components (presented by van den Akker (2003) as a curricular spider's web, figure 1): the rationale underpinning the curriculum; aims, goals, and objectives; content; teacher role; learning activities; materials and resources for teaching and learning; grouping; time allocation; and assessment modes and criteria. The spider's web metaphor emphasizes both the interconnectedness of the components (including aims and contents) as well as the vulnerability of the structure that connects them. Any dramatic shift will pull the entirety out of balance, with the risk of destroying it altogether. The relevance of the components varies across the curriculum levels. For instance, curriculum documents at the macro level (e.g. a national curriculum framework) usually

focus on the rationale, aims and objectives, content, and sometimes also time allocation. Curriculum documents at the micro level (e.g. textbooks), on the other hand, usually address all ten components.

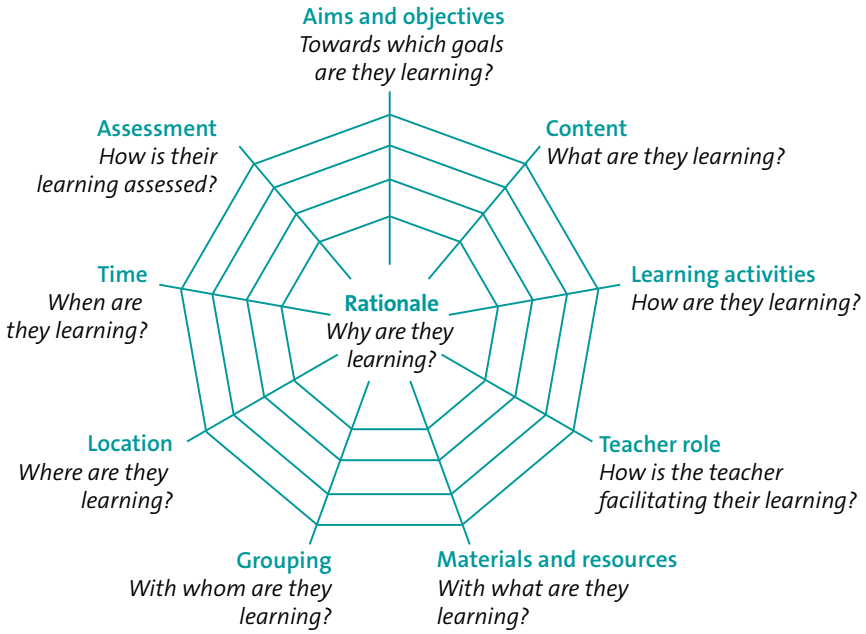

Figure 1: *Curricular spider's web*

A clarifying distinction concerns the various forms in which curricula can be represented. The typology presented in figure 2 builds on the work of Goodlad, Klein, and Tye (1979; see also van den Akker, 2003; Thijs & van den Akker, 2009; Kuiper, Folmer, & Ottevanger, 2013) and is helpful when trying to analyse and understand the, often, substantial discrepancies or 'negative coordination' (Hopmann, 1999) between the different representations or layers of curriculum innovations. Discrepancies may be caused by problems, misunderstandings, and challenges related to one or each of the perspectives on curriculum development (socio-political, technical-professional and substantive).
For instance, one of those discrepancies may be a lack of alignment between goals and contents described in a national curriculum framework (formal curriculum) and the content and format of tests and examinations linked with the curriculum framework (assessed curriculum).

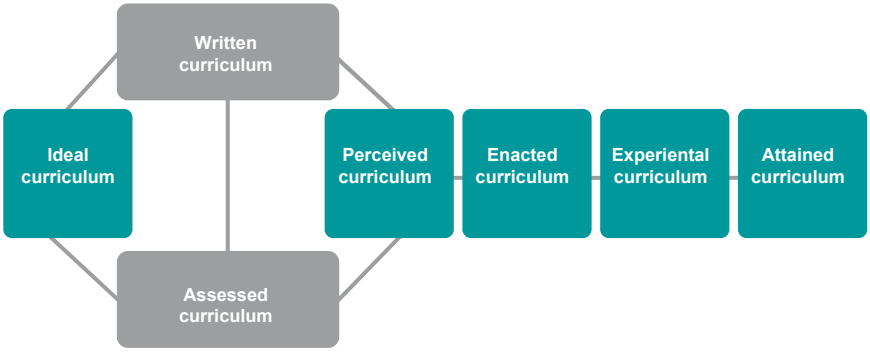

Figure 2: *Curriculum representations*

2.2 Curriculum regulation and deregulation

Curriculum regulation and *curriculum deregulation* may pertain to the curriculum both as a document and to the process of curriculum implementation. A curriculum as a document, in particular a curriculum framework at the national level, usually includes descriptions of goals and contents of education and often elaborations of other curricular components (see the curriculum spider's web metaphor). When defining the term 'goal' at least three issues need to be taken into account. First of all, a distinction can be made between two types of goals (Carlgren, 2006): 'goals to strive for', expressing qualities of knowledge and skills to be developed by teaching and learning processes, and 'goals to attain', expressing what students should know and be able to do after a certain period of schooling. Second, goals and contents make up a kind of a dyad, as, by definition, goals not only reflect knowledge and skills/competences but also the contents to be taught ('to strive for') or to be mastered ('to attain'). Third, within the context of this contribution, the concept 'knowledge' should be taken broadly (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; van Streun, 2001). It may pertain to 'knowing of' (facts, concepts), 'knowing how' (knowledge exercised in the performance of some task), 'knowing why' (principles, abstractions, overview), and 'knowing about knowing' (metacognitive skills).

Curriculum regulation reflects a government's intention to prescribe the high-fidelity implementation of directives at input level (goals and contents, in terms of 'goals to attain' or 'goals to strive for') and at output level (modes of

assessments and examinations; surveillance by the inspection; governance). Those prescriptions imply that the room for site-specific curricular choices is restricted. *Curriculum deregulation* reflects a government's intention to refrain from prescription and control at input and output level by stimulating school-based decision-making. At the heart of curriculum deregulation is trust in schools and teachers having the professional freedom to make site-specific interpretations of curriculum guidelines (Hopkins, 2005).

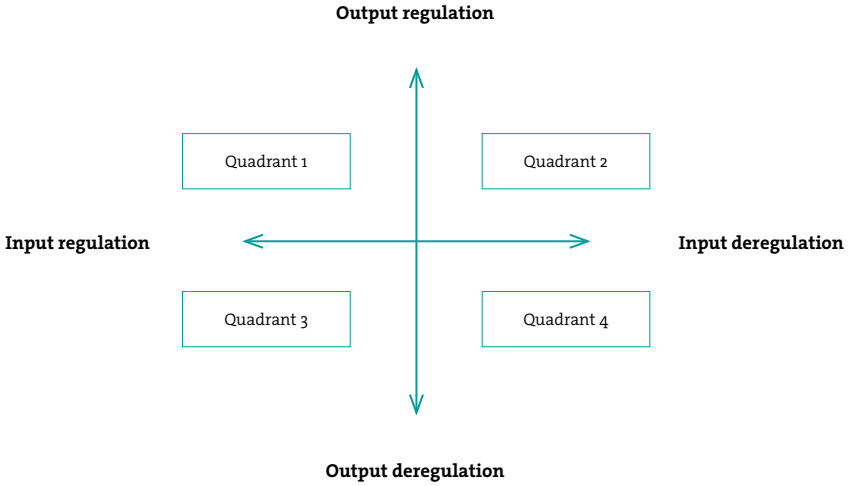

Figure 3: Input and output (de)regulation (building on Leat, Livingston & Priestley, see chapter 11 in this volume; Nieveen & Kuiper, 2012)

Curriculum regulation and curriculum deregulation at both the input and the output level can be conceived as extremes on a continuum, with a variety of modes of in-between. When we cross the continuums for input regulation/deregulation and output regulation/deregulation into one model, it becomes possible to position curriculum policies in countries in the four quadrants (Figure 3; building on Leat, Livingston, & Priestley, 2013). Curriculum policies in the top-left quadrant 'input and output regulation' can be designated as centralized, those in the bottom-right quadrant 'input and output deregulation' as decentralized. GERM-oriented policies - with standardizing teaching and learning, focus on literacy and numeracy, teaching a prescribed curriculum,

test-based accountability and control, and borrowing market-oriented reform ideas (Sahlberg, 2011) - typically can be positioned in the top-left quadrant. The position of countries can, of course, change over time.

Curriculum regulation (prescription and control) and deregulation (freedom) are not just a matter of a forced choice between two alternatives. Rather than as a dilemma, they should be taken as 'paradoxical perspectives' which both exist. The challenge is to find a proper balance in this puzzling *"paradox between steering and autonomy"* (Heijmans, 2013, p. 223): Too much steering - in our terminology 'regulation' - does not create ownership or professional ownership by teachers. Too little regulation provides insufficient sense of direction or results. Only trust in teachers and teachers' professionalism does guarantee improved educational quality. Insufficient space for site-specific choices undermines teachers' professionalism and negatively affects the imago of the teacher's profession.

2.3 Curriculum steering models

Key modes of curriculum regulation and deregulation can also be related to the four political steering models elaborated by Ekholm (1996) in the context of school improvement. The model (table 1) departs from the notion that systems not only regulate or deregulate the aims and goals of education and educational improvement (i.e. the 'what'), but also how to reach those aims and goals (i.e. the process of how to get there). Translated in curriculum (de) regulation terms, the *implementation* model (I) - in which the government prescribes both the aims and how to reach the aims - can be characterized as 'curriculum regulation' (at the input and/or output level). The *trusting the professionals* model (IV) - in which the government stimulates schools to formulate the aims themselves and also allows schools to find local solutions on how to reach the aims - can be pictured as 'curriculum deregulation'. The *gradual development* model (II) - in which schools are allowed to set local aims and the government creates conditions and prescribes the way schools need to go about the improvement process – takes an in-between position. The same is true for the *result-oriented responsibility* model (III) - in which the government prescribes the aims to be achieved by schools and at the same time allows schools to find their own ways in reaching the aims.

Table 1: Political steering models (source: Ekholm, 1996)

Centre of the system	Prescribes the aims of improvement to the periphery	Stimulates the periphery to formulate the aims of improvement
Prescribes to the periphery how to reach the aims of improvement	Implementation model (I)	Gradual development (II)
Allows the periphery to find their own solutions on how to reach the aims of improvement	Result-oriented responsibility (III)	Trusting the professionals (IV)

Ekholm's political steering models can also be related to the four ways of educational change introduced by Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) in order to illustrate macro level policy differences. Each way is known to have its strengths in some areas and limitations in others. The first way, with its bottom-up approach (more or less comparable with Ekholm's *trusting the professionals* model), embraces the value of professionalism and innovation, but tends to result in inconsistency as well as too much variation in educational quality. The second way, with its top-down approach (Ekholm's *implementation* model), provides direction and standardization of curriculum implementation, but usually at great cost of professionalism, motivation and innovation. The third way, with a mixed approach of top-down measures paralleled with extensive bottom-up and lateral support (having some commonalities with Ekholm's *result-oriented responsibility* model), increases the level of professional energy, but high-stakes testing tends to undermine longer-term, more innovative efforts. The fourth way combines the strengths of the former three ways and abandons the limitations, leading to a framework for change that integrates teacher professionalism, community engagement, government policy, and accountability. The building of an inspiring and inclusive vision that draws people together in pursuit of an uplifting common purpose is critical to this approach.

3. Curriculum policy and practices in three episodes

The purpose of the analysis below is to disentangle, interpret and discuss the complicated balancing act (mainly at macro level) between input and output

regulation concerning the goals and contents of education and the statutory freedom of education in the Netherlands during the past 40 years. The analysis focuses on compulsory education (comprising primary and junior secondary education, for children aged 5-16) as well as on senior secondary education. In secondary education – like in most countries comprising a junior level and a senior level - students may follow roughly one of three ability tracks: vocational (vmbo, four years, ages 12-16), general secondary (havo, five years, ages 12-17), and academic (vwo, six years, ages 12-18). In our analysis three episodes are distinguished.

3.1 Episode 1: 1970-2000

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Government pursued a 'constructive' education policy, featuring central steering of large-scale innovations. From 1980, the Inspectorate of Education started formulating observation criteria to make objective judgments of the quality of the education process possible. In order to support schools, an extensive school support system was created, including national institutes for educational measurement (CITO) and curriculum development (SLO). The task of SLO was to design and develop exemplary, non-prescriptive 'models for' curricula. The phrasing 'models for' was crucial, as any appearance of centralized curriculum policy had to be avoided against the backdrop of the constitutional freedom of education.

Although there was no statutory program of age-based achievement testing at the end of or during compulsory education, there were influential exit examinations (output regulation) after that period of schooling at age 16 (vmbo), age 17 (havo) and age 18 (vwo). The goals to be attained and tested in these high-stakes external and internal exit examinations were laid down in examination programs (input regulation). The goals meant to be assessed by means of the external examinations were further specified in rather detailed, quite influential syllabi. Many primary schools started participating in a standardized test that was administered in the final grade of primary education (age 12). This was a non-mandatory but very influential test, developed by CITO and meant to help teachers, students and their parents with choosing the appropriate secondary education track (basically some kind of output regulation).

Especially the content of primary and junior secondary education ('basic education') seemed to be fairly stable and was not an object of great dispute. However, from the 1970s to the 1990s the Government's commitment to the content of education gradually increased – reflecting an inclination to regulate a bit more at the input level – in order to stimulate equity and the continuous development of students. The lack of clarity about what should be taught in education also became an issue of concern because of the international tendency of developing 'core curricula', prompted by the effective school movement (Brookover & Lezotte, 1977), and reports such as 'A Nation at Risk' in the United States (Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, & Ecob, 1988). The Netherlands embarked on this movement, although the process turned out to be extensive and lengthy, leading to initial sets of more than 400 attainment targets ('goals to strive for') for primary education, as well as for junior secondary education. The Dutch parliament did not approve these two sets; the number and detail had to be revised. Finally, in 1993 much smaller sets – 122 for primary education and about 300 for junior secondary education – of goals 'to strive for' were laid down by law (Letschert, 1998; Thijs, Letschert, & Paus, 2005). A further review - i.e. reduction and de-specification - took place in 1998.

Parallel to this slight swing towards input regulation regarding compulsory education, a widespread dissatisfaction was being felt concerning several large-scale curriculum change efforts in secondary education. First of all, a strong and lengthy debate concerning the desirability of a comprehensive school system in 1993 led to a political compromise of introducing a core curriculum for the first years of secondary education, but without changing the tracked educational structure. This ambivalence in decision-making had a negative effect on the success of the reform. In 1998, a curriculum reform was initiated for senior secondary education, containing a new set of aims and contents, as well as suggestions (inspired by constructivist approaches) for teaching and learning methods. In practice, the substantive reform (the 'what') led to curriculum overload and fragmentation. The suggestions for the teaching and learning methods suffered from lack of conceptual clarity and resulted in discontent among teachers concerning the interference of

government with classroom pedagogy. This dissatisfaction with large-scale curriculum change efforts led to a greater awareness of the complexities of curriculum change and the processes and time frames that introduce, realize, and sustain such changes at the policy level. In 2007-2008, a parliamentary research commission studied these and other recent large-scale educational change efforts and concluded that government should not interfere with daily school practices and should leave this to the schools and teachers (Dijsselbloem, 2008).

In sum, curriculum policy in this episode positioned in the input/output regulation model (Figure 3):

- Primary education and junior secondary education: *slight swing towards input regulation*; mild output regulation by means of surveillance (Quadrant 4, slightly moving towards Quadrant 3).
- Senior secondary education: *input regulated* by means of subject-specific examination programs and syllabi further specifying goals assessed in external exit examinations; *output regulation* by means of subject-specific external and internal exit examinations (Quadrant 1).

3.2 Episode 2: 2000-2007

Educational times were changing, to a large extent also due to political changes. Rather than trusting government-initiated large-scale educational change, the focus in primary and junior secondary education shifted towards an emphasis on site-specific commitment and ownership, initially regarding school administrative issues, but increasingly also pertaining to the process and outcomes of education. A strong movement towards autonomy and market forces emerged - not only in education but also in other societal sectors - starting from the assumption that local ownership fosters commitment to curriculum renewal. However, concerning curriculum policy there was still ambiguity. On the one hand, schools were given ample room to make site-specific choices, which resulted in more variation across schools, especially in junior secondary education. On the other hand, there was still a tendency to safeguard quality by means of standards, the obligation of accountability, and external evaluation by the Inspectorate of Education.

Nevertheless, curriculum policy was deregulated in primary and junior secondary education. Schools received more space for (re)designing their site-specific curriculum. They tried to enact the freedom offered, but by sticking to the textbook much 'strategic space' stayed - and still stays - unutilized. The attainment targets substantially decreased in number as time went by (for primary education, from 122 in 1993 to 58 since 2005; also, for junior secondary education the number decreased to 58). Moreover, they were much less specific and did not include any teaching methodologies. They were meant as a source of inspiration for schools and teachers in making site-specific choices as well as a frame of reference for public accountability as regard to choices, efforts and outcomes. However, the 58 attainment targets had been (and still are) formulated in such a broad way that in the opinion of teachers the targets were (and still are) perceived and used neither as a guiding nor as inspirational. Instead, they were and are in the end used as a control and accountability device, during the context of external evaluations conducted by the Inspectorate (Nieveen, Handelzalts, & van Eekelen, 2011). Schools and teachers were and still are held indeed accountable for the way they give 'freedom within boundaries' a site-specific interpretation.

Deregulation led to the expectation that schools could evaluate their own educational process. Based on a 2002 Act, the role of the Inspectorate of Education became twofold: (i) inspection to assess the quality of education in terms of the education a school provides as well as its output and to report on it, and (ii) inspection for improvement, by fostering the self-regulative power of a school. A school's self-evaluation report is the starting point for an external quality review by the Inspectorate every four years, as such reflecting an educational governance system (Janssens, 2005). Inspection is proportional to the quality of the education a school provides.
A generally perceived trend in primary and secondary schools was that the national government's decentralizing policy was (and still is) gradually being counteracted by guidelines provided by the Inspectorate, municipality services, and last but not least, so-called 'school overarching managers'. The latter especially - appointed by large school boards - appeared anxious to play the role of 'mini-ministry'. So, curricular autonomy offered does not necessarily

imply that room for site-specific curricular choices is and can indeed be taken up by teachers.

Those schools and teachers that did embark on changing their curriculum were confronted with many common concerns. School-based curriculum development turned out to be a complex endeavor (Nieveen, Handelzalts, & van Eekelen, 2011; Nieveen, van den Akker, & Resink, 2010). Teachers who were used to working by themselves were challenged to share their goals in and perspectives on learning and teaching. Moreover, socio-political concerns also surfaced, including who should be involved in the redesign process and how to activate and include teachers and team leaders. Moreover, teams were confronted with questions on the actual redesign of all interlinked curricular components, such as the selection of learning activities, materials, assessment instruments, acquisition of new teaching roles, and setting out of time frames and equipment in new learning environments. Teachers reported a lack of confidence in their curriculum design skills, which, in most cases, led to either minimal changes or an unbalanced curriculum with many loose parts. This lack of curriculum competency and the struggle to fully utilize curricular freedom was also found in a survey of a representative sample of teachers in junior secondary education (Onderbouw-VO, 2008).
During this episode curriculum autonomy in primary and junior secondary education was (and still is) much greater than in senior secondary education. As already noted in the introduction section, the freedom for curricular action drastically decreased - or was perceived as drastically decreasing - as high-stakes exit examinations taken at the end of senior secondary education came closer. In this episode, policies and practices regarding examination programs and syllabi remained largely unchanged.

In sum, curriculum policy in this episode in the input/output regulation model presented in Figure 3:

- Primary education and junior secondary education: *more input deregulation* by means of de-specified attainment targets; at the same time *more output regulation* by means of surveillance and governance (move back towards Quadrant 4).

- Senior secondary education: no change; *input regulated* by means of subject-specific examination programs and syllabi further specifying goals assessed in external exit examinations; *output regulated* by means of subject-specific external and internal exit examinations (Quadrant 1).

3.3 Episode 3: from 2007 onwards

Recently, in primary and junior secondary education the pendulum has started moving again, due to a mix of influences: alterations in the political climate because of a change of government in 2010 and the rhetoric at the policy level on striving for a top five ranking in international comparative studies (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS). Although commitment from schools and teachers has proven to be conducive to the effectiveness and sustainability of improvement and renewal efforts, school autonomy also appears to have its limits - like regulation has. There are considerable challenges of major public importance and beyond individual schools (e.g. careful decision-making about the curriculum classic of what should be learned and taught) that call for combining forces and a regulating role from the national government. A government that wants to promote diversity is at the same time responsible for stimulating substantive and social cohesion, fostering equity, and promoting collective socio-economic interests.

The solution to many of the issues in primary and junior secondary education in this episode is being pursued through a more detailed specification of education outcomes in the context of a policy emphasizing outcomes-based education. In 2000, the Education Council - the most authoritative counseling body regarding education policy in the Netherlands - made a plea for the formulation of standards (minimum achievements). These standards should be implemented in Year 4 (age 8, primary education), Year 8 (age 12, end of primary education) and Year 10/Secondary 2 (age 14, junior secondary education). The Council considered those standards - resembling Finland's implemented 'descriptions of good performance' - as a proper device for providing schools and teachers with operational instructional objectives in order to counteract the underperformance of students, in particular with regard to literacy and numeracy (that were considered 'the basics'). Following

a more or less same line of reasoning, the Ministry of Education commissioned the development of a curriculum framework for literacy and mathematics. This framework has been implemented since 2010 and consists of standards ranging from Years 4, 8 and 10 to the final years of junior general vocational education, senior general education and pre-university education. As operationalization of the current attainment targets (for primary and lower secondary education) and the prevailing examination programs (at the end of senior secondary education) they are meant as a guiding frame of reference and entrance requirements for subsequent education programs.
The implementation of these standards witnesses a clear policy move towards (GERM-inspired) input regulation for the basics.

But this is only part of the story. The policy emphasis on outcomes-based education - comparable, for instance, with the Knowledge Promotion initiative implemented in Norway since 2006 - also finds its expression, even first and foremost, in an increased importance of being attached to testing and test-based accountability and control. An mandatory test at the end of primary education is going to be implemented, as it seems now, from 2015 onwards. Mandatory diagnostic tests for literacy, numeracy and English are expected to be administered in Year 10/Secondary 2, very likely also from 2015 onwards. It is safe to conclude that GERM-based output regulation, in addition to more input regulation, prominently has entered the scene as regards the basics (and probably English) in the compulsory age of schooling. Also, initiatives to study the added value of schools to learning growth in (especially) the basics are in line with a move towards output regulation. Based on a new Act from 2012, the Inspectorate is concentrating its efforts on those schools that show insufficient quality, and could receive penalties from the Ministry of Education. Still starting from the assumption that local ownership fosters commitment to curriculum renewal, the support infrastructure is becoming increasingly market-driven. Schools are being lump sum financed for the support and professional development they need in order to keep up their performance results.

From 2007 onwards, modified subject-specific examination programs have been implemented in senior secondary education. The changes include a considerable de-specification of goals, meant to provide schools with more freedom to make choices about how to reach those goals. This modest but historically rather striking swing towards input deregulation seems to have the intended effect regarding the internal exit examinations schools themselves are responsible for to organize, develop and administer. However, due to the fact that the level of specification given in syllabi remained un-changed, school practices pertaining to prepare students for external exit examinations do not seem to have changed substantially.

In sum, curriculum policy in this episode positioned in the input/output regulation model (Figure 3):

- Primary education and junior secondary education: *swing towards more output and input regulation* as regards literacy, numeracy (and English) in the compulsory age of schooling (partial move into direction of Quadrant 1).
- Senior secondary education: more *input deregulation* by means of de-specification of subject-specific examination programs; un-changed *output regulation* by means of subject-specific external and internal exit examinations (Quadrant 1).

4. Discussion

4.1 Puzzling paradoxical perspectives

The analysis above shows that regulating goals and contents of education in the Netherlands has been - and still is - a balancing act. Against the backdrop of a long-standing statutory tradition of freedom of education with a strong trust in teachers as professionals (Ekholm, 1996), governmental decisions about 'what knowledge is of most worth' not only teaching and learning but also testing have been delicate. Although for about 200 years input regulation (in the form of syllabi and subject-specific examination programs) and output regulation (in the form of external and internal school-leaving examinations) have been in place in senior secondary education, the Dutch Government has left curriculum decisions regarding primary and junior secondary education largely open-ended for a long time.

From the 1970s onward, influenced by the international school effectiveness movement and optimism about bringing about social change through large-scale educational change, the Dutch Government started the debate on input regulation for compulsory education. This shift to some degree towards a results-oriented steering model (Ekholm, 1996) is visible in the development of attainment targets that teachers in primary and junior secondary education should strive for. However, at the start of the new millennium, due to a change of government aiming at deregulation and market competition, the focus shifted slightly towards site-specific commitment and ownership. This led to a substantial reduction in the number as well as a de-specification of attainment targets, implicating less input regulation. Schools and teachers were expected to make their own site-specific curricular choices. In many cases this resulted in innovative school profiles and practices, but also in concerns with the complexities that school-based curriculum renewal brings about. At the same time, there was an increased focus on output regulation by means of surveillance by the Inspectorate and governance. From 2007 onwards, due to PISA and TIMSS rankings along with a change of government, a shift back towards a results-oriented steering model becomes visible. As regards compulsory education, input regulation has been revitalized by converting the attainment targets ('goals to strive for') for literacy and numeracy into standards ('goals to attain'), legislated in a prescriptive curriculum framework that also pertains to senior secondary education. Moreover, for the first time in Dutch history, educational policy is explicitly favoring output regulation for primary education and junior secondary education by means of mandatory achievement tests for literacy and numeracy at the end of primary education and for mother tongue, mathematics and English at the end of lower secondary education. The latter are very likely to be implemented from 2015 onwards and are intended to have a diagnostic purpose. In senior secondary education, de-specified examination programs have been implemented since 2007 - implying some input deregulation. However, because the level of specification in syllabi remained unchanged and de facto 'compensated' for the de-specification in the examination programs, this policy change hardly affected school and classroom practices.

The slight, but in some respect remarkable, pendulum swings (that even differ across education sectors) demonstrate the difficulty in striking a good balance between the two perspectives of curriculum regulation (prescription, testing, surveillance) and curriculum deregulation (freedom for site-specific choices). In this respect, these two curriculum policy modes should indeed not be seen as stances one can choose from. The analysis so far shows that both perspectives - to some degree - are needed to be considered in order to come to successful educational change. The issue to be raised is how to balance both perspectives. Reflecting on these paradoxical notions of regulation and deregulation a number of comments can be made. In doing so, we use the metaphor of education as a building with a front and a back door.

4.2 A common, comprehensive and cohesive curriculum framework

Nowadays at the front door (input) there is a mixture of common attainment targets ('goals to strive for') covering the whole range of subject domains and also common standards ('goals to attain') for literacy and numeracy. At the back door (output) there is surveillance by the inspectorate - with a strong focus on student outcomes, especially for the basics - and a growing interest in testing. And, by tradition, there is a predominance of textbook use by teachers. However, at the front door of the building there is *not* - like there is, for example, in Finland (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education), Scotland (Curriculum for Excellence), Norway (National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion), New Zealand (The New Zealand Curriculum) and Australia - *one* curriculum framework that provides a *common*, *comprehensive* and *cohesive* answer to the question of what is of most worth learning and teaching in this education sector. Such a curriculum framework might be useful and effective, for at least three reasons:

- It could give more, a more common as well as a better defined sense of direction (cf. Miller & Osborne, 1998) about what the goals and contents 'of most worth' to teach and learn are.
- It could not only give more and a more common sense of purpose as to what to teach and learn, but also to what to assess. During the third episode we noticed an increased, GERM-inspired significance being attached to testing and test-based accountability and surveillance. This

'framing the back door' of the education building by means of more output regulation should not go without *first* 'framing the front door' through debate and decision-making on the goals and contents to be realized and assessed. Framing the front door *first* - with maximum involvement and commitment from stakeholders - paves the way for democratic, transparent, balanced, coherent and sustainable decision-making about goals and contents considered to be *relevant* teaching and learning (see first bullet) as well as assessing. So, 'framing the front door' is a prerequisite for 'framing the back door', and not the other way around. If agreement on and clarity about the 'what' and 'why' of education are missing at the front, then tests and surveillances alter into a sort of hidden curriculum at the back (see also Figure 2).

- The provision of sense of purpose about the 'what' could stimulate schools and teachers to take advantage of better use of the space offered for their own curricular choices, in particular regarding 'how' to realize the 'what'. To put the latter differently: offering room for site-specific curricular choices - and ambitions - should go with a clear, common, comprehensive and cohesive framework that provides specifics concerning goals and contents that are considered relevant. So, freedom going along with specification. In addition, an answer shared by relevant stakeholders to the question posed may also help to put the current policy focus on the basics into a broader perspective. That is to say, there is a broadly shared recognition of the major importance of mastering the basics, but at the same time there is a growing discomfort about the perceived partial focus on the basics. There is more worth teaching and learning within the allocated amount of time than literacy and numeracy.

4.3 Inspirational support by specification and exemplification

The noun '*framework*' and adjective *'common'* should not be identified with '*prescription*'. Rather than prescribing what the goals and contents of basic education are, a common, comprehensive and cohesive curriculum framework for basic education should aim at providing *specification and operational support*. By doing so, it should give inspiration and a sense of direction to schools, teachers, textbook publishers, and the like. Schools and teachers in the

Netherlands are not looking for an overly prescriptive curriculum framework. Rather, they would like to be inspired and at the same time be supported by more specification (which the current attainment targets do not deliver). In addition to such a curriculum framework, support also can be provided by promising and prototypical practical *exemplifications* of how to (re)design the site-specific school curriculum in the context of a future curriculum framework. Examples may take the shape of educative materials that illustrate and support the essentials of the curriculum and that are adjustable to the local aims of the school. The major strengths of the curriculum policy period between 2000 and 2007 should not be discarded, as they were fostering bottom-up renewal initiatives, appealing to teachers to their professional capacity and stimulating what is nowadays called 'teacher agency' (Priestley & Biesta, 2013).

However, providing *support by specification and exemplification* is like balancing on a thin rope. At least two risks or a combination of the two may be lurking:

- Unintentionally, it may be perceived by teachers and others as only having to teach a prescribed curriculum and as mistrust in teachers' professionalism. Important lessons can be learned from experiences in some other European countries: some specification may provide teachers with the hold and support they say they need (see for example Finland), while over-specification may be perceived as a prescriptive straitjacket that works counterproductively (see England).
- Specification may incite more testing and test-based accountability and control, in particular testing and controlling of those aspects that can be specified and can be measured in a more reliable way (and at the expense of aspects that are harder to specify but are also relevant to be taught and learned and valid to be assessed).

4.4 Space offered versus space taken

Curriculum deregulation means that there is space for site-specific curricular choices. Space is offered from the top and can (or is meant to) be taken bottom-up. So, it takes two to tango. However, offering space does not imply

that the space will be experienced as such neither that the space also will be taken by schools and teachers. The latter may be due to teachers lacking the competences to cope with the freedom as they develop the curriculum. The former is (also) affected by teachers' inclination to stick to the textbook. The point here is that, by heavily relying on textbooks, teachers themselves restrict much of the strategic space they have available. So, unintentionally, textbooks have quite an input-regulative effect on teaching practices and, as such, represent quite a peculiar sort of 'self-imposed prescription (see also Leat, Livingston, & Priestly, elsewhere in this Yearbook).

4.5 Communicating vessels

In this chapter curriculum regulation and curriculum deregulation at both the input and output level have been conceived as puzzling 'paradoxical perspectives'. Our analysis of curriculum policies during the past forty years in the Netherlands makes clear that both perspectives exist in a paradoxical and also continuously changing relation to each other. It appears indeed to be a matter of 'and - and', not 'either - or'. We may even go one step further by taking curriculum regulation and curriculum deregulation as communicating vessels. In physical terms this principle means that increasing the fluid level in one vessel automatically results in a decrease of the fluid level in the other. When we apply this physical principle to the concept of curriculum (de) regulation, it means that more input (de)regulation implies - or let us say 'might imply' - less output (de)regulation. So, in case there will be a common, comprehensive and cohesive curriculum framework that expresses the broadly shared 'will of the what and the why of education', less output regulation will do. The experiences in Finland - top-performing in PISA, having a core curriculum that is an expression of their will, but not having testing at the end of basic education and also not having an inspection system - are rich food for further thought for curriculum policy making.

4.6 Sources affecting curriculum practices

Taken the above comments together, a way forward looms up. They underpin the idea that curriculum practices at the school and classroom level depend on at least three sources: direction and pressure from the top, room for teachers

taking initiatives from the bottom, and support provided from aside (Kuiper, 2009; see figure 4). With regard to compulsory schooling in the Netherlands, direction and support from the top may be provided by a common, comprehensive and cohesive curriculum framework; room for site-specific interpretations and choices by trusting and fostering the professionalism of schools and teachers in school-based decision-making; and support from aside by means of (amongst other things) specification and exemplification.

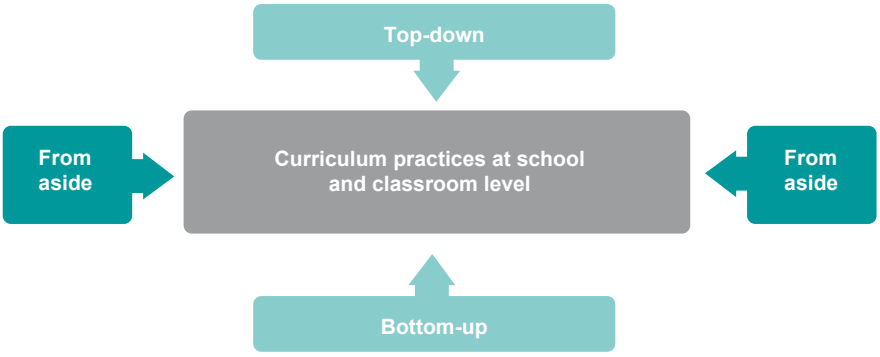

Figure 4: Sources of curriculum practices at school and classroom level

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Researching curriculum specification and freedom in Norway

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Abstract

This chapter examines the way professional freedom is shaping as well as is being shaped across two periods of compulsory school reform in Norway. It is based on data collected through surveys given to professionals in schools involved in curriculum development, textbook production, implementation and teaching. We are above all interested in how goals and expectations towards a national curriculum are expressed by different groups of reform actors, how their conceptions correspond with the way the existing curriculum specifies goals and contents and how their conceptions interplay with reform efforts that increasingly emphasize assessment and outcomes. A range of reform studies indicates that a detailed curriculum restricts professional freedom in schools. Our own studies as well as research findings from similar studies in Norway show that a curriculum that focuses on goals and contents creates room to move for professionals although it does not necessarily enhance self-control. We also see that teachers' conceptions and preferences are changing along with national reform towards specification of minimum content and assessment criteria, partly contradicting the current curriculum in Norway, which holds the school level accountable for both development processes and outcomes.

1. Introduction

The field of curriculum research addresses the many decisions and facets of teaching and learning in schools and classrooms. From a curriculum point of view, such decisions target the way teaching and learning is made into a study course (Karseth & Sivesind, 2010). Although experiences of this course can be highly site-specific, programmatic issues are demanding, which continuously encourage curriculum making and implementation in policy and reform.

Recently, important advances have been made in theorizing about programmatic dimensions of curriculum, such as the interrelationship between systemic reform and evaluation (Lundgren, 2009; Mangez, 2010; Scholl, 2012; Sundberg & Wahlström, 2012), the implications of accountability for reform making and practices (Hopmann, 2008; Nieveen & Kuiper, 2012; Scholl, 2012) and cultural versus generic concepts constructed within global and transnational curriculum processes (Karseth & Sivesind, 2010; Rosenmund, 2006; Yates, 2009; Young, 2010; Young & Muller, 2010).

During the last few years, we have also witnessed a surge in interest in literacy and learning as new approaches to curriculum research (Markussen, 1990; Martin & Rose, 2007; Simensen, 2010). Moreover, a renewed interest is devoted to the way curriculum and standards are reframed within state-based curriculum reform (Westbury, 2007). Although considerable progress has been made, important questions remain unanswered when it comes to empirical research about curriculum specification and professional freedom in view of contemporary evaluation policy and reform. This chapter contributes to educational research by suggesting and developing knowledge about the way curriculum conceptions among professionals correspond and change along with a stronger emphasis on evaluation policy, which turns out to be more out-put based, but not necessarily more specified, during the second reform period.

The interplay between curriculum conceptions, specification of reform and professional freedom cannot be fully explored without empirically examining how reform actors view their own experiences. Therefore, we provide a

comparative case study based on survey material to analyse what groups of people involved in different reform realms conceptualize as their overall goals, experiences and expectations. Goals and purposes are, in this case, about what professionals seek to accomplish within their work with a new national curriculum. Experiences refer to reform group actors' know-how from different fields, such as teaching, textbook production, reform implementation and curriculum development. Do they adjust their conceptions about curriculum and reform along with policy changes that increasingly emphasize assessment and outcomes?

From an international perspective, continents and countries differ in how they develop and carry out curriculum work and national policy (Hopmann, 1999). As Steiner and Khamsi (2013) argue, the policies of nation-states vary in the degree they construct common reform systems and establish joint expectations to outcomes. This variation also exists when it comes to curriculum implementation across reform levels in several countries (Louis, 1989; Nieveen & Kuiper, 2012; van den Akker, Kuiper, & Hameyer, 2003). In this chapter, we focus on national reform in Norway, which by tradition connects to Scandinavian models for curriculum regulation. Here, the main model expects curriculum makers to develop national curricula that guide reform processes by suggesting principles for teaching; however, they do this without prescribing activities or standardizing outcomes (Bachmann, 2005b; Sivesind, 2008). The overall task of a national curriculum has from the 1920s to the 1990s been to support professionals in their daily work. For this purpose, the curriculum has served as a guide for action rather than a document that merely standardizes evaluation processes of learning activities and outcomes.

We first base our analysis on a cluster of surveys carried out in 2000 as part of the 1990s reform. We collected data among curriculum developers, textbook producers, implementers and professionals in Norwegian schools (Bachmann, 2005a; Bachmann, Sivesind, Afsar, & Hopmann; 2004b). Our core aim was to investigate how a national curriculum functioned in framing and guiding professionals during two reform periods and how a national curriculum was translated across reform arenas by suggesting a range of elements, such as

purposes, principles, contents and activities in schools. In this chapter, we report from a large research project. We compare data from several surveys, the last of which was conducted in 2005 and which refers to the early efforts of introducing a new national curriculum within the Knowledge Promotion reform in Norway. We also refer to findings of the national evaluation of the Knowledge Promotion reform.

By way of introduction, the chapter starts out by presenting the research design with an overview of the research projects, methods and data. The empirical part is divided into two sections in which the main findings and interpretations for each of the two reform periods are presented. Finally, the chapter suggests how to conceptualize changes in view of transnational reform processes, which partly change the conditions for creating professional freedom in schools. By summarizing and interpreting empirical findings, we contribute to curriculum research by developing theory as well as providing empirical knowledge about the way curriculum conceptions and professional freedom is shaping as well as shaped by national reform across two reform periods.

2. Research design and methods

The chapter primarily reports from research projects in Norway conducted under the umbrella of a common research framework (Hopmann & Künzli, 1994) and were funded by the National Research Council in Norway and coordinated by Professor Stefan T. Hopmann. These studies made use of questionnaires first developed and distributed within Germany (Biehl, Ohlhaver, & Riquarts, 1999; Ohlhaver, 2005) and Switzerland (Bähr, Fries, Ghisla, Künzli, Rosenmund, & Sline-Müller, 1999; Bähr, Fries, Ghisla, Rosenmund, & Gaby, 1999; Rosenmund, 2006; Rosenmund et al., 2008), and later in Finland (Backström-Widjeskog & Hansén, 2002). In Norway, as in Germany and Switzerland, the research aimed to cover seven milestones or steps, which we will describe here (Sivesind & Hopmann, 1997; see also Hopmann & Nesje, 2002, p. 22).

The first step included an analysis of policy texts and curriculum guidelines with regard to overall rationale of reform period. The second step consisted of a questionnaire to curriculum makers at the national level that was translated from German versions already distributed in Switzerland and Germany. A pilot study tested by the Delphi-method included experts in subject-matters didactics from Switzerland and Germany, who responded anonymously, to define the core concepts and indicators (Bähr, Fries, Ghisla, Rosenmund, & Gäby, 1999, p. 7). The questionnaire put a particular focus on a selection of subjects (Science, History, English and Mathematics) for year 8-10 in compulsory schooling in Norway (at age 13 and 15). The third step focussed on curriculum implementation in regard of subject-related issues, repeating a selection of questions from the questionnaire to the curriculum developers. It was distributed to people on the national or local level, and it provided the main database from the first reform period in Norway, which we consider to be from 1990-2003.

We collected names using the snowball method by contacting officers within the Ministry of Education and National-regional offices (NEO) during 1998. They had been responsible for organizing networks of administrators and teachers who implemented the new Curriculum 97 through in-services and evaluation. All persons reported by NEO, located at the regional level during 1999, were contacted in addition to textbook producers (authors, consultants, editors) who were also involved in mediating the new curriculum from 1997. These actors were not considered as representing a wider population, but the universe from which we wanted responses. They were asked to report their goals, experiences and conceptions during this particular implementation process.

The fourth step consisted of interviews with 30 people involved in curriculum development and implementation at the national and regional level, which is a study we will not report on here (for more details, see: Sivesind, 1999). Thereafter, the fifth step involved a survey about lesson planning where both school principals and teachers were asked about their main goals, views and expectations to a national curriculum. They were also asked about whether the

curriculum and related texts and instruments were useful within their local context (e.g. guidelines for instruction, textbooks) and how they conceived their own task of preparing teaching and learning in schools in regard to a national curriculum.

The study included schools in four geographical regions of Norway. Within these four regions, municipalities and schools were strategically selected to cover different types and sizes, distributed equally between urban and rural districts. By using this selection, we aimed to generalize findings to a national level. Schools in our study offered instruction for the final years of mandatory education i.e. lower secondary school (year 8-10), in the aforementioned school subjects. However, some schools also organised teaching to students from 6-10 years old in so-called combined schools. The differences between combined schools and normal lower secondary schools were carefully analysed.

The sixth step synthesized findings in evaluating the national curriculum, part of a research-based evaluation The National Evaluation of the Reform 97 (Bachmann et al., 2004a). In addition to these steps, a follow-up study was launched during the 2000s. Survey data and interview data from the project 'Early start with the Knowledge Promotion Reform' (Bergem et al., 2006) were reanalyzed within the project 'Achieving School Accountability in Practice' (ASAP) (Bachmann, Sivesind, & Bergem, 2008). In this period, a new national test system was implemented to create public control of schools by publishing the outcomes on an electronic platform, available for all, including journalists.

By conceptualizing accountability and assessment as reform in curriculum implementation, the ASAP-project extended the theoretical and methodological framework by including concepts about the way different forms of accountability were decisive for curriculum and reform (Langfeldt, Elstad, & Hopmann, 2008; Sivesind & Bachmann, 2008). Thus, some of the questions from the first surveys were repeated while others were developed according to new topics, such as evaluation and accountability. The seventh step was aimed at achieving a comparative analysis. Here we conducted a documents analysis to compare the Norwegian curriculum with similar

documents in Finland, Sweden and Denmark (Sivesind, Bachmann, & Afsar, 2003).

Table 1 gives an overview of the topics covered by our research projects in Norway, the year they were conducted, the data and the response rates. For more details about the research design and validation, we refer to the national reports.

Table 1: Overview of projects, data and publications

Projects	*Respondents*	*N/Response-rate*	*Topic*
From curriculum development to lesson planning			
Structures and strategies in curriculum reform 1998-2002	L97a: Members of curriculum committees/ syllabus groups in a selection of core school subjects	35/50	Curriculum making, L97
National evaluation – Reform 97: How is curriculum mediated through secondary tools? 2001-2002	L97f: Teachers and school principals (national survey)	836/66	Curriculum development and implementation L97
	L97g: Implementers (responsible for in-service training and evaluation)	419/66	Curriculum development and implementation L97
	L97h: Text book producers (authors, editors and consultants)	225/56	Curriculum development and implementation L97
Nordic curricula	Cross-national analysis. Document review		Curriculum making and reform
Achieving School Accountability in Practice			
ASAP	KL1.2: Documentary analysis and policy interview		Curriculum making history
	KL1.3: Survey and interviews with school administrators, principals and teachers	56/66 111/55 87/51	Curriculum implementation and evaluation

Our research approach can best be characterized as what Steiner-Kahmsi (2013) advocate and call 'simple comparison', where we draw upon descriptive

statistics to describe changes in the way professionals conceptualise and view curriculum within similar contexts over a period of years. Besides examining reform periods in view of their history, we also compare conceptions articulated across reform realms within the same period that, on the one hand, connect to education policy and, on the other, connect to educational practice.

These two analytical perspectives, seeing reform both as a product of history and as a result of reform processes, help us to understand how professional actors direct their attention within national reform, e.g. what they think, what they do and what they criticize. The analytical perspective provides an inside view of the organizational context where the national curriculum is developed or implemented, and conceptions of institutionalized policies and practices shaped by reform history in Norway. Based on this analysis, we can discuss changes in curriculum regulation and freedom in reform realms, such as schools.

3. Researching curriculum reform in Norway

3.1 Goals for a new national curriculum (1991-2003)

In the first period, a 10-year compulsory school curriculum was prepared at the national level over a six-and-a-half year period within the Ministry of Research and Education, and was formally put into practice in school year 1997-98. The national curriculum was authorized before international assessment programs came to the forefront within public debates. However, new principles of public management and accountability were part of the political discourse. Two commissioned reports, one from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 1988-89, 1990 {1988}) and one Royal Commissioned Report (NOU, 1988:28) became important in legitimizing work on a new curriculum.

Whereas the OECD report recommended that the Norwegian government continue with the existing national curriculum and to develop a new evaluation system to guarantee the quality of the primary and secondary school system, the Royal Commissioned Report recommended revising the national curriculum. The latter appeared just one year after the former was

formally adopted in 1987. Thus, the formal curriculum from 1997 was more of a national than a transnational initiative. Although the national curriculum introduced cultural literacy and systemic reform along with transnational movements, it did not respond to what the experts from OECD actually asked for.

Organized as a comprehensive project, the work on a new curriculum included committees, reference groups and networks of consultants and implementers. Curriculum developers, one of our groups of respondents in this paper, formulated and provided drafts of the subject-specific curricula suggesting general aims and particular content for each school year. These drafts were revised during the process based on input from public hearings, the executives, the steering group in the project and even the leadership, including the Minister of the Ministry of Research and Education. Finally, the deputy of the Ministry, a group of officials within the civil service and a group of professionals completed the curriculum. Thus, the curriculum developers included in our survey were involved during a period of four years until the curriculum was completed.

A new formal curriculum, consisting of general aims and guidelines as well as aims and contents to be covered each year of public schooling, was put into action in 1997, about 10 years after the former curriculum had been formally adopted. The former curriculum from 1987 was merely a guideline or a recommendation in terms of content to be taught at different stages (years 1-3, 4-6 and 7-9) and suggested a local orientation to curriculum matters. The new 'Curriculum 97' was far more detailed in terms of specifying general aims, guidelines and principles, subject-specific purposes and lists of units and topics to be covered for each year of compulsory schooling. One rationale for this specification was to achieve goal coherence through translating national overarching goals into aims, principles and subject content.

The first part, labelled the 'Core curriculum', pointed to overarching goals and the visionary ideas of schooling, and outlined what students should experience and become. The main idea was to support the development of an integrated

human being. The second part of the curriculum sorted out normative principles for organizing schooling, e.g. how to organize student projects and contents in terms of shared topics across subjects. The third part was aimed at translating the overall goals of the curriculum into subject content knowledge that detailed content areas and even a canon of authors and artists to be covered by teaching in different disciplines.

However, the formal curriculum did not detail minimum contents, i.e. asking municipalities and schools to add extra teaching content when developing their own curricula. Neither did the national curriculum include tips for teaching a particular subject, in line with the Scandinavian curriculum tradition. The 1997 curriculum did not specify timetables for when and for how many hours a particular topic would be taught within the subjects. It did not suggest benchmarks as descriptors or criteria for evaluating learning processes. The curriculum was not aligned with a test system that defined expectations for what to assess and learn at different levels. Although the curriculum structured teaching in terms of normative principles, it did not tell teachers what to do, being entirely prescriptive. Hence, the national curriculum structured the school as an input tool. By being an authoritative document, it worked out as merely a guide for further action and interpretation. As such, the curriculum was open-ended in terms of how to apply knowledge.

We asked members of curriculum committees engaged in developing the drafts for the subject curricula to report on their purposes and expectations within the development course (see table 1, L97 a). Many of the curriculum developers were subject experts who also had experience with teaching in schools. We also asked implementers, textbook producers (authors and editors), principals and teachers the same questions (see table 1, L97 f-h). The diagram in Figure 2 presents what different groups of respondents answered to the question about their overall goals in working with the new curriculum. The respondents were asked to select two out of the eleven proposed alternatives about the main goals relevant for their decisions within their positions. From our examination of the political discourse, which at that time centred on the competitiveness of the school system, we expected the

respondents to point out the nation's opportunity to sustain the international competition level as a prioritized alternative. We also knew that the basic values of Christianity were part of the overall paragraph of the Education Act and were also mentioned in the general part of the curriculum. However, none of these alternatives were prioritised by the respondents in their view on overall goals for their work. Instead, the respondents emphasized basic principles in pedagogical work and basic values in a democratic society.

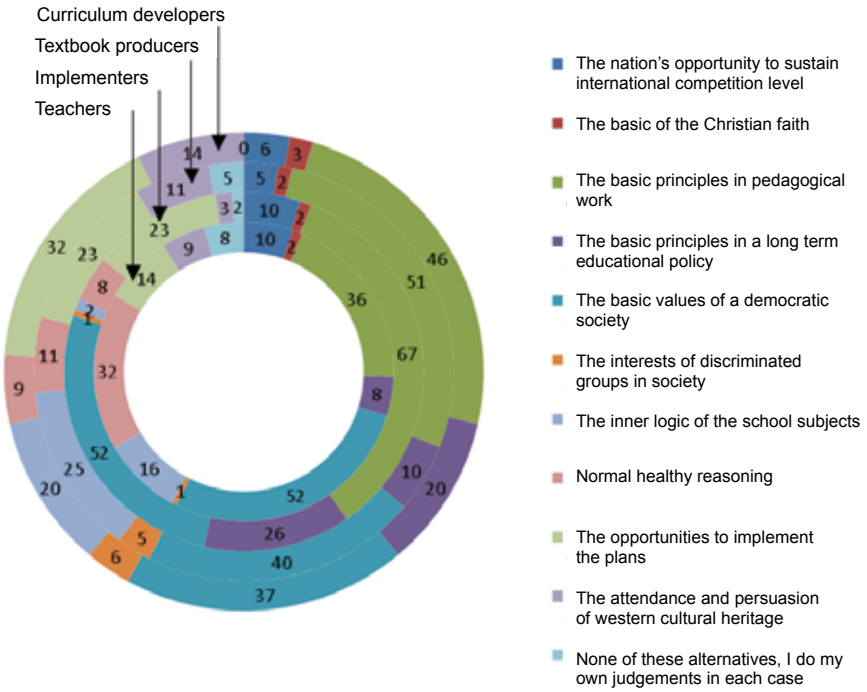

Figure 1: Overall goals of most importance in decisions in developing L97 (outside circle)/ producing textbooks/ implementing /teaching (inside circle). The percentage distribution based on responses in survey L97 a, f, g and h (see table 1)

From the point of view of the curriculum makers, implementers and textbook producers, the most important goal is educational, which means they found the basic principles in pedagogic work as core matter in their work with the national curriculum. The second priority is the importance of basic values in a democratic society. The teachers, in this case also including school principals, differed in their view. They found democratic values as the most important

goal, above basic principles in pedagogic work. Even more unexpectedly, the textbook producers claimed their overall purposes were not primarily the inner logic of the school subjects but, next to pedagogical principles and democratic values, they see basic principles of a long-term education policy and the opportunity to implement the plans as relevant. This can be interpreted by the fact that textbook authors and publishers were controlled by a national agency that authorized the textbooks during this period, a system that was downplayed during 1998-99. This is similar to those who were appointed to act as implementers within the reform process. They were mainly teachers and professionals working at the municipality level and engaged by regional state-run offices to offer in-service training and evaluation that supported curriculum development in schools.

All groups give a very low priority to the continuation and persuasion of Western cultural heritages, similar to personal and practical site-specific and case-to-case judgement. We also observe that interest for discriminated groups is not an overall goal for any of the groups. Thus, the visionary platform for curriculum development, implementation, textbook production, and teaching is primarily based on pedagogical principles and the public interest in democracy and education, and to a lesser extent long-term principles of policy and implementation. Hence, neither highly political issues, nor common-sense judgement seems to be highlighted by the respondents. From this we conclude that curriculum making and implementation concerns the educational sides of schooling within a democratic society.

3.2 Goals and expectations in work with a new national curriculum (2003-2012)

Continuing a more than a hundred year tradition in Norway, national authorities made extensive efforts, also during the 2000s, to formulate and implement a new national curriculum. However, this time the new curriculum was developed with a new national test system in mind.
Parallel to the Programme for International Student Assessment results (PISA), which gained enormous public attention because of short-comings in achievement scores among Norwegian students, a national test system was

put into action. From 2004, assessment results were made public on a new web-based platform to inform the public about the quality of schools and to hold municipalities and schools accountable for learning processes and outcomes (Langfeldt, Elstad, & Hopmann, 2008).

The new national test system evaluated students' skills across traditional school subjects, which naturally encouraged the development of new national strategies and tools for assessment. New expectations were directed towards the school principals and teachers, demanding the use of new instruments, such as the test results, aggregated to three basic levels of learning achievement at certain stages within the study course (today at year 5, 8 and 9). Because accountability was put into action by this system, the new curriculum did not include specification of curriculum contents and methods, as in the case with earlier curricula, although the general part, consisting of overall goals and visions, remained the same.

Curriculum 2006 replaced principles and guidelines with a so-called 'School Poster'. This illustrated students' learning more directly than earlier guidelines. It highlighted principles, such as guaranteeing democratic values and introducing a set of learning strategies, which implied that all students should learn to plan, organize and evaluate their own learning. Self-management was thereby introduced as a core principle in compulsory schools.

The new curriculum required teachers to apply competence aims during assessment, mainly to improve outcomes. Schools were also asked to develop their learning environment. Besides competence aims, which was a new element in the curricula for compulsory schools, the state authorities introduced basic skills to be covered within and across the subjects. These skills were specified as orals skills, reading, writing, digital skills and numeracy. Although the competence aims contained contents, and it was assumed that certain subject matter should be covered within students' learning, they were not formulated to structure contents by creating boundaries for knowledge that was not relevant, like earlier curricula in Norway.
Rather, the competence aims and new assessment instruments encouraged the integration of formal and informal learning at different levels to improve

outcomes. For example, teachers were asked to assess students' learning according to a selection of competence aims, independent of where they had acquired their knowledge and skills, within the classroom according to what was taught or not taught. Hence, the connection between aims and teaching was weakened and more focus was put on what students should master through instruction after a study course. This orientation corresponds with international frameworks, such as for the PISA study.

Curriculum 2006 formally replaced Curriculum 1997 in August 2006, and was implemented for a period of three years. Still, it was introduced a year earlier in many municipalities and schools on a voluntary basis. Since the curriculum continued to be a formal regulation, all new principles were mandatory and had to be applied within municipalities and schools. Although the municipalities could delegate the responsibility to school principals and teachers, they still had the formal responsibility to follow up the selection and organisation of contents according to the overall national curriculum.

Our study reanalyses data that include almost all municipalities and schools that adopted the new curriculum from 2005 and onwards. Hence, the findings represent the first responses to a new curriculum. Since the new curriculum was implemented when the evaluation gained remarkable attention within the policy discourse, the first question in the questionnaire, about overall goals, was reformulated. This time, the questionnaire asked the respondents, according to their experiences, what they were held accountable for.
Since the questions and the selection of participants at the municipality and regional level were differently selected (see Table 1), we cannot statistically compare the results between the surveys on this question. However, the main findings from the 2005 survey (see Table 1, KL1.3) confirm in many ways what was observed during the first reform period. The majority of all groups refer to the overall goal of adapting teaching for the sake of learning. Pedagogical principles are still important. Over 75% of the group from the municipality level agrees on this point, while around 50% consider themselves to be accountable for students' learning and that the students perform in accordance with their abilities.

Teachers in this survey are even more concerned about the general goals of schooling and see themselves as less accountable for what the above administrative level or media publish as significant measures. When school principals are asked the same question, they answer that adaptive schooling with regard to the expectations of students and parents is the most important concern. They are also worried about achievement with regard to students' abilities. However, they are not worried about achievement in terms of competitiveness or success at local or national rankings. Hence, learning is part of the professional discourse, but not as the overall goal. They are not primarily concerned with implementing a new policy for its own sake. Moreover, the aspiration to be the best at public rankings gains the lowest score.

We see the same findings in other studies. In the same year, 2005, a questionnaire was sent to a representative selection of school principals from both primary and secondary schools in Norway. It was later reanalysed to represent only the compulsory school level (Skedsmo, 2009). All in all, the findings show evidence for a core interest in educational principles rather than a concern about policy implementation driven by hierarchical accountability. The respondents also claim not to be motivated by the league tables; although, in this part of reform period experience, they realize that achievement scores for their school, their municipality and their county are part of official statistics to be used for competition and accountability in schools (Langfeldt et al., 2008). Hence, educational practice does not necessarily follow the reform conceptions generated by political rationales.

3.3 What should a curriculum include?

In our study, we were particularly interested to see whether the new curriculum corresponded with the expectations of teachers and principals to a curriculum. What should the curriculum within this new policy context include from the point of view of principals and teachers and in terms of what conditions? Figures 2 and 3 compare how the two main surveys from each reform period correspond to the same question about which elements were expected to be included within a formal curriculum and how the elements should formally regulate education. The findings are limited to the

responses of teachers and principals and to lower-secondary education within compulsory schools, where we look for internal differences between the two periods for the same groups and also between groups within the same year.

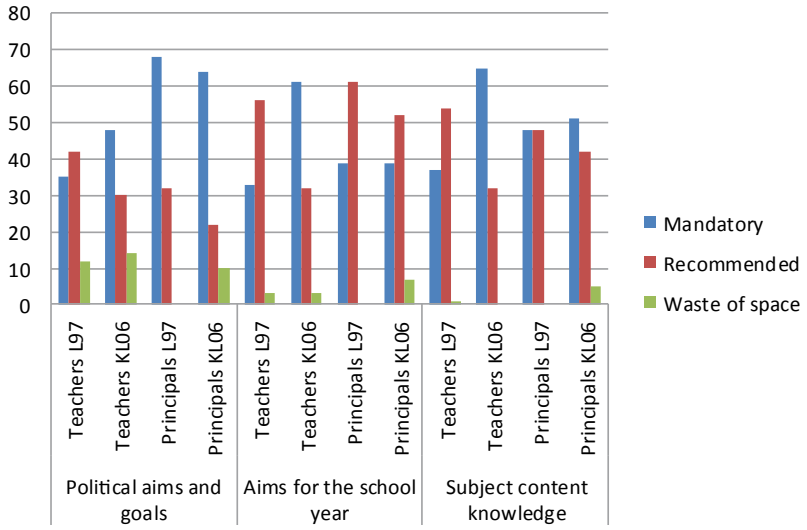

Figure 2: Teachers' and principals' responses as to which parts should be mandatory, recommended or not at all included within a national curriculum. Distributions of percentages within national surveys L97 f and KL1.3 (presented in table 1). L97 refers to Curriculum 97 and KL06 to Curriculum 06

Figure 2 illustrates the fact that teachers respond somewhat differently in the second reform period. They are far more positive about including political aims and goals, aims for the school year and subject content knowledge as mandatory parts. The views of principals on these matters are not so different between the periods. We also observe, because of the change in expectations among the teachers towards a more detailed curriculum, that school principals from the second period (KL06) are more critical to include aims of the school year and subject content knowledge as mandatory objectives.

We know from our document analysis that the new curriculum (KL06) puts more emphasis on the responsibility of municipalities and schools to develop a local curriculum. Through a national evaluation, and later on, through school inspections in some districts, municipalities and schools were criticized for

not accomplishing this task in accordance with the national goals. Since the formal curriculum in this second period included neither aims for the school year, nor a mandatory or recommended subject content knowledge in terms of units and topics, we observe that the conceptions of teachers are more critical to the current curriculum than the conceptions of school principals. However, both groups expect all three elements to be included in the curriculum, either as mandatory or as recommended, which means the new national curriculum did not fulfil expectations in this part of the reform period. This is also confirmed in later studies, which conclude that school principals and teachers ask for more concrete guidelines that are offered by the state authorities (Dale, Engelsen, & Karseth, 2011).

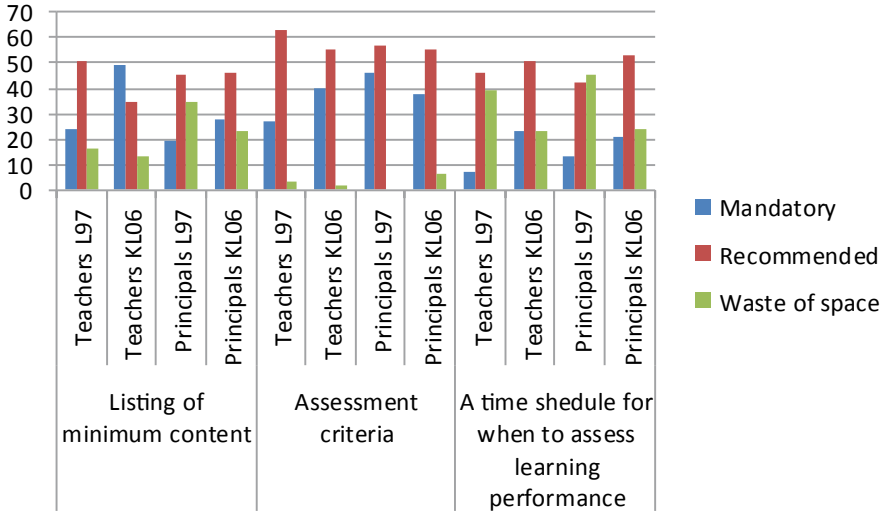

Figure 3: Teachers' and principals' responses as to which parts should be mandatory, recommended or not at all included within a national curriculum. Distributions of percentages within national surveys L97 f and KL1.3 (presented in table 1)

On three related items concerning the listing of minimum content, assessment criteria and time schedule for when to assess learning performance, we observe some noteworthy differences. With regard to the listing of minimum content, teachers in the second reform period are far more positive about including this as mandatory, which points to new models of curriculum reform, related to the common core standards in the United States, for example

(Porter et al., 2011). Also, principals are positive, but not as positive as teachers. More school principals than teachers consider listing of minimum contents a waste of space. However, not as many principals are critical about this element in the second period compared to the first reform period, which means they seem willing to adjust to the ideas of transnational models and frameworks borrowed from abroad. All in all, the respondents are more positive about listing a minimum content, in contrast to the then existing curriculum.

All the survey groups, in particular the teachers and the principals from the two reform periods, agree that assessment criteria are expected to be part of the curriculum. A majority of all groups expect such criteria to be recommended. When comparing the two periods, we observe that teachers from the last period are more positive about mandatory criteria than those from the first. However, the school principals are somewhat more critical. Since the national curriculum from neither the first nor the second period included assessment criteria, we find our respondents as expecting a new element in the national curriculum, which the current policy refuses to deliver during the period.

In both surveys, teachers and principals were asked if they should include tips to learning materials and methods. We found no large differences between the two surveys, and principals and teachers seem to agree. A large majority welcomes tips to learning materials and methods as a recommendation, but not as compulsory at a national basis. This is also contrary to the current curriculum policy, which becomes less educational in its approach to advocate pedagogy. This supports the view the national policy adjusts with transnational ideas and trends not being oriented to pedagogic principles despite the conceptions and interests of teachers and school principals (Sivesind, van den Akker, & Rosenmund, 2012).

4. What a curriculum can accomplish in terms of professional freedom

Now, we consider the issue of curriculum and the professional freedom within the context of national reform. The way in which state authorities regulate policy and schools by national reform is not only a professional question, but also a legislative one, according to traditions in Scandinavia and Germany

(Engelsen & Karseth, 2007; Scholl, 2012). Simultaneously, a formal curriculum ensures and restricts professional autonomy by its substantive approach, suggesting goals, aims and contents. The new revised curriculum, launched by the Ministry of Education during 2005-2006, will be considered on the back of a new assessment system that took form during the first decade of the 2000s. Through a new language of evaluation and learning, introduced through what van den Akker (2010) characterizes as a 'backdoor strategy', curriculum was considered to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Although the reform and the new curriculum was interpreted as more open in terms of how to detail teaching processes in schools, new constructs and expectations come to the forefront in regulating professional practices. Did Curriculum 2006 restrict professional autonomy differently to the old reform from the first period during the 1990s?

To understand the complexity of how curriculum shapes professional freedom across reform arenas, we will refer to a typology suggested by Hopmann (1999). According to a four-field model, which distinguishes between state-based curriculum work on the one side and evaluation-systems at the other, institutionalized traditions for curriculum regulations exist in Europe and the United States, partly explained by political structures and administrative systems. One explanation for how a state authorized curriculum potentially regulates professional freedom, attributes to both how programmatic goals and content are initially proposed and how reform actors, positioned within different fields, conceptualize their task of introducing a new national curriculum (Nieveen & Kuiper, 2012; van den Akker, Kuiper, & Hameyer, 2003). Finally, curriculum can also be aligned with complementary reform tools, such as a new legislation and test systems (Hopmann, 2003; Lundgren, 2003). In Norway, a new national test system was implemented during the 2000s.

In Figure 4, we observe the interrelatedness between curriculum and evaluation (vertical dimension) as outlined within national reform by, for example, curriculum developers engaged by the state authorities to formulate a new curriculum. We also see reform either directly or indirectly regulating curriculum practice and thereby professional conceptions and autonomy within education and school (horizontal dimension). We also differentiate

between examination and assessment (upper quadrants), which focus on the product dimension of schooling and a national or local curriculum focussing on processes that are either content-oriented or instructional by character (lower quadrants). Input and output regulations need to be divided to underscore the fact that both evaluation and curriculum have always been decisive for national reform. However, some say they are complementary functions.

Nonetheless, in contemporary policy, the traditions seem to merge to a point where curriculum and evaluation can regulate professional work as a structuring framework through input control (left side of the model) or potentially influence education and schooling through standards and expectations according to an output mode (right side of the model). Moreover, national reform can regulate professional freedom indirectly or more directly, dependent on how evaluations leave spaces open for professional control through content (left side of the model) or alternatively influencing professionals by targeting the inner life of their work (right side of model). To the degree teaching is not structured by formal content, a national reform might influence not only teaching, but also instruction and learning behind the classroom door (see Figure 4).

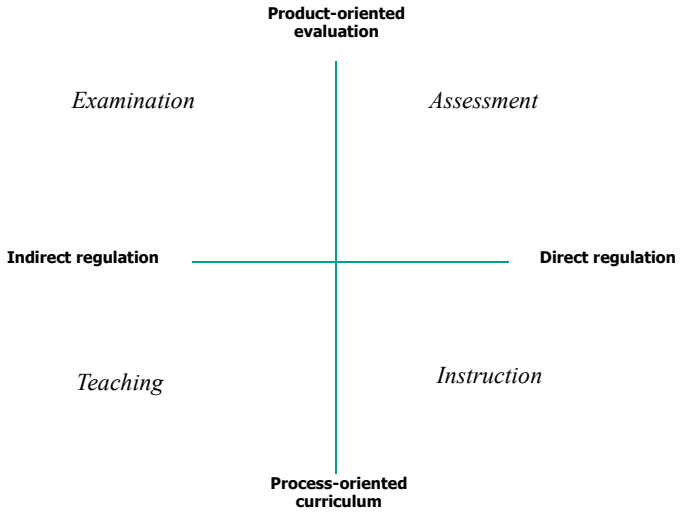

Figure 4: Four models of reform regulation (see also Hopmann, 1999)

According to our studies and the national evaluation of the Knowledge Promotion reform, schools were loyal to national policy by introducing a new curriculum in the 2000s. This curriculum was based on new approaches to assessment and presumed instruction for learning rather than teaching a particular content. Still, the curriculum did not specify criteria for assessment or core standards of a minimum of what to learn. Curriculum 2006 introduced new technology by focusing on competence and assessment for learning, which in many ways can be considered instructional through new technologies (right bottom corner of the model), which calls for a more detailed curriculum. Moreover, although the curriculum became more open-ended by being less goal-oriented and content-oriented, it was not necessarily protecting professional freedom and control, as our professionals partly signalled in asking for a curriculum that emphasizes goals and contents, to which Curriculum 2006 did not correspond.

Both Aasen et al. (2012) and Hodgson, Rönning and Tomlinson (2012) show that the Knowledge curriculum has been in active use in many schools. Yet, there are large variations in perception and interpretation of, for example, basic skills among the school principals and teachers. Aasen et al. (2012) write that the skills written up within the curriculum, which are instructional by assessing students' learning and outcomes, have rarely been a common concern for the school and that there is wide variation in how the term is understood among the teachers. Nevertheless, adoption of new semantics, suggested by the curriculum, appears to be part of a gradual improvement throughout the reform period in a selection of the case schools examined, and therefore adjusted according to a mixed model of reform (Sivesind, 2013). The Knowledge Promotion evaluation also shows that school administrators and teachers agreed with the new approach to include competence aims as part of the curriculum. Curricula, as they are designed, also adhere to local curriculum development and contribute to cooperation among teachers within the schools. Yet, researchers point out that the variations between schools are striking in regard to the initial goals and purposes (Aasen et al., 2012), which leads our focus to the old model of reform. Hodgson et al. (2012) conclude that teachers have generally increased their focus on assessment, but claim at the

same time that the reception of the detailed instructions offered by the central authorities is not at all clear. Relatively few teachers in their sample know the regulations so well that they can express themselves explicitly and clearly about the various dimensions of student assessment. Rather than recalling what regulations demand of the schools in terms of assessment practice, they refer to their own school practices, along with a process-oriented reform (bottom of our model, Figure 2).

Curriculum regulations in terms of applying a formal curriculum through national reform do not necessarily restrict professional freedom. This is because the formal boundaries of goals and contents without assessment that direct instruction in schools creates a wide professional space, legitimized by decisions taken by, for example, a government or a ministry. Much depends on how a curriculum is put into practice in regard to other policy tools, such as national evaluation systems. As long as the reform actors are not controlled in terms of what they do or accomplish, they feel free to choose between different recommendations suggested by the formal curriculum. If these suggestions, mandatory or not, instruct what to do, the conceptions will probably change. So far, this is not the case in Norway, neither in the 1990s reforms, nor within the Knowledge Promotion reform during the 2000s. Therefore, we can also understand why professionals across different reform arenas and periods welcome a comprehensive curriculum.

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Portugal - The mirage of curricular autonomy

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Abstract

The Portuguese curriculum policy is rooted in a centralist tradition, which started to be challenged in the context of the educational reform of the late 1980s. The policy-makers' discourse has been, for the past quarter-century, loaded with calls for decentralization and a number of measures with some decentralizing potential have been taken. A careful analysis of the main official documents, combined with a review of research reports, reveals that curriculum policy-making in Portugal is still very centralized and dependent on the prescription of detailed study plans and syllabi. These tend to be followed very strictly. Therefore, Portuguese schools are still far from becoming strong curriculum agencies.

1. Introduction

It is not easy to find global trends in policy making with regard to the countries' inclination towards either centralized prescription of the curriculum or strong reliance on school-based curricular decisions. Some policy-makers move towards one pole, other move towards the other pole. Furthermore, reversals of policy are frequent. Nevertheless, there is some evidence of a slow and piecemeal consolidation of decentralized approaches. Based on a comparative analysis of policies and on research findings, Kennedy (2010) states that, overall, despite the feeling that *"it appears that centralized control of curriculum will remain the dominant motif in curriculum policy-making"* (p. 15), *"some progress has been made in the consolidation of school-based curriculum development"* (p. 16). In a similar vein, Marsh (2010) states that there are promising examples of school-based curriculum development emerging

in many countries despite the tightening central control exerted by central authorities. A superficial analysis of the official documents through which the Portuguese curriculum-policy has been conveyed for the past quarter-century may suggest that Portugal has followed this growing tendency to accept the idea of schools as curriculum agencies. However, a deeper analysis of those documents, combined with a review of research reports, prompts questions on the extent to which such tendency has a real existence beyond rhetoric.
In the following sections, different moments of the history of the Portuguese curriculum will be considered. Firstly, the tradition followed by the educational system until 1986 are briefly characterized. Next, curriculum policies developed in two periods (1986-2000 and 2001-2010) are described and discussed. Finally, current policies are briefly discussed and commented.

2. The history of curriculum in Portugal

2.1 Plain centralism (until 1986)

The Portuguese curriculum policy is rooted in a centralist tradition, which dates back to the mid-nineteenth century (Pacheco, 2008) and centralism tends to be associated with uniformity. Accordingly, until the late 1980s, most of the curriculum decision-making was unquestioningly concentrated in the central administration. Agencies within the Ministry of Education or other national entities directly subordinated to it issued detailed prescriptions on what should be taught at every level of schooling across the whole country (autonomous regions included). Such prescriptions included lists of school subjects to be taught, accompanied with the specification of the amount of time that should be spent to each of those subjects every week. For every subject, a thick syllabus was usually issued – one that specified, in a very detailed way, the content to be covered. Sometimes the syllabi also included recommendations on teaching methods and on approaches to student assessment. In 2013, central prescription of detailed study plans and syllabi is still the main pillar of curriculum decision-making in Portugal. Yet, calls for more decentralized approaches have risen and a number of measures with some decentralizing potential have been taken.

2.2. Autonomy as an emerging challenge (1986-2000)

Calls for a more decentralized curriculum started to become visible in the early 1990s, through texts that had earlier roots. The most frequently cited criticism of curricular centralism and uniformity in Portugal is a Formoshino's call for attention to the inadequacy of a uniform, one-size-fits-all curriculum to the Portuguese student population – a criticism that is stated in well-known texts published in the early 1990s (Formosinho, 1991, 1993), which follow a less known text that had been written in 1987, in the context of the early stages of an important educational reform.

The foundation of that reform is Law 46/86 (later on, Law 115/97 and Law 49/2005 changed some aspects of Law 46/86), which, for the first time, set general rules for the organization of the Portuguese educational system in a democratic context. One should realize that, despite the fact that Portugal had become a democracy in 1974, such kind of law (comprehensive, governing the whole educational system) had not been published after 1973 – a year when Portugal was still a dictatorship. Through its statement of guiding principles for the organization of the Portuguese educational system, Law 46/86, published in 1986, conveys a commitment to the decentralization and diversification of *"educational structures and actions"* (Article 3g). Specifically with regard to the curriculum, this law determines that *"curricula of basic education shall be set at the national level, notwithstanding the possibility of flexible content that integrates regional components"* (Article 47.4). It also states that *"curricula of secondary education shall have a national structure, although some of their components may include regional and local features"* (Article 47.5). In addition, the law admits that curricular initiatives of a supplementary kind are taken at a wide range of levels, from the national level to the school level. Morgado (2000) interprets these passages of Law 46/86 as words that suggest the existence of some institutional willingness to value local contexts and increase the schools' power and competence. In the light of Law 46/86, curriculum decision-making in Portugal remained centralized to a large extent, on the basis of a national curriculum, but some degree of decentralization became possible. In order to understand how far the system has gone in the exploration of such possibility, it is necessary to start with analysing

the measures that were taken in the context of the educational reform that followed the publication of Law 46/86.

The authors of the preparatory documents that were issued at the early stages of that reform remarked that one of the main problems they were facing in terms of curriculum development was the excess of centralism in the decision-making process, which harmed the emergence of innovative experiences that could contribute to a better adequacy of the curriculum to local realities (Silva, Emídio, & Grilo, 1990a). This remark was made by the members of a team that had the specific mission of designing a proposal for new basic and secondary education curricula. In Portugal, basic education encompasses pre-school, whose attendance is not compulsory, and nine years of compulsory schooling, whose attendance is compulsory. Those nine years are organized into three stages. The first stage of basic education encompasses grades one through four, the second stage includes grades five and six, and the third stage lasts for three years. Secondary education lasts for three years. Its' attendance became compulsory in 2009.

The team responsible for proposing the new curricula was integrated into a larger entity: the Commission for the Reform of the Educational System. The team also cautioned that the degree of curriculum decentralization admitted by Law 46/86, including decentralization via the emergence of regional components, could only become effective if responsibility for that endeavour were assigned to qualified agents and if it were supported by a new attitude of participation (Silva, Emídio, & Grilo, 1990a). The proposal for the new curricula issued by the above-mentioned team called for decentralization of the services provided by the Ministry of Education, for the promotion of the schools' autonomy and for a vision of the school as an educational community, rather than as a peripheral service of the State, without an identity of its own. Such vision was amplified by a number of scholars, through the publication of many texts that explored, both at the theoretical and at the practical level, a number of related themes: schools as educational communities (Formosinho, 1989; Sarmento & Ferreira, 1994), the school's autonomy (Sarmento, 1993), and the educational project of the school as an instrument for the assertion

of the school's autonomy (Alves, 1993; Barroso, 1992; Canário, 1992; Carvalho & Diogo, 1994; Costa, 1992; Macedo, 1991). One of the most explicit sources of opportunity for the promotion of the schools' curricular autonomy proposed by the team consisted of a new curricular area, named 'Área-escola'. This was a trans-curricular area, which, unlike the traditional subjects, was not constrained by detailed syllabi or guidelines issued by the central administration. It was supposed to be planned by the schools through the conception and implementation of projects that were expected to have some impact on the local community and mobilise content from a wide range of subjects, by exploring the practical implications of that same content, thus concretising concepts and consolidating ideas (Silva, Emídio, & Grilo, 1990b).

After a period of public debate, the curricular reform was legislated, the most relevant piece of legislation being Decree 286/89, which set a new structure for basic and secondary education curricula. In the preamble of this document, the legislators claimed that such reform stimulated local initiative, by allowing for margins of curricular autonomy in the construction of multidisciplinary curricular projects and in the establishment of partnerships between the school and institutions from the community. The decree confirmed the creation of 'Área-escola', which was supposed to take between 95 and 110 hours of the students' time every year, both in basic and secondary education. The responsibility for deciding on the content of this curricular area was assigned to the schools. More specifically, all the teachers of a given class were expected to work as a team in the development of a project for the class and decide on how each subject would contribute to it. In addition, the schools were allowed to provide a supplementary curriculum of a non-compulsory kind, which was based on "joyful and cultural activities", including school sport, "aimed at a creative and formative use of the students' free time" (Decree 286/89, Article 8).

In parallel, legislation that ruled other aspects of the educational reform was issued, including legislation on the schools' autonomy and management. School autonomy was then defined, via Decree 43/89, as the school's capacity to create and implement its own educational project. Three dimensions of

autonomy were considered in that piece of legislation: cultural, administrative, and pedagogical. Pedagogical autonomy includes the school's capacity to create and implement the above-mentioned supplementary curriculum, to design and implement projects of remedial teaching and to participate, with other schools, in the definition of regional and local components of the curriculum. Other pieces of legislation on school organization and management that were published some years later, especially Decree 172/91 and Decree 115-A/98, confirmed the official assertion of the educational project as the most important of the documents through which each school reveals its identity and exercises its autonomy. In addition, the latter decree allowed schools to deepen their autonomy by signing 'autonomy contracts' with the Ministry of Education, with the municipalities and eventually with other entities. The degree of decentralisation allowed by the afore-mentioned measures could hardly threaten centralization as the dominant orientation of curriculum policy in Portugal. Sousa Fernandes (2003) noted that the new curricula kept the previous organizing scheme. In a similar vein, Pacheco (1994) stated that little or nothing had changed with the reform in terms of curricular structure and decision-making. For this author, the reform adopted *"a closed, uniform and centralized model"* (sic, p. 51).

Research on curricular autonomy conducted in that period reveals that the Portuguese teachers considered it one of the least relevant dimensions of school autonomy at large. They tended to emphasize the administrative rather than the curricular dimension of school autonomy (Morgado, 2000). But even school autonomy at large (not curricular autonomy in particular) took very slow steps, in practice. The fact that not a single autonomy contract was signed between 1998 and 2005 (Silva, 2010) is especially revealing. Furthermore, research on educational projects suggests that such projects tended to be regarded as external to the day-to-day reality of the schools, that is, as *"unreliable fictions"*, with no relevance to school development (Fontoura, 2001, p. 135). Findings from specific research on 'Área-escola' suggest that opportunities to use this area as a lever for enhancing local agency in terms of curriculum decision-making were wasted. Pereira (1998) described and discussed cases wherein original ideas for the design of 'Área-escola' projects

through a problem-solving approach, unconstrained by the subjects syllabi, easily diverted into additive approaches, whereby teachers of different subjects demonstrated that each subject was contributing to the exploration of a given theme. In other words, teachers tended to disavow the possibility of becoming *"generators of curriculum"*. Instead, they tended to reproduce, in the context of 'Área-escola', *"their habit to put a given curriculum into practice"* (Pereira, 1998, p. 306).

In that period, curricular autonomy could also be exerted, to some extent, in the context of special programs that were created for specific purposes, including alternative curricula for students affected by persistent underachievement or at risk of dropout, and priority educational territories, which were set in areas with a high concentration of such problems. Research on those programs also disclosed wasted opportunities to enhance teachers' competences as curriculum decision-makers, inasmuch as they tended to concentrate their agency on peripheral rather than on central aspects of the curriculum. Afonso (2000, p. 208), commenting on two studies presented at a national conference on priority educational territories, concluded that teachers' incapacity to introduce significant changes in the management of the core curriculum was emphasized in both studies; the effort of 'priority intervention' was concentrated on peripheral aspects: instructional support, school clubs, parties, et cetera. Commenting on other studies presented at the same conference, he emphasized the same idea.

In short, the end of the 20th century was marked by the emergence of strong calls for autonomy, both in the political and in the academic discourse, although such calls were not enthusiastically accompanied by the voices of teachers and school leaders. Policy-makers took some measures that allowed for moderate forms of curricular autonomy, which were used by schools and teachers with even more moderation.

2.3 Autonomy as the flip side of accountability? (2001-2010)

In the transition from the 20th to the 21st century, there was a renewal of discourses that questioned the tradition of uniformity and centralism that still

characterized the Portuguese curriculum policy, especially in the case of basic education. Some of those discourses were initiated by top-level educational authorities, which took some initiatives that somehow challenged the above-mentioned tradition. One of the most outstanding initiatives was the project 'Flexible Curriculum Management' (FCM), launched in 1997 by the Department of Basic Education – a branch of the Ministry of Education –, following the project 'Participated Reflection on Curricula for Basic Education' (PRCBE). Those projects were aimed at the exploration of ways of increasing flexibility in the organization of the curriculum at the school level and enhancing schools' and teachers' curricular autonomy. An increasing number of schools participated in those projects: 10 in the school year 1997/98, 34 in 1998/99, 93 in 1999/2000, and 180 in 2000/2001. These figures include some groupings of schools under a single administrative unit. According to the National Institute of Statistics, in 2001 there were 15,669 schools in Portugal, including all kinds of schools (basic and secondary, public and private) except higher education institutions.

On January 18, 2001, a reorganization of the curriculum, based on the principles that had guided FCM and PRCBE, was officially determined, via Decree 6/2001, for all the Portuguese basic schools. In the same year, the Department of Basic Education issued an official document entitled 'National curriculum for basic education – Essential competencies' (ME/DEB, 2001). This document was presented as another facilitator of autonomous curriculum management, via projects designed at the school level and at the classroom level. It was committed to a competency-based approach, included suggestions on teaching methods, and expressed the ambition that its use would imply a reconsideration of the syllabi's role (ME/DEB, 2001), that is, a decrease in teachers' dependence on detailed syllabi as the main guides of their work. Four years earlier, in their first report on PRCBE, the reporters (Roldão, Nunes, & Silveira, 1997, p. 90) had written the following comment on the results of the discussion of the proposal with teachers: *"Teachers and schools seem neither to view curriculum management as their business nor to consider it a priority (...). Having been, in the past, considered mere executers of syllabi, unable to decide what to teach, they tend to be more concerned with their working conditions and*

to direct most of their expectations to the central administration as a provider of solutions." These words suggest that Portuguese teachers' mindset has been so framed by a centralist tradition that they will have serious difficulties in playing the role of autonomous curriculum managers that, according to emergent discourses, is increasingly expected from them. A study on FCM, conducted by Esteves (2002), confirms the existence of such a difficulty. According to this author, flexibility – another key-concept of the current curricular reform – is frequently regarded only in the light of the power schools have nowadays to decide how to allocate time slots to different subjects, within certain limits. But flexibility in deciding what educational objectives to pursue, what teaching strategies to use, what assessment and evaluation devices to use with particular students in a particular context – which are the most important issues in a flexible curriculum management – are still regarded by most teachers as too difficult to plan and implement.

As suggested above, Decree 6/2001 officially inaugurated a period when new attempts to decentralise, to some extent, curriculum decision-making in basic education were made, by taking the results of projects FCM and PRCBE into consideration. Before the publication of that piece of legislation, the government had diagnosed the *"excessive uniformity of educational action"* (ME, 1998, p. 8) as one of the major problems of the educational system. Consequently, the government committed itself *"to consolidating a common national curriculum and to supporting flexible curriculum management"* (ME, 1998, p. 10), which should be used *"to adapt teaching to diverse contexts and, simultaneously, make its quality better for all"* (ME, 1998, p. 19). The preamble of Decree 6/2001 confirms such commitment, by presenting the new curriculum as an outcome of an emergent need: To overcome a view of curriculum as a set of norms to be followed in a supposedly uniform manner in every classroom and to support the development of new practices of curriculum management, in the context of the schools' increasing autonomy. The decree emphasizes curricular projects, to be designed both at the school level and at the classroom level, as major instruments of local decision-making in the context of the national curriculum. Decree 6/2001 also increased opportunities of curricular autonomy through the creation of three non-disciplinary areas

that should be organized by the schools, unconstrained by detailed syllabi or national guidelines: the project area (which, to a large extent, resembled ‹Área-escola›), guided learning (aimed at the development of the students' competence to organize their learning activities autonomously), and civic education. In addition, schools were encouraged to provide non-compulsory activities for curriculum enrichment in the domains of sport, the arts, science and technology, voluntarism and European issues (Decree 6/2001, Article 9). Legislation that was issued some years later determined that such activities had to be made available for all the students of public schools until they finished the first stage of basic education, although attendance by the students remained non-compulsory. At the same time, the decree determined, in a very detailed way, the kinds of activities that had to be provided, the length of the time slots allocated to them and the characteristics of the teachers who could supervise them.

As it usually happens in this kind of legislation, Decree 6/2001 presented lists of school subjects to be taught, accompanied with the specification of the amount of time that should be spent on each of those subjects (and, in this specific case, to the non-disciplinary areas as well) every week. Noticeably, some flexibility was allowed, according to a footnote in the decree, which reads as follows: *"The school may propose a different organization of the students' time, in terms of amount of hours allocated to each subject, when there is a justification for that"*. However, in the specific case of the first stage of basic education, legislation published in 2006 determined minimal numbers of weekly hours to be allocated to every curricular area, which represents a step back in terms of flexibility, considering the fact that, in the first stage of basic education, responsibility for teaching most of the curricular areas has been assigned to one teacher only and, before 2006, that teacher could decide how much time would be dedicated to each curricular area. This creation of obstacles to curriculum integration in the first stage of basic education, the fact that the Ministry of Education prescribed detailed rules for the provision and organisation of curriculum enrichment activities, and the fact that teachers and school leaders had to justify flexible forms of organising the students' time are examples of situations wherein opportunities to strengthen schools' and teachers' power to decide on the curriculum were wasted. Such situations

suggest that curricular autonomy has been praised through the official discourse but, in practice, formal obstacles have impaired its development. Besides considering those formal obstacles, it is necessary to understand that schools' and teachers' ownership of the curriculum cannot quickly and easily rise after more than a century of centralism. Findings from research conducted in that period on several aspects of curriculum development support this idea. Some studies demonstrated that the construction of curricular projects, both at the school level and at the classroom level, was being induced by teachers' and school leaders' willingness to respect legal obligations, rather than emerging from a sense of local ownership of the curriculum (Freire, 2005; Gonçalves, 2008; Machado, 2006; Martins, 2007). Research on activities for curriculum enrichment provided evidence of many constraints in the relationship between the school teachers who supervised the activities and teachers contracted by the municipalities to implement them. Such constraints decreased opportunities for the consolidation of autonomous and integrated approaches to the development of that part of the curriculum (Cruz & Machado, 2011; Pereira, 2010). Studies on curriculum differentiation at the school level and at the classroom level (Marques, 2002; Sousa, 2004; Sousa, 2007b) found a persistent view of the curriculum as a prescription issued by the central authorities, which tended to be applied in a uniform way, some *ad hoc* practices of differentiation notwithstanding.

In that period, a regional curriculum for basic education started to emerge in the Azores – one of the autonomous regions of Portugal. Until the beginning of the 21st century, the Azores did not have a curriculum policy of their own. But in 2001 the Legislative Assembly, which is the main political authority in the region, included, for the first time, the concept of regional curriculum in a piece of legislation: Decree 15/2001/A. In that official document, it was stated that the regional curriculum should be understood as the content to be learnt and the competencies to be developed by students on the basis of the geographical, economic, cultural, political, and administrative characteristics of the Azores. As these words suggest, the emergence of a regional curriculum policy in the Azores has been justified in the official discourse by reference to the fact that this region is both insular and politically autonomous (Sousa,

2007a, 2012). Interestingly, Madeira, another Portuguese region, also has these two characteristics but does not have a regional curriculum, although some research suggests that most teachers who work in that archipelago are in favour of the idea of a regional curriculum (Carvalho, 2009). The consolidation of the Azorean curriculum policy has progressed slowly at the formal level and there is a lack of research on its impact at the level of the implemented curriculum. A set of curriculum competencies to be promoted in the schools of the region was officially approved in 2004 and revised in 2011.

Meanwhile, school autonomy progressed very slowly in the country. The first autonomy contract was signed in 2005. Between 2005 and 2010 only 24 schools signed autonomy contracts. Findings from research conducted in those schools (Ferreira, 2012; Freitas, 2010; Silva, 2010) suggest that, in practice, their autonomy was not strengthened. Centralism has prevailed and the autonomy contract has been conceived *"as an instrument that legitimates and stresses decisions that had already been taken, without enhancing local empowerment or the actors' capacity as decision-makers"* (Silva, 2010, p. 98).
At the international level, the growing tendency to accept the idea of schools as curriculum agencies was being accompanied by an increase in the adoption of teacher evaluation and school evaluation measures in many countries. Some authors have interpreted such tendency as the outcome of a strategy aimed at strengthening control while praising schools' and teachers' curricular autonomy. Krejsler (2005) views this relationship between autonomy and evaluation in education as part of a wider phenomenon whereby a large portion of the public sector has been increasingly subject to changes. These changes are characterized by a decentralization of decision-making as well as centralization in the form of broad descriptions of aims and goals for public service that are controlled at the output level through quality assessment by a major expansion of detailed auditing and (self-)evaluation measures.
As a member of the EU, the OECD and other international organizations, Portugal has been influenced by this movement towards the implementation of school evaluation and teacher evaluation devices. Accordingly, a system of school evaluation started being implemented in Portugal in 2002, under the leadership of the General Inspectorate of Education, and a new model of

teacher evaluation was established in 2008. Furthermore, external assessment of student achievement through examinations increased in that period. Teacher evaluation already existed in the country, but the previous model had a predominantly administrative orientation and few practical effects in terms of teachers' professional development (Pacheco & Flores, 1999). The new model valued ethics and professionalism, quality in classroom teaching, participation in the school as an organization and as an educational community, and professional development. Although appraisal of teachers' curricular work was not very explicit in the model, the assessment instruments that were created in order to collect evidence along the process included some items that were, to some extent, related to teachers' competences as curriculum decision-makers. Examples of such competences included: accurate planning; adequacy of teaching strategies to students' prior knowledge; diversity, adequacy, and accurateness of educational materials.

If ownership of the curriculum was already embedded in the Portuguese teachers' professional culture, perhaps the use of evaluation as the flip side of autonomy could have contributed to the enhancement of the latter. Since a centralist conception of the curriculum has prevailed in teachers' thinking and practice, teacher evaluation could not easily contribute to the enhancement of curricular autonomy. Nevertheless, a strong coherence between curriculum policy and teacher evaluation policy could have facilitated some progress in the promotion of such autonomy. Teacher evaluation has the potential to contribute to teachers' professional development, as long as it includes a strong formative dimension, accountability notwithstanding. By prompting reflection on the distance between the observed and the desired practice and by suggesting changes, evaluation can contribute to the improvement of teachers' competences, including competences related to curriculum decision-making.

The teacher evaluation model that was created in Portugal in 2008 was based on organizing principles that emphasized its implications for professional development. But a detailed analysis of the legislation that supported the model reveals that it lacked a formative dimension, for it did not include any device that ensured the early identification of teachers' difficulties, let

alone the provision of support in order to help these teachers overcome them (Morgado & Sousa, 2010). In addition, the implementation of the model was so troublesome that it is difficult to imagine how it could generate any benefit in terms of professional development. It was the main cause of a strong conflict between the Ministry of Education and the teachers' unions, which, in November 2008, fuelled the biggest demonstration of teachers ever observed in Portugal – 120,000 teachers protesting in the streets of Lisbon.
The formative dimension of school evaluation has been more visible. Year after year, the General Inspectorate of Education has produced evaluation reports that describe schools' performance in key-domains, including leadership and provision of the educational service. In the specific context of the latter domain, the reports have consistently discussed curricular issues. Such consistent discussion has potential to encourage school-based curriculum development, although some research suggests that curricular centralism still operates as an obstacle to that desideratum (Domingos, 2010).

In short, the first decade of the 21st century was marked by renewed calls for curricular autonomy, along with a strong increase in evaluation measures. Simply put, evaluation has both a formative and a summative dimension. The latter was used for accountability purposes. The former was not ignored, but could have been further explored as a source of professional and organisational development in various domains, including autonomous curriculum development.

2.4 Autonomy as freedom to choose the means without questioning the goals? (2011-...)

In June 2011, a new government took over. Its discourse and its educational policy have been based on the following key-words: rigour, excellence, disciplinary knowledge, focus on 'fundamental subjects' (Portuguese, Mathematics, History, Geography, Physics, Chemistry, and Natural Sciences), and measurable goals. The first measures taken by the new Ministry of Education with regard to the basic education curriculum consisted of the nullification of both the document 'National curriculum for basic education – Essential competencies' and Decree 6/2001. The previous curriculum was

criticized for being oriented towards the development of competencies, which, according to the new Minister, undervalued knowledge and harmed knowledge transmission, memorization, the development of automatisms, and the accurate measurement of student achievement. The current official discourse has also emphasized commitments to decentralization and de-bureaucratisation. Furthermore, it has repeatedly stated the following position (Dispatch 17169/2011): *"The national curriculum shall set the knowledge and the essential skills that all the students should acquire, as well as allowing teachers to decide how to teach (...). Teachers should be given a larger professional freedom in terms of how they organise and teach the curriculum."* New measures also included the introduction of vocational streams in basic education, the introduction of exams at the end of the fourth and sixth grades (Until 2011, examinations were only taken in secondary education and at the end of basic education - i.e., the ninth grade), and the abolition of non-disciplinary areas (project area, guided learning, and civic education; citizenship education is now mentioned in the official documents as a cross-curricular area) both in the second and in the third stages of basic education. In the specific case of the second stage, a new area, named 'supported learning', was created. This area, which, to some extent, resembles 'guided learning', has to be provided by all the schools but has to be attended only by the students who, according to the class council, need it. The obligation to design curricular projects at the school level and at the classroom level ceased, although 'activity plans' for adapting the curriculum to the characteristics of each class are still required. In addition, the power to decide how much time students spend with each subject every week was granted to schools, within given limits.

In the Azores, the regional authorities have proceeded with a curriculum policy whose connection with the national policy is not straightforward. In 2011, the regional government issued a framework of reference that not only revises the competencies that had been approved in 2004 but also conveys a wide range of guidelines that cover all the components of the curriculum. The text of this framework of reference was copied into an electronic book that was sent to the schools and published online in the summer of 2011 (Alonso et al., 2011).
This new regional curriculum is organized around the following elements:

1. Political and epistemological justification of the regional curriculum.
2. Identification of key-competencies, both of a cross-curricular kind and specific to each curriculum area.
3. Guidelines on how each level of basic education (from pre-school to the ninth grade) and each curriculum area can contribute to the development of the cross-curricular key-competencies.
4. Guidelines on how each level of basic education and each curriculum area can approach the transversal themes (sustainable development and *Azoreaness*).
5. Guidelines on teaching methods.
6. Guidelines on assessment of student learning.
7. Guidelines for the construction of instructional materials.

As this summary suggests, currently the Azorean curriculum is not fully aligned with the national curriculum. The former values the development of competencies, whereas the latter does not; the former suggests teaching methods, whereas suggestions on how to teach have, to a large extent, been removed from the latter. Yet, Azorean schools still work with the national syllabi, which are still the main guides of teachers' work, and Azorean students take the national exams.

It is too early yet to provide solid interpretations of the curriculum policies being developed in the second decade of the 21st century. Studying them in depth is certainly a new challenge for researchers. Nevertheless, the discourses that have already been produced and the measures that have already been taken suggest that the Ministry of Education is now implicitly taking a canon-based curriculum, made of the so-called fundamental subjects, as a given, while emphasizing schools' and teachers' autonomy in the choice of the means to access it and in the provision and organisation parts of the curriculum that are not considered so fundamental. The assertion of a curriculum policy in the Azores, at least at the formal level, is an interesting phenomenon, considering that is has not been paralleled by an equivalent trend in Madeira, the other autonomous region of Portugal.

3. Conclusion

The Portuguese tradition in terms of curriculum policy is centralist. That tradition has been challenged by many discourses and by a number of concrete measures. Yet, schools are still far from being regarded as strong curriculum agencies and teachers' work is still very dependent on detailed syllabi issued by the central administration. Those thick documents still tend to be followed very closely, even in the Azores, where a regional curriculum policy has emerged.

This relationship between the succinctness of the official documents and curricular autonomy is a critical issue. In educational systems where there is strong reliance on school leaders and on teachers as curriculum decision-makers, the curriculum guidelines issued at the national level are usually concise. In Portugal, a timid attempt to reconsider the syllabi's role and to provide the main representation of the whole national curriculum for basic education in a single document was made in the period 2001-2010. But the strength of the syllabi prevailed in that period and has been even more emphasised after 2011. While schools and teachers operate predominantly as followers of detailed syllabi issued by the central administration curricular autonomy will certainly remain a mirage.

Certain curricular areas are being presented as unquestioningly fundamental. They have been officially declared fundamental and they are covered by national exams. Therefore, teachers will focus on them. They will also be free to choose how to teach them. Autonomy to choose the means without questioning the goals is a kind of autonomy that lacks a critical dimension, for it is based on the assumption that the curriculum is a given, rather than a reality under continuous reconstruction at various levels of decision-making.

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Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland - Local flexibility or national exemplification?

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Abstract

Scottish education has undergone a significant curricular change across the last decade. The introduction of Curriculum for Excellence has led to national debate about a range of interrelated issues including methodology, curriculum planning, assessment, qualifications, timetabling and the articulation of the different phases of education from 'early' to 'senior'. Whilst Curriculum for Excellence has moved away from the perceived prescriptive nature of the previous 5-14 curriculum to give greater flexibility, there have been continuing requests from practitioners and those who represent them for ever greater levels of 'exemplification' as implementation continues. This chapter examines the continuing paradox of the broad welcome for greater flexibility coupled with the demand for 'exemplification', along with examples of ways in which this extra detail has been provided.

1. Introduction

The Education (Scotland) Act 2000 (Scottish Executive, 2000) provides that *"education should be directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential"* and that *"due regard, so far as is reasonably practicable, should be paid to the views of the child or young person in decisions that significantly affect them, taking account of the child or young person's age and maturity"*.

In 2002, the Scottish Executive (from 2007 retitled the 'Scottish Government' under a new administration) undertook the most extensive consultation ever of the people of Scotland on the state of school education through the National Debate on Education. Some people - pupils, parents, teachers, employers and others - said that they valued and wanted to keep many aspects of the current curriculum. However, many others also made compelling arguments for changes to ensure all our young people achieve successful outcomes and are equipped to contribute effectively to the Scottish economy and society, now and in the future.

It was against this educational backdrop that the Scottish Executive established a Curriculum Review Group in October 2003 to identify the purposes of education from age 3 to 18 and to outline principles for the design of the curriculum. The Group was asked to take account of the views expressed during the National Debate, current research and international comparisons. It also considered global factors, which would have strong influences on the aims and purposes of education over the coming decades, including changing patterns of work, increased knowledge of how children learn and the potential of new technologies to enrich learning. In addition, the Group was asked to take a broad view of children's development, within the wider framework of Integrated Children's Services, bearing in mind the wide range of adults directly involved in the education of children and young people, in early years centres, schools, colleges and out of school learning. According to the Times Educational Supplement Scotland, "*what emerged from the group's first meeting was a focus on learning styles and belief in instilling a passion for learning in all. Learning can be fun and should be enjoyable, so the group will see that it is.... There seems to be consensus that early years education would and must impact on the whole 3-18 curriculum and that transition stages throughout education to employment would be a crucial focus. Schools should not be held responsible for the growth of a child, nor for all of society's ills, but the curriculum should equip children for full citizenship*." (Times Educational Supplement Scotland, 2003). The result of this work was *A Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive, 2004).

2. Background

The original report from the Curriculum review Group, *A Curriculum for Excellence*, outlined three important aspects:

1. The **values** upon which the Group believed the curriculum should be based:
   - Wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity: the words that are inscribed on the mace of the Scottish Parliament have helped to define values for our democracy.
2. The **purpose** of the school curriculum 3 to 18 and the outcomes which they intended all young people to achieve (Figure 1):
   - All children and young people *"should be **successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens** and **effective contributors** to society and at work. By providing structure, support and direction to young people's learning, the curriculum should enable them to develop these four capacities. The curriculum should complement the important contributions of families and communities."*
3. The **design principles** which schools, teachers and other educators should use to implement the curriculum, and which would be used in a process of national reform:
   - Challenge and enjoyment
   - Breadth
   - Progression
   - Depth
   - Personalization and choice
   - Coherence
   - Relevance

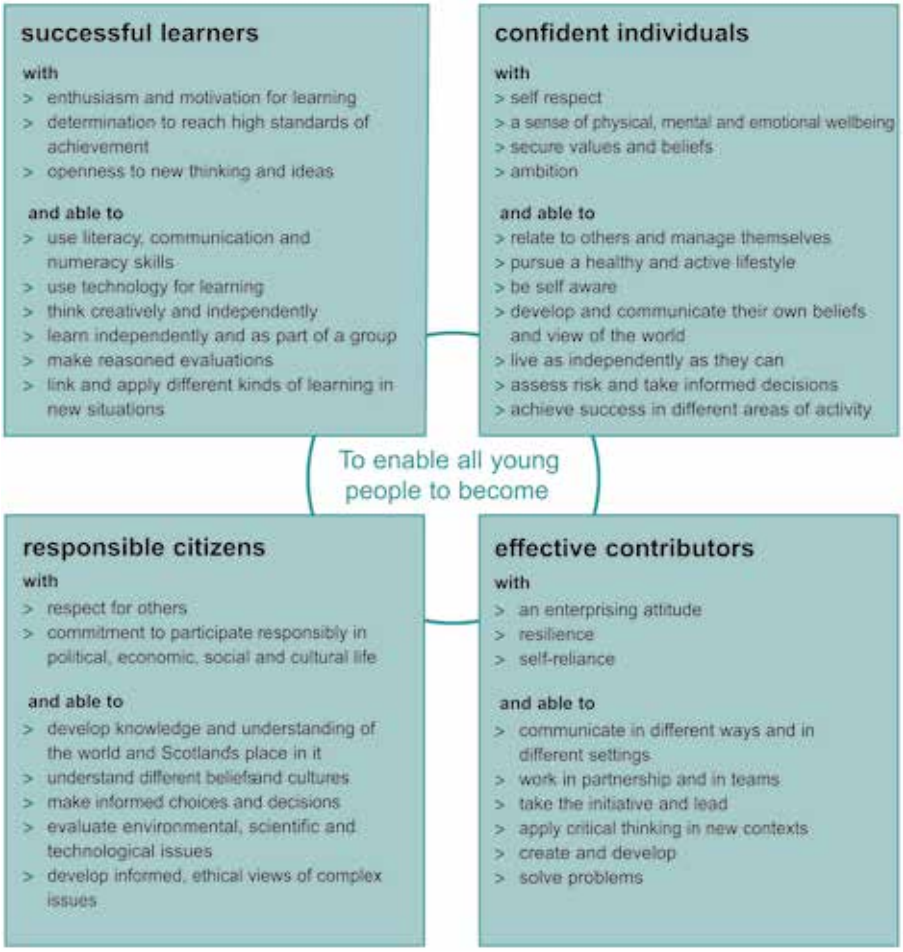

Figure 1: *The 'four capacities' (Scottish Executive, 2004)*

3. Guidance documents

Over the ensuing years, a range of documents was produced, published by the Scottish Executive and then the Scottish Government, to help individual practitioners, schools and local authorities to plan for, and then implement, changes in the curriculum for learners from age 3 to 18, and potentially beyond, using the principles outlined in the initial Curriculum Review Group document. Each document was contributed to, and endorsed by, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

'Building the Curriculum 1' (Scottish Executive, 2006) was the first official guidance document. It focuses on the eight curriculum areas:

- Expressive arts
- Health and wellbeing
- Languages
- Mathematics
- Religious and moral education
- Sciences
- Social studies
- Technologies

The document explains that each curriculum area makes its own unique contribution to developing the four capacities of children and young people, both within its own disciplinary contexts and through connections with other areas of learning. The document draws on classroom practice to describe some of these contributions and possible connections.

'Building the Curriculum 2' (Scottish Executive, 2007) provides an overview of active learning approaches in practice. It describes the experiences and outcomes for children's learning, supporting a more active approach to learning and teaching in early primary school. 'Active learning' is defined as learning that engages and challenges children's thinking using real-life and imaginary situations, rather than that which simply involves physical movement.

'Building the Curriculum 3' (Scottish Government, 2008) has in many ways been the most significant of all guidance documents and is still regularly referred to by practitioners. It includes a definition and purpose for the curriculum, principles for curriculum design, the central place of the experiences and outcomes and a range of entitlements for all children and young people. It challenges all of those involved in planning the curriculum to work as partners to provide more opportunities for vocational education and the need to promote greater flexibility and creativity in curriculum design and provision. In addition, there is a continuing need to 'raise the bar' to ensure that young people are challenged to achieve to their maximum potential, and to this end

a number of entitlements are specified. Every child and young person is entitled to expect their education to provide them with:

- A curriculum which is **coherent** from 3 to 18.
- A **broad general education**, including well planned experiences and outcomes across all the curriculum areas from early years through to S3.
- A **senior phase** of education after S3 which provides opportunities to obtain qualifications as well as to continue to develop the four capacities.
- Opportunities to develop **skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work** (including career planning skills) with a continuous focus on **literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing**.
- **Personal support** to enable them to gain as much as possible from the opportunities which Curriculum for Excellence can provide;
- Support in moving into **positive and sustained destinations** beyond school.

The document (figure 2) provides a framework for curriculum planners to meet these challenges and opportunities.

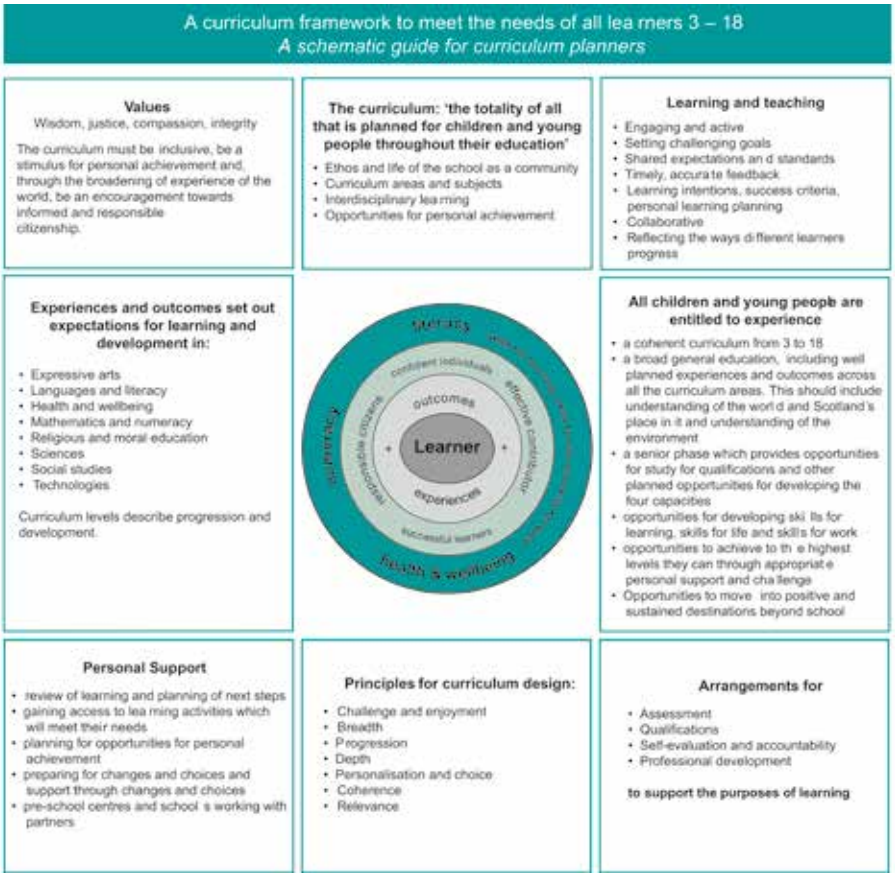

Figure 2: Curriculum planning framework (Scottish Government, 2008)

The guidance document does not provide a set of templates which can be applied across the system as there is a realization that there will be the need for models to be developed at local level to address local needs and circumstances. Establishments and partners at all levels in the system are encouraged to consider and reflect on the framework set out here and to consider how, individually and in partnership, they can begin to adopt more fully the values, purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence. In many establishments, this is still a 'work in progress', often using the diagram above to structure the overall shape of their curriculum. The document also lays out the different levels of Curriculum for Excellence. The experiences and outcomes are grouped into five levels - early (in which most children will

undertake learning to the end of Primary 1); first (in which most children will undertake learning by the end of Primary 4); second (in which most children will undertake learning by the end of Primary 7); third (in which most young people will undertake learning during S1 – S3) and fourth (in which most young people will have undertaken learning by the end of S3). For all children and young people, learning, at whatever level, will be managed in a manner that paves the way for work towards qualifications in the senior phase at the level appropriate to their needs and achievements.

'Building the Curriculum 4' (Scottish Government, 2009) sets out key messages about how children and young people develop and apply skills. This publication is intended to support planning, design and delivery of the curriculum in pre-school centres, schools and colleges. It sets out skills for learning, life and work and shows how they are embedded in the experiences and outcomes and the senior phase. It supports thinking about evidence of progression in those skills and how they can be developed and applied across learning and in different contexts. As many schools were still grappling with the curriculum planning issues raised in '*Building the Curriculum 3'*, this document was not seen as such a priority for establishments when it was published. Now that schools are developing the senior phase, practitioners are looking afresh at this document's guidance in that area.
'Building the Curriculum 4' was also overshadowed by the publication in June 2009 of the final version of the 'Principles and Practice' practitioner guidance papers for each area of the curriculum along with the related 'experiences and outcomes', which specified what children and young people would be expected to be able to do across the different stages of their education in a range of aspects relating to each curriculum area. Teams, including practitioners, had been working on these documents for each curriculum area and drafts were circulated for comment before the final versions were produced. Whilst the intense debates around the finalized experiences and outcomes and their use in curriculum planning should be noted, there is not space to do them justice in this chapter.

Finally, '*Building the Curriculum 5*' (Scottish Government, 2010) provides guidance for all teaching staff on the main areas of the assessment strategy for Curriculum for Excellence. It sets out key messages about principles of assessment, standards and expectations, ensuring consistency, training and support, reporting to parents, informing self-evaluation for improvement and monitoring standards over time. Unusually, there were also four separately published appendices to the original document, which dealt with specific areas in more detail.

Firstly, '*Building the Curriculum 5: Reporting*' (Scottish Government, 2010) provides staff with advice on reporting to parents, including information on reporting on progress within a level.

Secondly, '*Building the Curriculum 5: A framework for assessment: understanding, applying and sharing standards - quality assurance and moderation*' (Scottish Government, 2010) has information on the support structures at national level to ensure that quality assurance and moderation are fair and consistent and that local and national practices are aligned.

Thirdly, '*Building the Curriculum 5: Recognising achievement, profiling and reporting*' (Scottish Government, 2010) provides advice on developing common approaches to these which relate closely to the processes of learning and teaching. Fourthly, and finally, '*Building the Curriculum 5: Quality assurance and moderation*' (Scottish Government, 2011) develops the features of quality assurance and moderation in assessment 3 to 18, provides examples of current practices and proposes how these can be further developed for Curriculum for Excellence.

4. The role of inspection

The process of inspecting educational establishments has also had a part to play in the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. HM Inspectors worked for HMIE (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education), which has since been amalgamated with other national education agencies to form Education Scotland, the national education improvement agency in Scotland. Education Scotland aims to provide assurance on the quality of Scottish education and promote improvement and innovation to enhance learners' experiences and lead to better outcomes. The evaluations from these inspections also

contribute to National Performance Framework reporting to the Scottish Government. Each year, HM Inspectors inspect and report on the quality of education in a sample of pre-school centres, primary schools, secondary schools, special schools, community learning and development services, colleges, and residential educational provision. Evaluations are made against Quality Indicators from the self-evaluation framework, '*How good is our school?'* (HMIE, 2007). After each inspection, these evaluations are published on the Education Scotland website along with a letter to parents. To support improvement, inspectors focus on the quality of children and young people's learning and achievement and discuss these issues with staff. They have a particular interest in the development of children and young people's skills and understanding in literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing, which enables access to the highest possible learning within a broad general education and beyond.

'How good is our school?' (HGIOS) presents a set of indicators for school self-evaluation, organized within a quality framework which is the same as the framework used by early years' settings, education authorities and children's services. The indicators within HGIOS reflect the developing context within which schools now operate. They focus specifically on the impact of schools improving the educational experience and lives of Scottish pupils through learning and their successes and achievements, particularly the broad outcomes for learners within Curriculum for Excellence and the vision statement for Scotland's children. HGIOS has adopted a framework for self-evaluation common to all public services and structured around six questions, which are important for any service to answer.
'Improving our curriculum through self-evaluation' (HMIE, 2008) was produced in acknowledgement that self-evaluation relating to the curriculum was changing, due to the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence, and that practitioners required more specific help to do this. The approach taken in this document supplemented, rather than replaced, HGIOS, by providing sets of focused, reflective questions for practitioners to consider in relation to the curriculum, which would help them to evaluate their progress more accurately.

5. Additional targeted support

The Scottish Government realised that additional support was needed to enable local authorities and schools to proceed with the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence, rather than further documentation. During the autumn of 2010, inspections within the secondary sector were temporarily suspended, and HM Inspectors were redeployed to provide approximately 750 days of direct, targeted support, as negotiated and agreed with local authorities. This was delivered in a range of different ways including open discussion sessions with small groups in individual schools, practical activities with practitioners and presentations to groups of local authority head teachers and centrally based officers. The agreed focus of the support varied according to local need and included topics such as curriculum design, timetabling, profiling and reporting, moderation of assessment standards, interdisciplinary learning and support for pupils. Local authority evaluation of this support from HM Inspectors was extremely positive. Variations on this support has continued since, provided by Education Scotland, through local conferences, school-based support and a range of initiatives to build capacity of staff to implement Curriculum for Excellence. Inspections of secondary schools began again in January 2011.

6. Inspection advice notes

In 2011, 2012 and then again in 2013, an updated '*Inspection advice note*' (Education Scotland, 2011, 2012, 2013) has been produced and shared with local authorities. The purpose of this advice note is to complement the quality indicators (QIs) from HGIOS with specific advice regarding progressive national expectations of the degree of implementation of Curriculum for Excellence across the country. This can be used by authorities and individual schools to audit their progress and is used in conjunction with HGIOS by HM Inspectors during inspections.

"HM Inspectors will continue to collate evidence from inspections and other evaluative activities which help to inform the Curriculum for Excellence Management Board and the Curriculum for Excellence Implementation Group on progress with Curriculum for Excellence. While we do evaluate the

development of the curriculum as part of QI 5.1, ***we do not evaluate progress with the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence*** *across the full range of implementation priorities.***"**

7. Curriculum briefings and the education Scotland website

In addition to the guidance documents outlined above, Education Scotland began to publish an online series of '*CfE Briefings'* (Education Scotland, 2012; 2013), beginning with '*Broad general education in the secondary school*' (Education Scotland, 2012). At the time of writing there were thirteen published briefings and there are at least another three in an advanced state of preparation. These briefings are designed as short, readable papers, which clarify a potentially problematic area of Curriculum for Excellence. They generally end with a set of reflective questions, which encourage practitioners to consider their own practice in the context of the briefing topic. The briefings are published on the Education Scotland website and multiple printed copies are sent to educational establishments across the country.

On the freely accessed Education Scotland website, there is now a wide range of additional support materials available relating to Curriculum for Excellence, often written by teachers on secondment from their school. These give practitioners an overview of the changes, link to the original documents and then look in detail at practical aspects such as 'Curriculum planning'. This section, for example, features topics such as 'What is building your curriculum?', 'Involving the school community', 'Whole school planning', 'Identifying priorities for change', 'Creating a curriculum plan', 'Support for local authority officers', 'Sharing practice', 'Achievement pathways' and 'Evaluating practice and performance'. Each of these sections is exemplified with a mixture of advice, planning formats and materials, case studies of practice in Scottish Schools and videos. There are also links to specialist practitioner groups on Glow, the national schools intranet, which give teachers the opportunity to find or share further practical advice and planning tools. There are currently approximately 70 such 'professional learning communities' hosted on Glow by Education Scotland, local authorities and outside agencies. These are 'visited' and contributed to by over 1600 individual educators per month. In addition,

practitioners have open access to the 'Engage for Education' website which was set up by the Scottish Government to allow teachers, parents and other interested parties to discuss aspects of education in Scotland, often in a blog format. There are regular interactive articles written by Scottish Government ministers, including the Cabinet Secretary (Education Minister). Users can comment on, and enter into online debate about, the content of these blogs.

8. Teachers and unions

Curriculum for Excellence is the most significant curricular change in Scotland for a generation. It has been broadly welcomed by practitioners, who have welcomed its challenging but practice-focused nature (Priestley, 2010) as well as by parents, children and young people (Martlew, Ellis, Stephen, & Ellis, 2010). However, some concerns remain over its implementation. A recent survey of its members by the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), the largest teachers' union in Scotland, found that a majority of teachers and lecturers who responded are barely confident or not confident at all of their department's state of readiness to deliver the new National qualifications from 2013-2014 (Final results of CfE survey, 2013). This shows only a little improvement from a similar survey carried out in May 2009 when the EIS reported that 46% of teachers were 'barely confident' or 'not confident at all' with the advice relating to Curriculum for Excellence (Union concern, 2009). A majority of respondents also rate materials published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to support preparations for the new qualifications as 'not very helpful. Similarly, a majority view as unsatisfactory the quality and level of support supplied by local authorities, colleges, Education Scotland and the SQA on the Senior Phase. The Cabinet Secretary has noted, however, that the respondents represent a small minority of those who work in secondary schools.

9. Conclusion

At the time of writing, there is one year to go until the first cohort of young people undertakes the new National Qualification courses and assessments. This will be an important milestone in the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. As part of Curriculum for Excellence, aspects of Scotland's education system, including qualifications, assessment and learning and teaching

approaches are being reviewed. The SQA, in partnership with teachers, is developing the new accredited courses learners will study. There is an on-going national debate about the range and nature of the new suite of qualifications. This tends to centre round the scheduling of their introduction (beginning with National 4 and 5 in May 2014) and in what ways the new qualifications are different from the existing system. This can be summed up as follows:

- There will be less prescription and more personalization and choice in the qualifications. For example, there will be 'Added Value Assessments, many of which will be projects; in History, students will be able to take an aspect of the Course that really interests them and study it in more depth.
- At National 5, more coursework will contribute to the final grade, so examinations should be shorter. At the moment, half of Intermediate Courses have some coursework aspect. It will be a much larger proportion at National 5.
- Although some of the fundamental features and characteristics of the Higher and Advanced Higher Courses will be preserved in the new Courses, these will be revised to reflect the ideas behind Curriculum for Excellence.

As well as developing new National Qualifications, SQA has developed a number of new Awards. Some of the new Awards cover work from across different subject areas, are shorter than traditional Courses and recognise success across different levels of difficulty, meaning they are suitable for learners of all abilities. They are marked and assessed by schools and colleges and do not have any external assessment or exams. Each of these qualifications supports the values, purpose and principles of Curriculum for Excellence. The most appropriate conceptual model for this kind of curriculum implementation would appear to be the 'implementation staircase' (Reynolds & Saunders, 1987), which acknowledges that policy messages are adapted and modified by stakeholders as they are transmitted – in both directions - through a system and implemented. It also reflects the importance of constructing and analysing the experience of an initiative from the points of view of stakeholders at all points on the 'staircase'.

In this sense, the policy messages have gradually changed as the implementation has taken place. For example, some members of the original Curriculum Review Group have distanced themselves from the way in which Curriculum for Excellence has developed: Keir Bloomer, a member of the team that created the Curriculum for Excellence, described it as 'not good enough'. The former council leader and director of education was particularly critical of the literacy element, calling it 'complete nonsense' (The Scotsman, 2009). He also claimed that: *"...Curriculum for Excellence was never intended to narrow young people's choices on entry to the senior phase... I am certain this is not what the national guidance is intended to achieve but, in some places, that is the effect it is having...It is not too late to put this right but greater clarity is needed urgently..."* (Daily Record, 2012). Other members of the Review Group such as Brian Boyd still feel that it is well placed to deliver better outcomes for learners: *"[Curriculum for Excellence] offers teachers a chance to become re-professionalised, to rediscover their creativity and to use their skills in the pursuit of understanding for all. The tyranny of exams, the fragmentation of the curriculum, excessive focus on timetabling and putting pupils into ability sets have combined to make young people's experience in many of our schools tame and limited."* (Boyd, 2009).

There has been a move, as identified above, increasingly encouraged by teacher representative unions, from professional freedom to self-imposed prescription. These unions have been increasingly vocal in their response to the new curriculum arrangements. A recent study researched ways in which teachers make sense of reforms facing them (Luttenberg, van Veen, & Imants, 2013). The research identifies four forms of search for meaning: assimilation, accommodation, toleration, and 'distantiation'. This final term describes a situation where you establish or create a mental or emotional distance from something and cannot – or will not – identify with it. It could be argued that this approach accurately describes the point of view of at least some of the teachers and their representatives in Scotland. Despite the need to change the curriculum in Scotland's schools and the significant support which has been made available over the past 9 years, many teachers and their unions are continuing to demand further delays in implementation and further

delays in the introduction of new examinations, citing workload issues and dissatisfaction with support materials which have been produced for them.

The introduction of Curriculum for Excellence has reinforced the need for effective communication with parents and carers. The point of view of parents is being increasingly heard, on the Engage for Education website, through the National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS) website and events and through communication routes at school and local authority level. Parents want to know what is different, what the educational experience looks like for their child, and how they can support their child's learning. Where schools and local authorities have provided parents with information about current and future planned changes under Curriculum for Excellence parents have responded positively. This effective approach to communication has been supported by a wide range of opportunities for parents for face-to-face dialogue with Scottish Government representatives, and an array of advice publications and resources specifically produced for parents in order to enhance their understanding and generate enthusiasm for the new aims, entitlements and methodologies associated with Curriculum for Excellence. Publications have included a series of briefings, NPFS 'Nationals in a Nutshell' summaries of the new national qualifications, illustrations of learner journeys and a suite of papers on achievement pathways for children and young people. Despite this, some parents have been frustrated at the lack of information from individual schools about the changes which are taking place. To address this, Scottish Government and Education Scotland employ dedicated staff to work closely with the NPFS, local authorities and schools to develop and deliver tailored events which promote the range of effective ways many schools are involving parents in decision making about curriculum design. Often these engagements bring together a broad range of schools, staff, young people and parents in discussion.

As can be seen, the implementation of this new curriculum approach has been marked by the two distinct aspects of greater curricular flexibility, sensitive to the particular local context of the school and the learner, alongside the continuing demand from teachers and their representatives for ever-greater levels of detail to help practitioners. Perhaps it was never

going to be possible to have the former without the latter and the protracted gestation of Curriculum for Excellence may relate in some way to the effect that the previous, more prescriptive, curricula have had on teachers' confidence in exercising their own professional judgement rather than being dependent upon external 'exemplification'. In this respect, the new generation of teachers that has been emerging from initial teacher education institutions across Scotland over the past few years is becoming an important driving force for implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. This is the only curriculum framework they have ever worked with or been trained to use and they have no affiliation to the previous *status quo*; Curriculum for Excellence is natural to them in a way that it is not to more experienced teachers. These new teachers have a significant part to play in developing and supporting the curriculum changes outlined above to ensure that all of Scotland's children and young people achieve successful outcomes and are equipped to contribute effectively to the Scottish economy and society, now and in the future.

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Curriculum deregulation in England and Scotland - Different directions of travel?

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Abstract

This chapter explores the balance in curricular policy between input regulation (for example prescription of content) and output regulation (for example accountability mechanisms). The chapter draws upon two case studies, England and Scotland, which have adopted diverging approaches to curriculum regulation, identifying the current balance in each country between input and output regulation. Drawing upon an ecological understanding of teacher agency, the chapter is concluded with an analysis of the extent to which England and Scotland are centralized or decentralized systems, and the relative freedom of teachers in each case to engage in school-based curriculum development.

1. Introduction

England and Scotland provide interesting and in some ways contrasting case studies for studying the balance between curriculum freedom and regulation. In common with the pendulum swings between these two positions, identified across different curricular jurisdictions by Nieveen and Kuiper (2012), teachers in both countries have experienced shifting terrain, the general trend being an apparent move from more extreme versions of prescription (especially in England) to greater degrees of freedom for schools to develop the curriculum (particularly in the case of Scotland). However, such trends need to be viewed cautiously. Questions remain about the extent to which school autonomy

in curriculum making is actually happening; as noted (ibid.), the worldwide development of accountability systems (*output regulation*), the phenomenon termed GERM - the Global Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg, 2011), has superseded and counter-balanced the *input regulation* formerly seen in many cases. Such mechanisms, according to Wilkins (2011), produce cultures of performativity, with three distinctive features: the evaluative use of statistical attainment data; external inspections; and increasingly marketized education systems, driven by publicly available data collated into league tables. This in turn is said to have created a worldwide phenomenon of performativity in schools, comprising perverse incentives, game playing and even cheating (Ball, 2003; Keddie, Mills, & Pendergast, 2011). Thus, one might ask, in the specific cases of England and Scotland, against the backdrop of these global trends, whether claimed deregulation is genuine, or illusory and rhetorical. Indeed, it has been argued that outputs-driven methods have done more to erode teacher agency (Biesta, 2004,) than has any recourse to prescriptive inputs. Linked to this, there is the further question of whether, as is often claimed, Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) offers hitherto unknown levels of autonomy in curriculum-making, in contrast to England, which is widely seen as highly prescriptive.

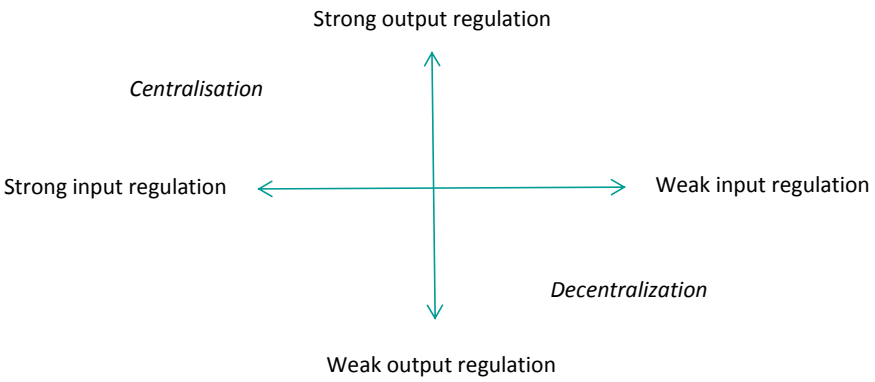

Figure 1: The balance between input and output regulation

These questions are best explored through an analysis of the interplay of input and output regulation. In this chapter, we explore the nature and extent of these types of regulation in England and Scotland, where there has been a considerable divergence in policy (Grek & Ozga, 2010). In doing so, we extend the centralized/decentralized continuum proposed by Nieveen and Kuiper (2012), providing an analysis framed as a quadrant rather than as a linear continuum (figure 1, above). Additionally, as we are primarily concerned with the effects of regulatory systems on the autonomy granted to teachers making the curriculum, we employ an ecological approach to teacher agency in our analysis (for a fuller account of this approach, see: Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2013). This approach, depicted in figure 2 (below), construes agency as an emergent phenomenon, combining the personal capacity of teachers to act (for example in developing the curriculum) with the context (social and material) by means of which they act. In this view, agency is something that people achieve rather than something that resides within them. It thus varies from place to place and over time. This approach allows us to make judgements about the ways in which regulatory frameworks facilitate or inhibit the achievement of agency by teachers, or in other words, the extent to which teachers experience freedom as they develop the curriculum. The key area for analysis here lies in the practical-evaluative dimension of agency. Regulatory frameworks, relating to both inputs and outputs, concern the cultural realm (in terms of ideas, dispositions and values that shape agency) as well as the structural realm (for example in terms of coercive power structures and relational resources). These aspects are practical, in terms of how social structures and cultural forms constitute the social conditions, which render agency possible (or not). They are also evaluative, insofar as teachers will form judgments (for example evaluations of risk) as they enact the curriculum.

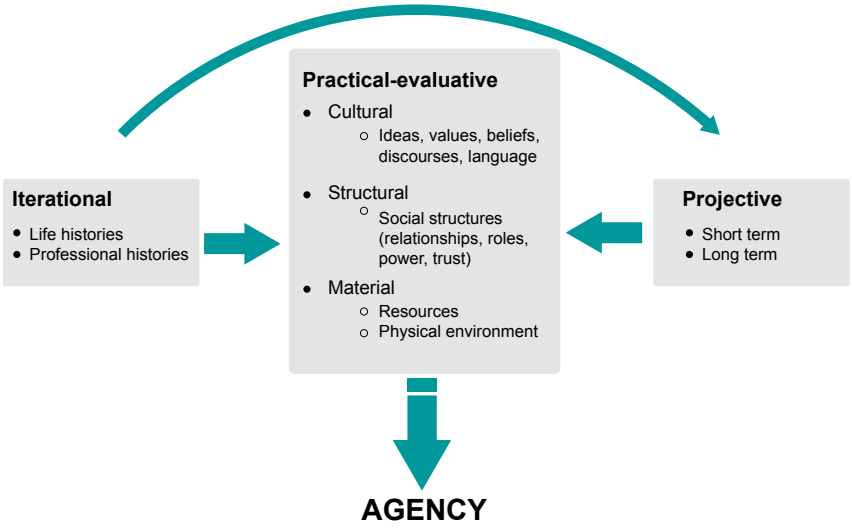

Figure 2: The ecological approach to teacher agency (source: Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2013)

In the sections that follow, we present brief descriptive case studies of the current frameworks for curriculum regulation in both England and Scotland, identifying the current balance in each country between input and output regulation. We conclude the chapter with an analysis of how these contexts for curriculum enactment might enable the emergence of teacher agency, drawing conclusions about the extent to which England and Scotland are centralised or decentralised systems, and the relative freedom of teachers in each case to engage in school-based curriculum development.

2. The National Curriculum in England

2.1 Input regulation

The introduction of the first National Curriculum in England in 1988 marked a major turning point in the history of curriculum policies in the UK, with international ramifications, as other countries copied and adapted the model. The 1988 curriculum was applied to England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Scotland, with its tradition of independent policy making in education, resisted moves to introduce a similar model, eventually developing the less prescriptive and non-statutory 5-14 curriculum guidance (see Priestley, 2013). This 1988 curriculum was highly prescriptive in relation to inputs, specifying in often

minute detail the content to be taught in schools. It was heavily criticized by academic writers in relation to its uncritical stance towards questions of knowledge/content and its lack of coherence (see, for example: Kelly, 1990). Since then there has been a general trend towards less prescription, with reviews of the National Curriculum leading to a paring down of content in 1995, 1999 and 2008. Part of the driving force for deregulation has been continual complaints from teachers and school leaders that the curriculum is overcrowded. Moreover, in the background has been an important tenet of Conservative party philosophy, which favours the marketization of education in order that parental choice might motivate school improvement. This short account might lead one to believe that schools and teachers have been granted greater licence to engage in localized curriculum development. However, this is misleading for a number of reasons, two of which are worthy of note here. First, the National Curriculum in England remains comparatively prescriptive in comparison with national curricula in many other countries, despite a gradual move towards deregulation in this respect. Since 2010, when the election of a conservative government marked a distinct curriculum turn, there has been an increasing re-emphasis on input regulation, inspired by notions of essentialist canons of knowledge and cultural literacy (for example, see: Coles, 2013). Thus, the curriculum in England retains high levels of input regulation. A second point worthy of note, which we develop further in the next section, concerns output regulation, which exerts high levels of control over teaching in England's schools. We note here that large numbers of schools in England – for example academies – are exempt from the strictures of the National Curriculum, a point that is developed later in this chapter.

2.2 Output Regulation through surveillance

A major part of the problem in achieving curriculum deregulation has been that policy makers have not been able, or perhaps not willing, to move beyond relatively simple measures of educational outcomes, specifically performance in timed examinations, with particular importance given to mathematics and English. In the marketization of schooling, these outputs or *standards* become the primary currency, and it is political power that has given these measures such legitimacy. As Ball, Maguire, Braun, Perryman and Hoskins (2012, p.514)

explain: *"As a policy, standards 'works' through a very simple but effective and very public technology of performance – made up of league tables, national averages, comparative and progress indicators, Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) assessments and benchmarks. These together are intended to instil into schools what is called a 'performance culture."* Because of this performance culture, it is argued that teachers in England are the most accountable in the world. There is a specific accountability for pupil performance in public examinations, which is periodically increased. For example in 2012, primary schools were expected to get 60% of their pupils to the 'expected level' in English and mathematics. In 2014 this will be raised to 65%. If schools consistently fail, regardless of the social background of pupils, they will be forced to become 'academies', a significant change of governance. In secondary schools, in 2012, a basic target was that 40% of students should gain 5 GCSE passes (including English and mathematics) at Grade C or above (the grades run from A*, A, B etc through to G). GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education) are qualifications undertaken by school students at the age of 16 in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. In the face of previous targets (which did not include English and mathematics) many schools developed ingenious means for reaching targets, including searching for the exam boards and subjects that seemed to have the best pass rates and using particular vocational courses which provided four GCSE passes. Grades in all GCSE subjects are predicted from pupil scores in tests at age 11 and it is common for pupils to have a test in most subjects every six weeks, from age 11, to see if they are maintaining progress. If pupils' grades are seen to be dropping, some form of support or intervention is likely to be implemented.

Schools are periodically inspected by Ofsted. There is strong pressure for observed lessons to be graded as 'good' or 'outstanding'. There are very significant rewards for schools if they are judged outstanding in all categories of inspection, including going onto a longer cycle of re-inspection. The criteria for 'outstanding' lessons are used for internal school monitoring and often for departmental and individual teacher self-evaluation. Ball (2003) has adapted the concept of performativity to this context, to denote the micro-management of public services through numerical targets. More

recently he has coined the term 'deliverology' (Ball et al., 2012), for the instrumental mindset that can pervade many schools to achieve targets, generated by a 'common-sense political rationality'. For many teachers this is experienced as anxiety-inducing pressure, which pervades the school culture. As one primary teacher interviewee in Webb, Vulliamy, Sarja, Hamalainen, and Poikonen (2009, p.417) expressed it: *"The head is under pressure to perform, she puts pressure on us, we put pressure on the children and then everyone is just under immense pressure and stress."* However as this extract indicates, teachers are not alone in internalizing expectations of performance, it is also evident in students, many of whom become very instrumental in their approach to education, as indicated by this 15 year old pupil who indicates no desire to continue with a more enquiry based approach to the curriculum (Leat, Thomas, & Reid, 2012, p.408): *"We're still all in the middle of our GCSEs and we just want you to give us the right answers so we can learn it and I think that's what is stressful for a lot of people. We just want the correct answers so we can go and learn them instead of having to go and find it."* Foucault's (1977) writings on disciplining, surveillance and the development of the technology of the self might indeed have been inspired by the English education system. This is high stakes accountability, as teachers whose students do not meet targets or whose lessons only reach satisfactory grades are likely to be given *support,* which can ultimately lead to dismissal if improvement is not forthcoming. Output regulation is thus an effective, albeit contentious, means of curriculum control in England.

2.3 Mixed messages

Thus although politicians make commitments to more freedom to teachers and schools (Department for Education, 2010), this is not the lived experience of teachers, who feel constrained by the output regulation. In primary schools, the focus on exam results at age 11 has historically encouraged schools to focus on English and mathematics and, to a lesser degree, science. One of the key findings of an independent review of the primary curriculum '*The Cambridge Primary Review'* (Alexander, Armstrong, Flutter, Hargreaves, & Harrison, 2009) concerned the narrowing of the curriculum as the result of the effects of high-stakes testing. Alexander (2012), the lead author of the review, has

repeatedly criticized government for abandoning any commitment to a broad and balanced curriculum, this concept being a marker for pupil entitlement to an equitable medium for education. More recently the ideas of E.D. Hirsch, the American cultural commentator, on cultural capital embedded in traditional subjects, have captured the imagination of the present Secretary of State for Education, disposing him towards a subject-based curriculum and the teaching of knowledge. Where, as in England, the curriculum is permeable to the ideas of individual politicians, it is very difficult to have faith in a deregulated curriculum. Therefore, the prospects are not good for teacher professionalism in England. In an era of government involvement in education, one can detect signs of the crossroads described in Hargreaves's (2000) fourth age of professionalism, in which teaching *either* may assume a postmodern identity where the profession has a broader, more inclusive stance *or* a diminished post-professional status characterized by simplistic apprenticeship models, constraining competence frameworks and detailed measurement of outcomes.

Paradoxically the government control of the curriculum by means of input or output manipulation has been partially contradicted by encouragement to schools to innovate, as an acknowledgement of changing societal demands on schools. These conflicting principles partly explain the ongoing tussle between the forces of regulation and deregulation and the confusion that results. Thus although the latest National Curriculum proposals in 2013 have attracted considerable criticism for returning to greater specification of subject content, some schools are virtually free of the National Curriculum specifications. The previous Labour government had introduced the concept of academies, sponsored by businesses or other organisations. The current government has maintained and extended the concept of academies and introduced further diversity through the establishment of Free Schools. Such schools now account for more than 50% of secondary schools in England. Although only a few academies and free schools have used their greater curriculum (input) freedom, greater curriculum diversity is beginning to appear, but for the present anchored to the common high stakes exams at 16.

3. Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: A different direction of travel?

3.1 Divergence

The re-establishment of a Scottish Parliament, following devolution in 1999, has accelerated a process of divergence of the already distinctive Scottish education policy from that in the rest of the UK. This divergence plays out in a number of areas that are relevant to our analysis of the school curricula in the two countries, including:

- The development of the new Curriculum for Excellence. This explicitly positions curriculum-making as the preserve of teachers and schools, reducing prescription in terms of content, and establishing a number of underpinning common approaches as desirable; for example, inter-disciplinary provision, active learning, and personalization and choice. This new curriculum thus represents a considerable relaxation in the nature of input regulation, at least at the macro-level of curriculum contextualization. CfE, in common with its predecessor (the 5-14 curriculum framework), is considered to be 'guidance' rather than a statutory and compulsory curriculum. There remains, nevertheless, the question of whether this position is rhetoric. It might be argued that, as far as schools are concerned, a combination of different forms of regulation means that CfE is to all intents and purposes the national curriculum.
- A concomitant positioning of teachers as key agents of change, evident in both curriculum policy statements (e.g. Scottish Executive, 2006) and in subsequent policy developments, for example the new Standards produced by the General Teaching Council for Scotland and the agenda established by the report Teaching Scotland's Future (Donaldson, 2010). These developments suggest an aspiration to reduce prescription in general, and a commitment to raising levels of teacher professionalism.
- The establishment of a national education agency, Education Scotland, following the bringing together of the Inspectorate (HMIe) and Learning and Teaching Scotland (the curriculum, assessment and technology agency) in 2011. This development occurred at a time when similar agencies were being abolished in England. Education Scotland is primarily concerned with meso-level contextualization (potentially involving input regulation) of the curriculum and quality improvement (including support for the process of curriculum development and output regulation)

- Continued attachment to the principle of education as a 'national system locally administered' (Livingston & Hulme, 2013). The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 specified that *"it shall be the duty of the [local education] authority to secure that the education is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential"* (Scottish Parliament, 2000). A Concordat agreed between the Scottish Government and the 32 local authorities of Scotland in 2007 emphasized subsidiarity as an organizing principle in Scotland – the Scottish Government sets the direction of policy and expected national outcomes and the local authorities are responsible for shaping and improving service delivery in response to local needs and circumstances (Scottish Government, 2007).
- While evaluative use of attainment data and external inspections have remained as a key part of the government's drive to raise standards in schools, the third aspect of Wilkins's (2011) typology of performativity - a market environment, where parental choice is facilitated by the publicly available data from inspections and attainment statistics – has been far less evident in Scotland (see Menter & Hulme, 2012). The support for socially inclusive comprehensive schools remains a feature of the education system in Scotland which has not seen the diversification to academies, free schools etc so prominent currently in England.

These aspects of the Scottish policy landscape would appear to position Scotland quite differently to England in terms of the degree and nature of curriculum regulation.

3.2 Input regulation

The rhetoric of macro-level Curriculum for Excellence documents suggests that the intention was not to produce a top-down prescriptive curriculum for teachers to deliver. Rather it was up to teachers themselves to engage with the reform process and reflect on changes to content and pedagogy. Within the framework of curriculum outcomes and experiences, published at a national level, the role of teachers as curriculum developers was emphasized. The framework of guidance was intended to allow *"... teachers the freedom to exercise judgement on appropriate learning for young people, ..."* (Scottish

Executive, 2004, p.4). *"Within a clear framework of national expectations, teachers will have greater scope and space for professional decisions about what and how they should teach, enabling them to plan creatively within broader parameters"* (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2006, p.1). The messages about the involvement of practitioners in decision-making about the most appropriate way to support their pupils in achieving outcomes have continued to be emphasized throughout subsequent documents, which put flesh on the original bones of the curriculum (e.g. the 'Building the Curriculum' series) published during the curriculum reform process. The text of the documents indicated the importance of an ongoing collaborative approach to curriculum reform. The intention expressed in the documents was that the curriculum should be developed and shaped through a partnership model with practitioners. The commitment and quality of teachers in Scotland was also consistently highlighted, as also appears from the following quote (Scottish Executive, 2006:21): *"Scottish Ministers have increasingly emphasized the value they place on the professionalism and commitment of teachers in Scotland. We have a motivated and well-trained workforce which is being asked to embrace a shift away from prescription about the detail of the curriculum and towards more responsibility for professional judgement and creativity within broader parameters. If we are to be successful in our aim of preparing young people for the challenges of the future, we will rely even more on individual teachers' commitment to refreshing and updating their own professional skills and knowledge."*

This apparent shift to weaker input regulation at the level of national policy is partly tempered by the local governance arrangements for Scottish schools described above. As stated, local authorities are the bodies responsible for schooling. This function is partly carried out through input regulation and partly through output regulation (to be discussed in the next section). In the case of the former, the situation varies from local authority to local authority, some being more prescriptive than others. However, a number of general observations can be made. Scottish schooling is extremely hierarchical. Local authorities mediate national policy, and such mediation can be significant in shaping curriculum making practices in schools. Many local authorities

produce mandatory teaching materials and operate relatively high levels of prescription in terms of teaching methodologies, for example Assessment for Learning techniques and cooperative learning methods (although we note that there is some variation between authorities in the degree of prescription operated). However, notwithstanding these trends, it is fair to describe Curriculum for Excellence as being weak in terms of input regulation, especially so in comparison to England.

3.3 Output regulation

Scotland is extremely similar in many respects to England in terms of the first two dimensions of Wilkins's (2011) typology. Since 1997, the so-called 'Quality Improvement Initiative' has established an accountability system, shown to have similar effects to its English counterpart (see Boyd & Norris, 2004; Cowie, Croxford, & Taylor, 2007). A strong attainment agenda has developed, driven by statistical use of data derived from external examination results. These generate what are known as 'Standard Tables and Charts' (STACS), which are used extensively in secondary schools to manage teachers, enabling, for example, subject departments to be compared with each other, the performance of individual pupils to be compared across subjects, and the performance of schools and departments to be set against equivalent schools on comparator league tables (Cowie, Croxford,& Taylor, 2007) (We note here that league tables do not 'officially' exist in Scotland; national tables are not compiled by the Scottish Government, although comparator tables are used within local authorities, and national newspapers compile their own unofficial tables annually). In many local authorities, similar use has been made in primary schools of data pertaining to pupils' attainment of the curricular levels of the former 5-14 curriculum. These data have allowed schools to be compared according to attainment levels, associated in many cases with performativity (see Priestley, Robinson, & Biesta, 2012). The emphasis on benchmarking continues to prevail in Scotland. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning in Scotland said recently in a speech presented at the University of Glasgow (27 March 2013), that a new tool would be created to benchmark how pupils perform in terms of literacy and numeracy; how they achieve more broadly in terms of qualifications and wider awards; where

they move on to when they leave school; and how their school is closing the attainment gap. It is likely that this tool will be used across all Scottish local authorities; it remains to be seen whether its effects will be different from those documented within existing accountability systems.

Inspections by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of education (HMIe) form a second part of this system of output regulation. Inspections are framed around a set of performance indicators known as HGIOS – How Good Is Our School (HMIe, 2002). HGIOS is ostensibly a self-evaluation tool, but is also used by inspectors to judge the quality of schools. Following the advent of Curriculum for Excellence, HGIOS was revamped in 2006-7 (HMIe, 2006, 2007), signalling a supposed shift from a hard to a softer managerialism. However, according to Reeves (2008:13), revisions to HGIOS are 'cosmetic, since the basic instruments and methodology remain the same'. The inspection model has been further developed subsequently: inspection and review have increasingly placed more emphasis on issues such as the extent to which an establishment or service has developed the ability to self-evaluate and drive its own improvement. However, the inspectorate is quite clear that their aim to provide public assurance and accountability through robust independent evaluations of establishments and services, share effective practice and inform national policy, and thus one might argue that inspection still forms a key component of strong output regulation.

A third aspect of output regulation lies in Scotland's local authorities, which are more pervasive in their governance role than in England, and which operate extensively in regulating outputs. A shift in emphasis in many local authorities from a supportive advisory role to a quality improvement role, characterised by audits mirroring the external inspection process, has been documented by several writers (e.g. Cowie, Croxford, & Taylor 2007; Boyd & Norris, 2004). The potentially detrimental effects of the role of bureaucracies, notably the local authorities, in maintaining central control was noted by the OECD report '*Quality and equity of schooling in Scotland*' (2007).

The net result of these practices and policies is an accountability system that, while being less pervasive than its English counterpart, still has real teeth. As such, it has had considerable potential to shape the forms of education emerging following the reform of the curriculum, and especially to militate against the new forms of freedom promised by Curriculum for Excellence. In particular, *"improvement with pre-specified level descriptors"* (MacKinnon, 2011, p. 91) requires schools to provide evidence of 'quality,' with the attendant dangers of perverse incentives and game playing (Cowie, Croxford, & Taylor, 2007). Finding an appropriate balance between teacher freedom to take curriculum decisions and accountability measures to assure the consistency and quality of Scottish education remains a challenge.

4. Analysis: curriculum regulation and teacher agency

We conclude this chapter with a brief analysis of the differing nature of curriculum regulation in England and Scotland, and some reflections upon its effects on teachers and schools.

4.1 The nature of curriculum regulation in England and Scotland

Grek and Ozga (2010) have noted the considerable divergence in policy and policy influences between England and Scotland, something often ignored in both media commentary and academic literature. In particular, they note the influence of American models of governance in England (markets, choice et cetera) and the greater influence of European policy discourses in Scotland. These differing policy influences may account for the different emphases within the two countries, and in particular the balance between input and output regulation. We note here that Scotland's comprehensive school system can be seen as a homogenous arena for education policy, whereas in England the situation is considerably more confusing. The balance between these forms of regulation will be different, dependent upon whether the school is a local authority school or an academy/Free School. Thus, in Scotland we see relatively weak input regulation at a macro-level, as Curriculum for Excellence opens up considerable space for school autonomy. However, as we noted, levels of input regulation at a meso-level vary from authority to authority. Moreover, Scotland retains a relatively hard managerialism (Reeves, 2008) through high levels of

output regulation. The rhetoric of teacher and school autonomy is therefore not easily realizable in practice. In England, the situation is more complex. Local authority schools are subject to both high levels of input regulation through the National Curriculum and extensive output regulation. However, as we have noted, in academies and Free Schools, largely exempt from the demands of the National Curriculum, we ostensibly see far lower levels of input regulation. However, two points should be made here. First, such schools are still subject to the high levels of output regulation. Second, we additionally note that the content of the curriculum in such schools may be subject to control by stakeholders other than the teachers in the schools (for example, the sponsors who partially fund the schools). Thus, while there may be freedom from the input regulation of the National Curriculum, this may be substituted by potentially more capricious control by other external parties. The balance of input and output regulation in the above cases is depicted in figure 3 (below).

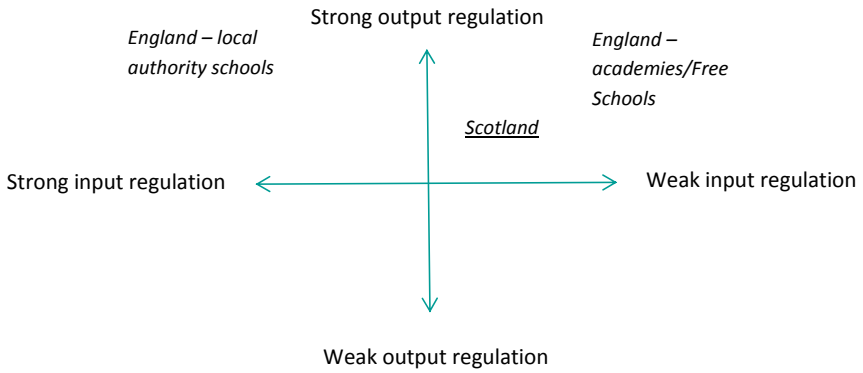

Figure 3: The balance between input and output regulation in England and Scotland

4.2 The effects of curriculum regulation on teacher agency

Space precludes a deep analysis of the effects of curriculum regulation on teacher agency. However, we offer here a few reflections on how such regulation might be detrimental to teacher agency, and how in turn this might undermine professionalism – surely an issue at a time when curriculum policy emphasizes school autonomy and positions teachers as agents of change. We make here a number of points that draw upon the ecological conception of

agency, as something that emerges from the transactions that individuals – with their particular talents, aspirations, values and knowledge – have within their environment.

First, teacher professionalism often tends to be seen as matter of enhancing individual capacity – for example, knowledge, skills and professional ethics – which tends to sideline the structural and cultural context in which the professions develop (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2013). Output regulation comprises both a set of social structures (systems, power relations, roles, etc.) as well as cultural expectations. These social conditions shape what is possible in schools. This is both a practical issue (what is actually possible) and an evaluative issue (how professionals judge aspects such as risk). Thus output regulation potentially impacts radically on the possibilities for agency (by enabling or precluding particular practices), and has, at the same time, undermined professionals' ability to take responsibility for their work, that is to act on the basis of informed and negotiated professional judgement. Accountability practices run the risk of becoming counter productive, for example when they encourage forms of action that are a-responsible and potentially irresponsible, as teachers 'play the game' (Keddie, Mills, & Pendergast, 2011).

The above observations apply to the practical-evaluative dimension of the ecological agency model. A related set of reflections concerns the projective and iterational dimensions of agency. Empirical research conducted in Scotland (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2013) suggests that the undermining of teacher agency in a practical-evaluative sense (for example removing the need for, or distorting judgement) potentially has long term effects in terms of teachers' abilities to form expansive aspirations for their teaching. The teachers in this research were relatively unable to articulate long-term aspirations for their teaching, being focused instead on short-term goals such as engaging pupils, maintaining technical efficiency in their teaching, or even just getting through the day. Linked to this, the research found that these teachers tended to articulate their teaching in the language of policy, and seemed to lack an educational language with which they could critically interrogate policy. These issues were at least in part due to their past immersion in the performative

cultures of their schools. It is worth noting here that such cultures in today's schools will shape the capacity of teachers in the future, potentially impacting heavily on future teacher agency and professionalism.

We are reluctant to conclude on a negative note. While the landscape for teacher agency in England, and to a lesser extent Scotland, is a little bleak, there are shafts of light. For example, Troman, Jeffrey and Raggi (2007) found that mature entrants to teaching in England, from other occupations, were more tolerant of the performativity culture but were resourceful in resolving tensions and dilemmas within their work. Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2013) found in their Scottish study of teacher agency that schools with well-developed relational structures – where teachers had extensive relational resources upon which they could draw – manifested enhanced levels of teacher agency. Moreover, decentralization in England has opened up spaces for grassroots activism in curriculum development. For example, the 'Creative Partnership Programme' has been particularly influential in primary schools, and 'Whole Education', 'Expansive Education', 'Opening Minds' and 'Open Futures' are all examples of networks or projects promoting curriculum innovation at local level (see Williamson, 2012, for a critique of some of these developments). The Royal Society of Arts (Facer, 2009) has championed the cause of area-based curriculum, which maps strongly onto the recommendations of the independent Cambridge Primary Review, which suggested that 30% of curriculum time should be devoted to developing a community-oriented curriculum. In Scotland, Curriculum for Excellence, despite its teething troubles and despite the tensions with output regulation, offers considerable potential for teacher agency.

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Slovenia - Between the school system's decentralization, curriculum autonomy, and teachers' professionalism

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Abstract

The state of patronage and its undisputed authority in the country in the field of education is a historical constant in Slovenia. Despite the fact that, from the 1990s onwards, greater autonomy of schools has been implemented into a previously strongly centralized system, numerous legal acts have been preserved on the national level, which frame the existing level of autonomy. It is therefore obvious that the relationship between centralized and autonomous administration and the educational system management simply cannot be mapped on a general level. We must differentiate between various levels, such as the national politics, the school, the teacher, as well as between different fields of analysis. The issue of professional autonomy of schools should be addressed by teachers' organizations in Slovenia by a larger degree. Their suggestions, solutions, and consensus in change implementation could represent an important starting point in the process of modernization of education.

1. Introduction

Even though the opening up of new perspectives and the encouragement of developmental approaches has been typical for the internationalization of education in national education systems, this characteristic has gradually

become more and more of a problem. The significance of education, which we can in principle still understand as 'national interest', wasn't coordinated with quickly developing areas such as science, commerce and art, all of which cross national boundaries (Dewey, 2004, in: Zgaga, 2009, p. 7). At the beginning of the 1990s, necessary cooperation and increased mobility in the field of education between European and other states enhanced the discovery of common points in different national systems. Questions of a global nature (e.g., human rights, environmental protection, peace and tolerance) were posed and that is why it was necessary to design such concepts and methods (e.g., the common policy), which would enable to solve the aforementioned questions.

There is no doubt that globalization, economization of the state and societal areas, and the appearance of the so-called 'information society' also pose a challenge to the field of education. On the other hand, it seems that words such as 'deregulation, privatization, and the market' have become sacrosanct and seemingly without alternative, especially in the cases where the public sector is in question (Beck, 1997; Zgaga, 2009). In Slovenia, the ruling administration advocated the shrinking of the state to administrative and legislative functions, while all other functions, including health services, education and media, are supposed to become private (Ule, 2013). It is obvious that globalism (the term globalism is understood as the ideology, and it is separated from the concept of globalization, which is seen as an analytical concept) has heavily handicapped educational systems. The effectiveness of the public option of 'education and training' was questioned to a great extent and attacked as being ineffective and of a low quality. At the same time 'virtues' were transformed into 'values' and ethics discourses were almost entirely replaced by economic discourses (Zgaga, 2009). The discourse on 'new public management' gradually silenced traditional discourses of public school just as said institution increasingly came to resemble a company (Falconer, 1997). On this subject, Apple critically states that when we start to treat school according to market logic, that is, in the same way as bread and cars, democracy stops being political and starts to be an economic concept, with the help of which individuals can opt for 'rational' choices on the free market in order to advance their position in society (Apple, 2008, p. 14).

All this must be taken into consideration when we talk about the problem of administrating education. In the last twenty years administration in numerous countries has radically changed. This not only in the administrative sense, but also regarding the level on which decisions are made. The most commonly used description for the changes made is the word decentralization. This is because the process of transforming the administration of educational systems was in most countries focused on the redistribution of power from the centre to the lower levels (Peček, 1999; Wakounig, 1999). It was believed that in this way, the increasingly complex educational systems would become more efficient and that they would concurrently also become more considerate towards the interests of local communities. Educational systems would thus become less rigid and more accommodating to the needs of the local environment. Moreover, they would also become more democratic due to their furthering of cooperation between different partners (students, parents, teachers, the civil society, the economy...) in the processes of decision-making. A greater level of autonomy for schools and teachers would also improve the quality and efficiency of schools and increase their success rate while also enabling the development of new teaching ideas.

Although the concept of decentralization is vital to modern systems of school administration, it is no more than an abstract category (Peček, 1999). This is because it cannot describe the whole complexity of changes we are facing in today's systems of management of educational systems. For example, an educational system can be decentralized in one of its dimensions while at the same time stays completely centralized in others. So regulation of the curriculum can be strongly centralized while the financing of education can be decentralized or vice versa. Schools can have much freedom within their curriculum, but the financing of schools can be strongly centralized. It is also possible to make decisions about financial resources for schools on a local level, although the decision can be strongly limited by a central regulative, which makes decision-making on the local level a mere formality. This is why the question of centralization or decentralization of different functions or areas of the educational system must be analysed separately. Areas which requires analysis are, for instance, who defines the curriculum, the transition of pupils

from one level of schooling to another, who is responsible for evaluation, the development and control of quality, textbooks and other teaching resources, employment of teachers, who is responsible for appointing the headmaster of the school, who is the financer of the school, et cetera (Peček, 1999).

It is true that a decentralized educational system is closer to the democratic social order than its centralized counterpart, but this doesn't remotely solve all the problems taking shape inside the educational system. If we take a closer look at the field of supervising the functioning of schools and the work of the teachers, we can see that school legislation and curriculum in decentralized educational systems are more open and that teaching is goal-oriented. It is assumed that this should enable a higher level of autonomy for schools and teachers, but it is becoming clear that this would not necessarily be so. If we also take a look at national knowledge tests, which represent the established way of measuring the quality of schools, we find that it increases pressure on the work of teachers, who have no choice but to submit their whole work to the furtherance of pupils' knowledge. Dialogue, which a decentralized educational system not only demands but also presupposes on all levels of school management, can also become a problem. The point is a search for the most efficient methods of conducting dialogue and coordination tied to the common interests of all partners.

2. Regulation of the Slovene education system from the establishment of the county until today

2.1 The White Paper on Education

Education in Slovenia has a long tradition, starting with the introduction of compulsory education for all children among the first countries in Europe (1774). Formal education has been developing according to a strong tradition of middle European educational space (Schmidt, 1963). In the 20th century the formal system developed within the framework of the centralized Yugoslav system. The influence of the Yugoslav system on Slovenian education was enormous, not just because of the orientation toward different cultural context but because the level of autonomy become the important issue for decades. In the 1980s, demands for greater autonomy (regarding the language of

instruction with the stated goal of preserving Slovenian culture) were formed within the framework of the educational system.

When in the 1990s an independent state was formed, it was also necessary to create a professional basis for the further development of the Slovenian education system. The first proposal was written by the National Education Institute (Ministry of Education, 1992). This proposal pertained to primary education. It was followed by a two-year period of public discussion. In 1995, the basic program document, the so-called White paper on Education, was prepared by a group of appointed experts. This document also comprised the principles which necessitated the implementation of plurality and opened the possibility of choice concerning the plurality of knowledge (education of teachers, development of curricula), the openness of the national curriculum (flexibility of curricula, implementation of elective subjects), the possibility of choosing between different textbooks, the plurality of pedagogical strategies and approaches (methods and forms of work), and plurality in educational programs. In this document, special attention was already paid to the autonomy of schools and quality control of educational work. It was stressed that schools must have autonomy in relation to the state and administrative structures and from extracurricular kinds and forms of knowledge or convictions (The White Paper on Education, 1995).

The implementation of the constitutional provision of separation of church and state (The White Paper on Education, 1995) was another important aspect of school autonomy. This is why no confessional subject is part of the curriculum of public schools, although schools are obliged to present contents through which pupils can gain knowledge about world religions within its framework of instructions. On the basis of this it was clearly determined that the public educational system is lay, which in fact means that it must not be put under the monopolizing influence of different churches, parties or world view groups.

According to The White Paper the autonomy of kindergartens and schools is also connected with *"the autonomy of the individual, which is true for*

pupils as well as for teachers and their respective situations in the system of education.... it is necessary to ensure the protection of individuality and privacy, to intensify control over data collection for children and their parents" (The White paper on Education, 1995, p. 27). Besides all of the aforementioned, it is stressed that autonomy also includes the opening of schools towards a closer and wider environment. Schools are obliged to develop cooperation with cultural institutions, sports, cultural societies and other non-governmental organizations. In pedagogical work they can include external professionals. Schools develop connections with their surroundings on their own. School are thus limited only by the prohibition of working for political parties. The aim is therefore to proscribe the abuse of school for political activism. Due to a lack of tradition of different political parties the questions about the role of political parties in school were raised right after the establishment of the multiparty political system in Slovenia. To us it seems important to protect this aspect of school autonomy.

2.2 Centralization and autonomy: Differentiation between levels and fields

On the basis of the aforementioned programme document, a so-called 'major systemic law' was adopted (Organization and Financing of Education Act, 1996), as well as laws for various areas of education (kindergartens, primary school, gymnasia, professional and vocational education, adult education). In the year 2000 two more laws were adopted regulating specific areas of education, namely children with special needs and musical education. Frequent corrections and supplements of the aforementioned laws followed, although the basic structure of the system remained intact. In fact, relations between autonomy and centralization within the educational system also remained unchanged (payment of teachers, national curriculum, on one hand and autonomy of teaching methods on the other). The only serious exception in the field of administration of schools was a change of laws, which from 1996 onwards intervened no less than three times into the structuring of school councils, which are institutions that govern schools. These changes stemmed from differing views on the problem of whether pupils should also have their own representatives in school councils, and what kind of relationship should exist between representatives of the employees, the founder, pupils and parents.

From the stated it is obvious that the relationship between centralized and autonomous administration and the governing of the educational system simply cannot be mapped on a general level. We must differentiate between various levels, such as national politics, school, the teacher, as well as between different fields of analysis.

Already the financing of education is being implemented in different ways. The assurance of finances for kindergartens is, for instance, transferred to the local community. Kindergarten fees are also determined on a local communal level, although the frames for the calculation of the price, as well as the parents' contribution, are at the same time determined on a national level. On the level of primary school, financial funds for implementing the program are assured on a national level, while funds for investments are assured on the local level. Secondary and tertiary education is financed from national resources. For primary school, the normative for the financing of activities is set very precisely, where the basic unit of calculation of costs is the department, while costs for the implementation of programs on the secondary and high school level are determined per capita depending on the number of pupils and students. This is called 'lump sum' financing. The presented description reveals that secondary as well as higher school institutions have more opportunities to enact their own judgement of where and how they will direct their funds. That is to say, they have greater autonomy in the financial area.

The same is true for the employment of teachers. Which candidate of those applying the school will accept depends entirely on the school headmaster. Here, headmasters on all levels of education are entirely independent. However, conditions (i.e. type of study program of master degree) for teaching individual subjects from the curriculum (in kindergarten, primary school, secondary school or high school institutions) are exactly determined on the national level. The career paths of teachers are also determined on the national level. There are titles (mentor, adviser, counsellor), which every individual can achieve in his career path; the conditions for promotion in individual appellations are also determined.

On the level of monitoring the quality of education, there is the National Inspection Service, the competences of which are focused on performing regular and random inspections. It is also in the competence of this service to ordain disciplinary measures for headmasters who break the law. From the year 2000 onwards, there has also been in practice the concept of self-evaluation of schools and external evaluation of school system (trough international research such as PISA). as more suitable mechanisms for determining and assuring the quality of education. It is the execution of various projects on the national level and on the level of individual schools that guarantees the determination and assurance of quality, slowly replacing classical inspectorial control. This way, self-evaluation becomes the legal obligation of each school. On the level of the state, quality control is performed in various ways. The most prominent approaches, utilizing the concept of so-called added value, are predominantly international studies (such as PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS) and external evaluation on the national level (for instance *matura*), etc. The results of studies are important information for planning of in-service training of teachers and for further development of curriculum for evidence-based policy.

Even in the field of implementing new systemic or content-based solutions for designing new curricula (new syllabuses, new educational programs), we cannot unanimously talk about centralization or autonomy. The proposer of new solutions could be virtually anyone, although the procedures for actual implementation are precisely determined on the national level. The National Board is obliged to elaborate all ideas of proposer and send them to the Council of Experts to decision-making.

2.3 More room for local curriculum planning within the tradition of centralization

In spite of the fact that, from the 1990s onwards, greater autonomy for schools was implemented into the heretofore strongly centralized system, numerous legal acts that are preserved on the national level, which frame the existing level of autonomy. This is revealed by numerous normative acts that are accepted on the national level, which frame the work of educational institutions.

More complex but also more subtle is the relationship between autonomy and centralized management on the level of content, where designing the curriculum and implementing direct pedagogical work are in question. In Slovenia we have a tradition of centralized planning of the curriculum. In the past, the curriculum was determined on the national level for all levels of education and was the same for all pupils who attend the same programme. In the 1990s the curriculum for gymnasia was the first to be accepted at the national level. This curriculum also allowed that pupils autonomously designed their own final curriculum (undistributed lesson hours and optional compulsory activities) to the extent of 15% of the program. Schools gained more freedom to localize the curriculum, but only within the syllabus and not within the programme. This was followed by curricula for professional and vocational schools. Here the so-called open part of the curriculum (20%), which schools can design themselves together with the local community, was adopted. Optional subjects in primary schools were also implemented in the last triennium. Thus, schools were offered a chance to design the final curriculum by themselves, and pupils were allowed to shape the curriculum according to their own choice.

The same is also true for syllabi. Syllabi are determined on the national level, although each syllabus also contains a part that offers the teacher a chance to make autonomous choices and supplements the syllabus. As of the last two decades, the teacher autonomously chooses textbooks published from different publishers from a selection accepted and approved by the highest expert body (The Council of Experts for General Education in Republic of Slovenia). The teacher is entirely autonomous in the choice of methods, approaches and pedagogical work, although teachers often still call attention to the fact that the autonomy of pedagogical work is limited by the standards of knowledge which are separately determined for each subject on the national level. Teachers also think that overtly detailed standards of knowledge narrow the possibility for autonomous decision-making regarding approaches and methods of work. They call for reconsideration of how detailed should standards be defined.

3. Decentralization and autonomy in Slovenian schools

An overview of educational systems reveals that almost all countries periodically change their curricular politics from more to less centralized (Peček, 1999) and the other way around. The first as well as the second form of curricular politics each has its strengths and weaknesses. A more firmly prescribed curriculum drives the implementation of policy choices that are found to be important. In the short-run such centralized approaches can lead to the improvement of learning results (Peček, 1999). The advantages of a more flexible curriculum where schools alone analyse important aspects are in the active involvement and participation of schools and teachers. Such an approach leads to expressions of high motivation and demands for professional development (Koren, 2013; Seddon, 1997). The result of this can be a more permanent improvement of educational achievements, although clarity is gradually lost (Nieveen & Kuiper, 2012). If teams of teachers do not work systematically towards a balanced curriculum, clarity might get lost over time, and education could lead to a hodgepodge of learning activities without clear goals and directions.

In the school area and from the perspective of analysis of school politics, we link autonomy to the decentralization of the educational system and to the degree of freedom, responsibility, and control – school inspection (Chubb & Moe, 1990). We can think about autonomy inside the educational system from the viewpoint of the school area, schools as organizations (Koren, 2013; Mintzberg, 1993) the teacher (Fullan, in Hargreaves, 1999) and, of course, the headmaster (Koren, 2013). In the school area we often connect it with the question of professionalism (Sockett, 1993; Stronach, 2002).
The autonomy of schools in Slovenia is limited by the Act on Organization and Financing of Education. It is established by The Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, as well as by statutes and on various professional bases such as syllabi, et cetera. On the national level, The Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia establishes syllabi. This council is a technical consulting body of the Ministry. The aforementioned legislation defines the state and school level and sets boundaries to autonomy in the field of organization, administration and financing, all of which are within the competence of headmasters, followed

by those which define the work of individual classes, departments or groups and set limits to autonomy in the field of curriculum and in consequence also to teachers, who are in the role of performers of professional sources such as syllabi (Nolimal, 2008, str. 27).

The autonomy and professional responsibility of schools and teachers are the principles which have been presented as goals of the educational system in Slovenia from the curricular change in the second half of 1990s onwards, although it can be also found among the principles for the renovation of syllabi in the year 2006 (Žakelj, 2008). Curricula on the national level are determined by the Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia, The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. Afterwards, the Minister announces beginning and mode of implementation of curricula in school practice with the help of the curricular letter. The curriculum is obligatory for all teachers. Curricula for individual subjects are uniform and equal on the entire territory of the state.

In spite of this it must be said that the implementation of the principle of autonomy has in practice been very cautious and has occasionally met with hindrance. This is the reason why at the time of curricular renovation, professionals warned that increasing autonomy is questionable if the level of professional expertise of teachers is too low and if professional norms, alongside which schools function, are not worked out (Svetlik, 1997).

In the phase of syllabi preparation during the curricular renovation of 1998, special attention was dedicated to the involvement of teachers, parents and the rest of the professional public in the participation of suggestions and professional solutions. At the same time the reform included a systematic evaluation of the work process. Monitoring the impact of curricular renovation has been formally and informally taking place from 1998 onwards.
Fifteen years after the curricular renovation which took place from 1996 till 1999, there once again emerged the need for renovation and upgrading of the school curriculum. On the one hand, this was a demand produced by societal development pressing for an ever more competitive individual, and, on the other hand,by developments in the field of education which spawned

a multitude of new understandings, politics and demands (for instance the competency-based approach, the development of linguistic and inclusive politics, et cetera).

In 2006, with the establishment of the competent commissions, began the formal renovation of the curriculum as an upgrade of the renovation of 1998. The principles for this reform were adopted with adherence to the principles of the national curriculum for the 21st century, which mentions flexibility of the teaching process, a holistic approach towards teaching and learning, self-regulation and the strengthening of autonomy for individual learning/knowledge and the like. Alongside these principles, the principle of autonomy of teacher and school (openness and selectivity) of the 2006 curriculum and syllabi renovation was also strongly stressed. With adherence to these principles, the goals of renovation were directed towards the autonomy of teacher and school (openness and selectivity), a teaching-targeted and developmental approach towards planning, improved competency of pupils, an integrated curriculum, and cross-curricular learning.

In 1998, the autonomy of schools was expressed through the introduction of elective subjects and through the incorporation of learning oriented teaching in syllabi. This means that goals which pupils are supposed to achieve through the educational process on individual levels moved to the foreground, while the selection of learning matter and working methods were concurrently left to the teachers. In 2008, the introduction of renewed syllabi for primary school and gymnasia somewhat increased the autonomy of teachers. Besides elective subjects and learning oriented teaching, elective goals and contents are also present in the renewed syllabi for 2008.

4. The realization of autonomy on the level of school management, teacher, local communities and state

Koren (2013) alleges that regarding school management, Slovenian headmasters and schools have greater autonomy than their colleagues in other countries, which also applies to teachers, other school expert workers and employees, and the distribution of financial resources. On the other hand, they

are limited by numerous - very detailed - regulations and norms. Headmasters are responsible for pedagogical and business management. Important is of course, autonomy in the field of pedagogical management - which offers the possibility for the development of particularities within the curriculum, as well as of teaching methods, the organization of teachers' work and more, which is the essence of the autonomous operation of headmasters and leads toward the autonomy of the school as a whole. However, recent Slovenian research (Koren, 2013) shows that headmasters do not take full advantage of their new role to implement this autonomy. The autonomy of headmasters in Slovenia also depends on the manner of their re-election. Although the current system in Slovenia also has its weak points, it has been proven in practice, as experience shows in conjunction with various political events, for instance the changing of governments, that the principle of leaving decision-making to school councils is the only way to limit political influences (Koren, 2013).

It is not possible to discuss the autonomy of schools without including the differing views of participants in the educational system and their mutual confrontation. Especially important are the teachers as the bearers of change in school classes. Fullan (in Hargreaves, 1999) especially emphasizes the role of teachers and their understanding of autonomy, but also takes into account that teachers' work is still rather isolated. This isolation affects their autonomy. Autonomy and professional responsibility of teachers are starting points for a quality educational process. Only an autonomous and professionally responsible teacher can design the educational process in accordance with the mission, basic virtues and goals of the field. The autonomy of teachers stems from their competence and professionalism, but at the same time it is very important that teachers are aware of their autonomy. In the framework of educational activity the teacher has the right to professional judgement in the case of the collision of rights and duties of pupils. Quality performance of pedagogical work demands permanent monitoring of the development of professions, implementation of different didactical approaches, and consistent educational activity. The condition for implementation of quality pedagogical work and realization of numerous roles find themselves in also present a crucial commitment to permanent professional growth.

In the Slovenian educational system, autonomy and professional responsibility is given to teachers through the opportunity to select the methods and approaches, with the help of the smaller part of the open curriculum, which is created by the schools themselves and partially also by national documents, which are open in the sense of allowing the choice of aims, contents and approaches to teaching and learning. On the other hand we have syllabi, selection of learning resources, evaluation of knowledge, etc., which are defined on the governmental level.

The next level is the autonomy of local communities. This autonomy lost much of its former prominence with centralization at the state level. It is tried to implement it again, often encountering the resistance of local communities, which sometimes reject autonomy and want to rely on the state instead (Koren, 2013). This is because the state-guarantees the equality of education to all in the country and decreases ambiguities regarding responsibility and the determination of basic goals. We can equally well say that, comparatively speaking, it successfully prevents political forces holding too much influence on local levels, which could work against professional and basic educational teaching goals adopted on the national level.

Monitoring the impact of curricular renovation and of implementation of autonomy on various levels of the educational system has been taking place, formally and informally, ever since 1998. Analysis of sources reveals that at the time of implementation of the nine-year primary school, decentralization in the field of external factors was weak, as for instance in the organizational field - in spite of the openness permitted by target-designed syllabi, schools were obliged to follow a detailed weekly realization of lessons, defined in the national schedule of subjects (Nolimal, 2008). The local empirical study entitled 'The professional autonomy and responsibility of professionals in education' (Marentič Požarnik, Kalin, Šteh, & Valenčič Zuljan, 2003) also reveals that understanding and recognizing autonomy by teachers differs for different levels of education: the higher the level of education, the smaller the degree of professional autonomy and professional responsibility the teacher gets. Along the same lines, the survey 'The purpose of school renovation and

autonomy' (Šteh & Valenčič Zuljan, 2004) reveals that primary class-level teachers feel to be the most autonomous and qualified of all teachers. This can be explained by the fact that at their level of education the most was invested in their education, that they cooperate the most in their work, and that the external frames such as demands in syllabi and the assessment of knowledge are the least constrained. In addition, the authors also reveal that teachers who experience the least autonomy are those who have limited ideas about educational reform. They, for example, see the purpose of renovation only in the changing of the content of syllabi. Also, less than one third of Slovenian teachers showed a higher level of understanding of the concept of autonomy - as responsible and professional activity in the sense of extended professionalism (ibid). Only these are the teachers of who could be expected to engage with the reform and to strive for achieving the ambitiously set goals.

Autonomy as well as responsibility are therefore conditioned by professional competencies and knowledge, while decentralization and autonomy of the education system are conditioned by external factors which more or less importantly determine the organization, performance, efficiency and the entire structure of schooling, as well as by internal factors, which is to say the human factor, being the teacher (Kant, 1987). When we emphasize the importance of autonomy, we must also be aware that autonomy also take on the responsibility that comes with autonomy. Autonomy burdens schools and other levels of education with increased responsibility. It is important to understand that increasing the responsibility of schools and teachers does not only mean compliance to regulations coming from the outside of school and to inspections. Responsibility also means being responsive to public criticism, which must have the opportunity to judge the professional decisions of schools, their responsibility toward parents and pupils and students.
We cannot discuss the autonomy of the school without including the different views of people who are part of the educational system. The Council for Evaluation in Education is the Slovenian expert body responsible for the coordination of educational programs. The body coordinates the evaluation on the level of programs for pre-primary, compulsory and secondary education. Evaluation of educational institutions is carried out as both internal and

external evaluation. External evaluation is carried out by an evaluator who is responsible and accountable to the educational administration, but is not directly included in the activities of the school. Some approaches are traditional, for instance the analysis of the success rate of the final assessment. Schools have been using different instruments for determining and assuring the quality of education only from the 1990s onwards. They report their findings and expected measures for the improvement of quality to their school councils. The results of international tests of knowledge and those of international surveys in which Slovenia participates - such as PISA, TIMSS, TALIS, ESLC, SITES-ICILS, PIRLS, and ICCS - provide additional information about the knowledge of pupils, which is important for the pupils themselves (their parents), for the teachers, the school, and the country.

5. Conclusion

The effectiveness of the school system and the introduction of change do not depend only on regulation of the school system. There are many other important factors (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2001). The fact is that the field of education is highly regulated since public schools are usually sponsored by either the central or local authorities. This is especially true for Slovenia, as state patronage and its undisputed authority in the field of education is a historical constant (Peček, 1999). No doubt that the state has to provide a formal legal framework for schools (the right to education, educational standards), but not necessarily to interfere with their day to day operation, and with the components of the learning process. Providing more autonomy on the principle of professional authority would mean allowing schools and teachers more freedom in decision-making about the content and modes of instruction, about recruitment and promotion of teachers, and in designing the criteria for the entry into the profession. Thus far, the above has been regulated by the state, allowing schools and teachers only to express their views, which is probably the reason why teachers seem apathetic and without belief that their participation in the educational reform can make a change. Commitment to decentralization is therefore normal.

The issue of professional autonomy of schools should be largely addressed by teachers' organizations. Their involvement in the reform process and their participation in solving concrete problems could give schools and teachers the status that they deserve. Such organizations could be an equal partner to the executive authorities. Their suggestions, solutions, and consensus in change implementation could represent an important starting point in the process of modernization of education in Slovenia.

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Sweden - From governing with curricula to steering with outcomes

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Abstract

In this chapter educational policy and educational change in Sweden are analysed from a historical, societal and socio-political perspective. The thread of the analysis is that there is a move visible from governing with curricula, via a more decentralized approach to steering with outcomes nowadays. The latter goes along with decreasing space for teachers' professional autonomy and for locally based curriculum decision-making. The influence of educational research on policy choices made is also addressed.

1. Introduction

The fall and rise of a progressive educational policy in Sweden is a story about the 20th century. In the very year of 1900 the Swedish educationalist and author Ellen Key (1900) published her famous book '*The century of childhood*'. It marked an entry into a modern time in which the future was not a given but became possible to choose. Social positions were not inherited but to be achieved. Education became one mean for the shaping of a modern welfare society. The centre of the pedagogical world shifted from the disciplining of the subject to the education of the child. These promises, if fulfilled, could become the century of childhood. In many respects the 20th century became a century in which school systems were established and schooling both prolonged and broadened. Even if the conditions for children improved, many children were still suffering from poverty and diseases and a decant childhood. It is maybe more appropriate to name the last century a 'Century of schooling'.

2. Reforms in the 1990s

Industrialization emerged rather late to Sweden. The basic agrarian production dominated up to the end of the 19th century. During the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century a sustained growth in the economy was nourished by innovative activities and investments started. The growth in the agrarian production gave a surplus that stimulated an incipient industrialization. Already in the 17th century the Swedish population (until 1809 Sweden and Norway were unified) was literate as a consequence of the Lutheran reformation (Ljungberg & Nilsson, 2009). The industrialization forced new demands on education and new forms of education arose. Engineer schools were established alongside with various types of vocationally oriented institutes. With the forming of industrial production, the need for a more organized vocational education was demanded. At the end of the 19th century, schools for vocational education were organized as 'evening schools' and 'Sunday schools'. In the beginning of the 20th century, specific industrial schools were established by municipalities. Compared to evening and Sunday schools, these were full-time schools (Olofsson, 2005). With a growing and differentiated labour market, education became essential for entering into the labour market. The political role of education as an instrument for social, cultural and economic change became increasingly important.

The increased political role that education was ascribed was also related to equality (see Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2000). At the time there were two parallel school systems on the primary level: one public (*folkskola*) and the one academically oriented (*realskola*). The central political issue during the first half of the century was how to make the system more equal. The question concerning organization was: How to connect the public school with the academic school? A solution was agreed upon in the Parliament in the 1930s. The public school system became the bottom school for further education. After the academic school there was a three- or four-year long upper secondary education (*gymnasium*), which gave access to university studies. After World War II the educational system was radically reformed. The comprehensive nine-year system (*grundskola*) was implemented during the 1960s and the upper secondary schools were integrated in a two-year and a three-year upper

secondary school system (*gymnasieskola*). Adult education expanded and so did the university system, which in the 1970s became program-oriented.

The restructuring of the Swedish school system during the 1990s occurred in three stages:

- increased decentralization and deregulation (started in the 1970s);
- revised educational goals and content;
- and increased consistency of the legal, financial, ideological, and evaluative systems to respond to the changes.

With these changes the National Board of Education (NBE), the state agency for schooling since 1920, was replaced by a new central agency: the National Agency for Education (NAE). NAE accentuated national evaluation and control. In 1991, a new government was constituted. The first educational reform was to create an independent school system. The government introduced rules for establishing independent schools. Although not being public, these schools had to follow the national curriculum. After being approved by the National Agency for Education they were financed by the municipalities to the same extent as the public schools.

During the 1990s, preschool, compulsory school and school childcare had become gradually more closely associated with one another. In many municipalities they were physically joined and shared the same staff. In 1995, municipalities became obliged to provide childcare for all children aged 1-12. As of recently, special needs children and children of parents who are working, studying or are on parental leave also have this right. In addition, it was decided that students aged 20 or more could attend adult education programmes that include basic and upper secondary adult education (with corresponding content to compulsory and upper-secondary school) as well as Swedish for immigrants.

To summarize the main reforms of the 1990s:

- a decentralization of the entire school system;
- a new model for political governing built on goals and results governing;
- new curricula;

- the National Board of Education (NBE) was abolished and replaced by a new agency: the National Agency for Education (NAE);
- a three-year-long program-oriented and course-oriented upper secondary school system;
- a new market system;
- an independent school system;
- pre-school education was moved from the social sector to the educational sector and given a curriculum;
- a new school for six-year-olds;
- a program for adult education.

On average, Sweden spent annually 8% of its GNP (or 174 billion Swedish crowns), on education in the first decade of the 21st century. Costs had increased by 18% over a five-year period and throughout almost 40% of the Swedish population had been enrolled in either educational programs or was working in schools. In this context, the Swedish population is a prime example of what is called the '*Homo pedagogicus*' (Lundgren, 2002).

3. The 21st century

After 1890 industrialization accelerated. New inventions and new industries were established. Except for the recession in the 1920s Sweden developed as a modern industrial nation. Industry developed and gave an expanding economy. In the political climate of that time demands on human capital were met with an expansion of education and the establishing of new types of school forms. On the lower secondary level there were - in the 1940s - eight different forms of schools and on the upper secondary level there were five types of school systems. On the primary level the children started in the same school and could after grade four or six enter an academically oriented school for five or four years. The entrance was determined on marks or, later, on an entrance test.

During World War II the planning of a unified public school system started. The first motive for reforming and unifying the educational system was to shape a system that would provide equal opportunities. Another motive was of an administrative character: to simplify the national system by creating

one unified system. A third motive was to form democratic education. The experiences from the thirties and the forties were important arguments for fostering the values of democracy in the next generation. In the report from the first School Committee of 1940, these motives were formulated in the following way (SOU, 1944): "*With the continuous change of democratisation there is a more visible will to organize the school system in such a way that each type and each degree of formation is possible for each young citizen, irrespective of sex, place of living, class and economic conditions*." During a ten-year period, between 1942 and 1952, the number of pupils in elementary schools increased drastically and urbanization increased. In its turn, this expansion demanded new physical space and more teachers.

The economic impact of education came into focus. During the 1950s, several economists demonstrated how investments in education were related to economic growth. The economic motives for reforming the educational system became the soundboard in the political discourse about educational reforms. Another set of arguments was related to the international scene. The launching of Sputnik (1957) and the Cold War had consequences for curriculum development in Sweden. A year later, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) was founded. One of the initiative holders was a Swedish educator, Torsten Husén.

4. Educational research, educational policy, educational engineering

The construction of the public school as a bottom school was a political compromise. Even if the construction gave entrance to continuing education, the choices in reality followed family and geographical backgrounds. The chairman for the Social-democratic party Tage Erlander characterized the then existing school system as "*a class society in miniature*" (Erlander, 1973). The Social-democrats and the Liberals argued for a common comprehensive school, while the conservatives wanted to have early ability grouping. The professors of education at the time were asked to give an answer to the question at what age the children could be divided into different study lines. There were four professors of education and educational psychology at the time. Three argued for a division at grade four, i.e. at eleven years of age, the

fourth argued for a later differentiation. The reason for the latter was that the practical talents developed slower than the theoretical talents (Elmgren, 1952). This was explored in an experimental period of ten years, which was never evaluated. In 1962 a parliamentary decision was taken on a nine-year comprehensive school (*grundskola*).The formation of a comprehensive school system involved researchers. Educational research and psychological research achieved a position and trust in the public discourse. The then central agency for schools - the NBE - was given resources for financing educational research and evaluation (Achenhagen, Berg, Entwistle, Popekewitz, & Vislie, 1997). The strong relationship between educational research and educational policy meant that a form of social or educational engineering was established. With a contemporary expression it can be called evidence-based policy-making.

The educational policies of the 1950s and 1960s were thus based on an idea of '*educational engineering*'. The NBE was given the role of evaluating the educational system and to follow and analyse societal changes. These evaluations were to be carried out by educational researchers and be used as an empirical ground for change - '*The rolling curriculum reform*'. Upper secondary education was reformed in 1964 and 1968. Theoretical and vocational study lines were organized within a unified secondary school system (*gymnasieskola*). Educational research had an impact. The construction of the secondary level and the curricula was, to some extent, based on research (Dahllöf, 1960; Härnqvist, 1958).
The changes towards non-ability classes were criticized. To teach in comprehensive classes, i.e. to teach in heterogeneous classes, was different compared to teaching in homogenous classes. The response to those who questioned the possibility of achieving the same quality in heterogeneous classes as in homogeneous ones, was that the teaching must be individualized. One discernible solution for such an individualization was to develop educational technology. Already during the 1920s there had been experiments with school radio. At the end of the sixties experiments started with school television The NBE launched several projects aimed at developing 'individualized' instructional methods, based on explored American examples. The projects failed. New projects around individualized instruction focussed

on programmed learning. Within the NBE a special working group was established in order to develop a new curriculum. This curriculum work was based on the idea that each goal had to be articulated in terms of behaviour. The curriculum worked was never finished, as criticism forced a closure.

5. Changed economic and political conditions

The decision on a comprehensive school was a compromise and compromises have unexpected consequences. Grade 7 to 9 offered many study alternatives, which held the consequence that schools had to be large. The increasing urbanization demanded new school buildings. New large schools were situated in housing blocks in the outer edges of the cities. Discipline problems increased. In addition, having had education and good marks became more and more necessary in order to enter the labour market. The medial pressure on schools increased and the public discourse about education was vivid. These consequences formed the background for the reforms of 1970s which was a decade of changed economic conditions. For the first time since the 1930s, the economy dropped. As a consequence of the Arabian-Israeli war in 1973, OPEC countries dramatically raised oil prices to nearly four times their usual level. The second crisis came in 1978, with the revolution in Iran. Student 'revolutions', ignited in Paris, focussed attention on educational systems and the inability to shape equal education. The expectations of increased efficiency and productivity called for concrete, well-articulated goals and a steady direction. But in the 1970s and 1980s, the governing subject - the government and administration - became weaker and fragmented. Evidence of this resides in the splitting-up of mass parties into smaller political factions, beginning around 1980, which thereby forced the creation of fragile governing coalitions. It can be argued that the classical ability of a government to be strong and able to reject demands was lost in the 1970s.

The political authority of a government and its administration is derived from two elements: its effectiveness and public consent. Effectiveness and consent are related, but can be in conflict. In order to guarantee the consent of the electors, more and more interest groups and associations was formed. During the expansion the existence of organizations favoured the negotiating

climate for reforms. Now it created new problems. As more organizations were formed, the more negotiations became necessary to gain support for one or another line of action, or for a reform. A cooperative negotiating context was formed, but such a context was susceptible to indifference with respect to participation: citizens could become demotivated. These problems resulted in governing documents, like curricula, that became more abstract and allowed for various interpretations. Such documents, however, did not meet the needs of a new political context, i.e. well-articulated goals and a steady direction.

What also changed during the 1980s and 1990s was the financial situation. With limited resources, various sectors of government were forced to compete with one another. A consequence of this competition was, in some places, that goals for education were broadened in order to make the educational sector look as important as, or more important than, other sectors. This broadening of goals was reinforced by the necessity to satisfy various, and often different, demands. Once again, the contradiction between what was produced and what was needed became apparent. Goals became more abstract despite the fact that more clearly stated goals were needed.

6. Decentralization and privatization

The welfare state came under attack. Public education had been an active part in building the Swedish welfare state. The comprehensive school system had attracted international attention. But few studies had been carried out on the outcome of the reforms. By the 1970s, the debate focussed more and more on the effectiveness of the school system. The criticism was on academic outcome, as reforms had not delivered what was promised. New reforms were needed. The main problem was to finance new reforms and to fulfil expectations in a changing work life and a new economy. In the 1980s these problems were accentuated.

The goal of social equality through equal educational opportunity was still unfulfilled. Differences between students of different backgrounds remained and, in some cases, increased. In addition, students seemed to learn subordination rather than democratic citizenship values. Education, as an instrument for social change, seemed to have become a fairly blunt

instrument that was difficult to control from the centre. While reforms succeeded in increasing access to education, socially and geographically, social background remained the best predictor of educational attainment (Härnqvist, 1992). However, in international tests Sweden came out rather well. Compared to other countries Sweden had rather good results with a low deviation, which indicated a fairly equal system, but there was also some indication on comparatively low results: On 33 international measurements from 1964 to 2003 Sweden was twelve times among the best, eleven times over the average and seven times average. Two times Sweden was in the bottom rank (mathematics in 1964 and 1980). The measurements on results from mathematics teaching in 1964 and in 1980 were used in the debate as indications of a system on its way down. One of the biggest daily papers had a campaign in the 1990s in which the school system was described as not only poor but in a state of moral disaster. The presented solution was to open up for private alternatives and strengthen the demands.

In the mid-1980s and the early 1990s, two National Commissions recommended major changes in the governance of the welfare system (SOU, 1990). Swedish education policy shifted from a centrally organized system to a decentralized system and later to market-orientation (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2000). This trend was consistent with the experience of many other countries that incorporated elements of local development, school improvement projects, school-based evaluation and role changes for school leaders. Social Democrats as and non-socialist party members contributed to these changes, but did so with different motives: While the Social Democrats, at least initially, considered the new form of governance as a way of attaining equality and informing local school development through evaluation, non-socialists wished to introduce both new goals and new instruments that would promote individual choice (Englund, 1995).
Criticism of the welfare state focused on difficulties in governance, inefficiencies, and an overload of administrative tasks. Government bureaucracies appeared to be inflexible, increasing in size, and costly, "*leaving civil society with small possibilities for intervention and participation*" (Klette, Carlgren, Rasmussen, Simola, & Sundkvist, 2000). In addition, better-educated

citizens called for more influence over their own lives and in social affairs. What has been thought of as the Swedish model, with its strong public sector, came under attack and was increasingly being considered as a problem rather than as an effective agent in the distribution of benefits and an instrument for economic development and social change. The transformation from an industrial to a service and knowledge marketplace, which required new information technologies, put new and increased demands on education in a response to the adult population's need to obtain the skills required to compete in the changing job market (Englund, 1995). In the late 1980s, a parliamentary committee received the task of investigating political governance and suggested a new model (Du Rietz, Lundgren, & Wennås, 1987). The Conservatives and the Liberals argued for the opening-up of the system for independent schools and thereby create a market. The Centre Party argued for decentralization, and the Left Party supported the continuation of a centralized system. The Social Democrats were divided in either keeping the centralized system or decentralizing it. The Minister of Schools resigned and a new Minister was appointed. He was delegated to decentralize the school system. A bill was presented in 1990. In this bill, the decentralization of the school system was suggested and a new model for political governing was presented.

7. Curriculum reforms since the 1960s

The first curriculum for the comprehensive school (*läroplan för grundskolan*) was established in 1962. It was rather extensive, including national goals, syllabi and timetables regulating the number of lessons for each subject and grade. Even teaching methods were suggested. It was a part of a centralized governed school. In 1970, a new national curriculum was implemented. The changes compared to the one of 1962 concerned mainly the organization of grades from seven to nine reducing the complexity of study programmes. In the 1970s the educational system, as pointed out, became more decentralized. The 1980 curriculum was accordingly less detailed and opened up for more of teacher freedom in choice of content and methods. Each school had to have a working plan (school-based curriculum) and the teacher had to work in working teams. The 1994 curriculum followed the same tendency as the one of 1980.

For curricula from 1960s up to the 1980s were presented to the government by the National Board of Education. With the decentralization in the 1990s and the change of the central agency, a committee headed by the NAE director-general worked out the new curriculum (SOU, 1992). The forthcoming law was a curriculum that presented the national goals for the school system and the ground of values (*värdegrund*). For each subject the syllabus had to be goal-oriented in order to give teachers and teaching teams space to adjust the content to that local context and to contemporary developments. The rationale was that in a world that rapidly changes, it is important that schools have room for continuous adjustments of content. At the same time, the curriculum regulated sharper than before the responsibilities of school leaders and teachers. Parallel to the work of the curriculum committee, a second committee was given the task to construct a new marking system.
The existing marking system from the 1960s was built on a relative scale, i.e. the distribution of marks had to follow the Gauss curve. The committee suggested an absolute system with a non-pass grade. It was built on a simple taxonomy. The government made some changes in the bill and an absolute system was introduced. The discussion on how to evaluate and assess goals given in the national curriculum and the way knowledge was to be assessed and evaluated by the marking system came in conflict with one another.

Criticism towards the school system increased. Teachers were opposing the decentralization and argued for a centrally governed system. In some municipalities the local government was infected by new business models and created systems for clients and contractors. Housing segregation and independent school created increased differences in outcomes. Sweden went through a financial crisis during the implementation of the new curriculum. As a consequence, municipalities had to cut down on expanses and schools had to reduce teaching staff. The necessary in-service training programmes could not be executed. In the 1990s, equality lost the 'e' and became quality. Quality, however, has a lot of faces. The concern about quality has translated into focus on outcome measures, program monitoring and program evaluation (Nytell, 2006). In recent years, the production of (internationally comparable) statistics has increased due to a rising interest on the part of politicians, the

media and the public. Municipalities and schools are now required to review their activities and present results in a quality report. On the basis of these reports, the national government provides support to municipalities to help them achieve national goals. Rankings for lower and upper schools, as well as universities, have become a more frequent phenomenon in recent years. During 2001, the national government constructed an extensive database containing quantitative and qualitative data, which is now available on the Internet. In addition, national school inspectors monitor the quality of education for a range of special topics. While at least some of the Swedish educational reforms have been designed to decentralize and increase flexibility, central control also has been strengthened: there is increased focus on outcome measures as a way of improving educational quality.

8. The new millennium

Sweden is a more divided and polarized country today than it was ten to fifteen years ago, with respect to income, wealth, living conditions and housing segregation. Categories traditionally associated with exclusion are unemployment, low education and low income. In the 1990s, youth and ethnic background gradually received political attention and programmes supporting the youth and students of various ethnic backgrounds in entering the labour market were implemented. Even though education has expanded significantly, societal divisions continue to be reflected in education and, in some respects, they have also increased. A rather large number of students cannot enter a national program at the upper secondary school level, and many of those who enter do not complete their upper secondary school or higher education. Also noticeable is the more frequent use of ability grouping in schools, as well as the decrease in special education within classes and the increased number of children attending special schools. Children from marginalized families are less likely to succeed in school. The new grading system makes a distinction between those who succeed and those who fail more visibly than before. Moreover, a larger proportion of students attend special programmes in upper secondary school and dropout rates are high. A relatively small proportion attends higher education at all and few of those can be found in high status programs.

The restructuring of Swedish education provides an interesting case study of policy change implemented by a welfare state in transition, with scarce finances, governing problems, and - at least in the perception of part of the population - a lack of legitimacy. It was hoped that decentralization, deregulation and freedom of choice would increase democratic participation, efficiency and professionalism. At the same time, however, greater control in the form of accountability occurring at every level of the education system has contributed to renewed centralization. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Swedish administration of education at the national level has changed several times. Tasks like monitoring, inspection and development have been interchangeably managed by one, two or three agencies. In the early years of restructuring, the independence and accountability of the municipality level was stressed. Shortages in the school system, especially in relation to the inability in handling school development and poor student performances, led to a split of the National Agency. The controlling task was separated from the responsibility to support school improvement. National evaluations of the school system remained part of the National Agency's responsibility.
The task of examining the standards of quality and equivalency of educational programs was executed under a new authority - the National Schools Inspectorate. At the same time, the amount of money designated towards inspections doubled. In addition, the Agency became responsible for the authorization of and grants to independent schools.

9. A self-fulfilling prophecy

Results from the PISA studies highlight Sweden as being in a rather good position. However, the tendency to loose position and attain weaker results is still evident, even if it does not appear as significant (Åström, 2008).
The public discussion has, nevertheless, concentrated on crisis. Results from PISA have been mixed with earlier results from IEA studies (TIMSS and PIRLS) as well as results from national tests, evaluation and inspection reports. The Minister of Education has used criticism emanating from these results for advocating change. The crisis of the Swedish educational system is a fact in the public discourse. Widening the debate through national newspaper reports and articles, for example, has been difficult. The ways of handling this alleged

crisis have been both to reinforce market solutions with independent schools and to control students' performances earlier in their study cycles, and more frequently, through tests, marks and inspection. The number of independent schools has increased at the comprehensive school level and even more so at the upper secondary school level. There is an on-going debate on this issue in relation to questions on equity. The enhanced control is in part considered as a response to the equity problem, regarded as a first step to reducing the gender, ethnicity and class gap in students' performances. There seems to be an on-going increase of production and circulation of information on students' performances and school results.

One consequence is a shortage in teachers. It became very easy to enrol in teacher education. Many programmes cannot be filled with candidates. Students entering teacher education programmes have on average lower marks than before. Social backgrounds of enrolled students have changed as well. The lesson to learn here is that creating policy while ascribing a crisis that fits a given belief and solution creates a real crisis. Voices in support of a recentralization of the educational system have emerged and the government has launched a large program for teacher in-service training that parallel new possibilities for teachers to obtain further education at the master and doctoral levels, and a new special needs teacher education. A new teacher education system has been implemented in 2011. The financial crisis is over and Sweden came out in good standing. Thus, there is space for reforms and expansion. However, a reconstruction of the old welfare system is not on the agenda. The objective is a more competitive educational system.

With these measures, the relative autonomy of the municipalities, schools and teachers is challenged in several ways. Simplification of and clearness in curricula objectives and state-governed intervention through visitations of development activities and inspections are examples of the reduction of the scope of action that exists at the local level. The centre-right Alliance government of 2006 started with announcing a series of reforms and new policies aiming at strengthening the evaluation and control over educational outcomes. It took time to turn the recommendation into an Act that was

implemented in 2010. The Act regulates stronger inspection and regulations. It also states that teaching should be based on science and proven experience.

10. New solutions?

During the first decade of the century a number of issues have been commissioned and several changes have been suggested, but yet not proposed to the Parliament. Quite a lot of these reforms have been rushed through the policy process. This is especially true when both the extent and the potentially far-reaching consequences of the suggested changes are considered. Some of the more major reforms, expected to pass through Parliament in the near future, are a grading system, a new curriculum for the comprehensive school, a restructuring of the upper secondary school, and new teacher education. Already decided is a change of the grading scale and a new education program for principals.

The relation between educational research and educational policy formulation and implementation is vague. Educational engineering is just a memory from the past. While there are demands on evidence-based research for teachers, the call for evidence-based policy remains absent. A major change in upper secondary education constitutes a break with the previously dominant trend of inclusion. Its aim is a clear division of students into three separate streams: Either study-oriented, vocation-oriented or oriented towards apprenticeship education and training. Again, assessment is an important aspect of the reform in upper secondary education. There is a sharpening of the rules for entrance, passing through and exit. Rather than a path to the future - the title of the official report - it stands out as a crossroads.

The intensive reform period in the 1990s ended with the reform of teacher education starting in 1997. The Agency for Higher Education evaluated teacher education in 2005. The report was rather critical and pointed out issues to be solved. Three years later, a follow up of the first evaluation was done. Positive changes were observed, but still some critical points prevailed. These were taken as reasons for reforming the teacher education again.

A new committee was established in 2008 with rather restricted directives and a time limit of one year. The proposal from the committee was followed

by a reform that is recently implemented. Teacher education has been given a more strict character of academic education, strengthening subject studies, subject didactics and research in educational sciences. The basic guideline is to approach teacher education as basic education from which further education has to be built in order to create specialization. This means also that the opportunities for teachers to continue to graduate studies will be expanded.

11. Conclusion

Considering the implemented reforms and the reforms still to come one can safely assume that changes in some respects challenge the very core of the Swedish educational system. At least as it is manifested in objectives put forward in Government commissions and laid down in educational acts ever since post World War II. Outspoken ambitions - to make not only compulsory education, but also secondary and tertiary education available and accessible to all - have resulted in an extensive expansion of the system. In order to manage remaining inequality problems the 1990s restructuring of the system - emphasizing professionalism, democratization and efficiency - meant to create a scope of actions for local actors. During the first decade of the 21st century there are, however, several signs pointing to a closing down of the space for professional autonomy, student influence and impact and locally based and initiated school development. This is partly due to a renewed strong central administration focussing on activities such as monitoring, control, inspection, evaluation and assessment on the level of both the individual and the system. If the system revolves around more easily measured results rather than more complex objectives we risk losing the 'e' in equality completely.

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