

The Interplay between Control and Autonomy in Education: International Trends in the 21st Century Education Policies, Curriculum Theories and Teaching Practices

Tero Autio, PhD
Research Professor
University of Tampere

Prelude: education as a special phenomenon of life and social practice (see Benner. D. 2005)

- The history of mankind is dominated by six basic phenomena, which are indispensable in the practical life
- 1. **Economy**: human creates the conditions of his life through work
- 2. **Ethics**: s/he works with other people, which requires rules for interaction between people
- 3. **Politics**: s/he plans and outlines his social future
- 4. **Aesthetics**: surpasses the present moment through aesthetic creations (art does not recognize the concept of progress)
- 5. **Religion**: faces the problem of suffering, limitation, finitude and mortality
- 6. **Education**: provides the new generation with the ability and readiness to plan their future in these areas of life, to be able to continue the social practice as a dynamics between earlier achievements and future projections

“The Age of Contingency”, Globalization and Education

- “The Age of Contingency” (Hans Jonas 2008): things and phenomena are less categorically either **necessary** or **impossible**; *Spielraum* for accidental and free will, willpower, and politics, cf. populist manifestations of “post-truth”, “alternative truths”
- The characteristics of the present world: contingency, uncertainty and the “law” of unintended consequences
- In the global, contingent, uncertain and cosmopolitan context, every nation should be aware more than ever before about the international and transnational trends and processes in politics, culture and education in order to build ***an internationally informed but nationally and locally distinctive system of education and teacher education***
- Yet, today there are powerful trends to standardize education along *transnational* guidelines with ambivalent, even detrimental effects on national and local cultures

Curriculum as an organizational and *intellectual* centerpiece of education at all levels

- Curriculum as a survival kit for the humanity (Herbart 1776-1841); Stoic statesman and philosopher Seneca: wise person associates all ages with her/his life
- Present understanding: curriculum theory is cross-breeding, hybridizing the former divisions between ed history, philosophy, psychology and sociology within the same discursive framework + other cultural and political sources
- What are our explicit or implicit thoughts and images of the curriculum decisively affects our education policies, curriculum reforms, and teacher education and, accordingly, how we position the teacher in the education system; the Culture of Method in teacher education (Autio 2012)
- Basically, there are two models of curriculum theory and practice which are “two very different intellectual systems” (Westbury 2000; Autio 2006, 2014) with far-reaching implications for education

North European *Bildung*

paideia: a system of broad cultural education

- *Bildung, haridus, obrazovanije, sivistys, utbildning*: means European *whole person approach* in education with broad and inclusive, “multiple intelligences” curricula (math, science, arts, humanities, practical and bodily activities embodied in curricula), temporarily lost its popularity after the WWII due to the collapse of the German Nazi Regime
- *Bildung* model, uniquely interpreted, is still the tacit, unarticulated, fragile core of public education in Finland (“Finland is built with *Bildung* more than Sweden or Norway that oriented to the U.S. curriculum” (Uljens))
- *Bildung* symbolically present in Singapore, some Canadian provinces, rising in Chinese “*Bildung*” variations, a mix of “wisdom traditions” of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism as curriculum guidelines. Instead of the passive “conduit of the system” (Westbury), in the *Bildung* tradition the teacher is seen a transformative, autonomous professional

Anglo-American Curriculum; The American “bible of curriculum”: the Tyler Rationale

- Objectives
- Learning experiences
- Organization
- Evaluation
- Based on current “societal needs” and behaviorist psychology and its reactivations in cognitive learning theories and “Learning Sciences”
- Heavy critic in the U.S. since 1970’s: Dwayne Hubner, Joseph Schwab, William Pinar, Michael Apple, William Doll, Janet Miller et al; the “Reconceptualization of Curriculum Studies” mean/t/s to essentially replace the “psychologized curriculum” as cultural, political, aesthetic, international, intellectual endeavor as a resource for education policies, teacher education and curriculum reforms in different geographical locales >> internationalization of curriculum theory/studies
- Revitalization of comprehensive *Bildung* thinking (Horlacher 2016: *The Educated Subject and the German Concept of Bildung: A Comparative Cultural History*)

Anglophone-American Curriculum as a current transnational blueprint for education

- Despite some tendencies to conceive education in broad European and democratic terms (John Dewey (1859-1952), American curriculum thinking and practice has mostly focused on utilitarian and instrumental aspects of education; how to make education effective and provide students with skills and competencies directly utilizable in labor market
- Economic and industrial goals override democratic ones; the long tradition to prefer the factory model of school(ing)
- Finnish-Swedish economist professor Sixten Korkman: the U.S. is plutocracy (government by wealthy) rather than genuine democracy North European style
- Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (1840), the problematic in the U.S. concept of democracy: “it can lead to the tyranny of ignorant masses”
- The basic idea of democracy and education: to optimally actualize the multiple potentials of every single individual (*allgemeine Bildung*)

President Obama's Education Policy: *Through Race to the Top*

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and workplace and to compete in the global economy
- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals where they needed most; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools
- 1,35 billion dollars in 2011 for education and curriculum reform
- What next? Pres. Trump and his Secretary of Educator Betsy DeVos?; no matter which party is in power in the U.S., education policies remain the same (Pinar 2013)
- Peter Taubman's critique 2009; "Teaching by Numbers"
- (Harri Rinta-aho, the Head of the one of best Finnish "lukio" in South-Tapiola: "Our aim is to help students to achieve their best whilst still maintaining a healthy sense of balance. **We never forget that education is about people rather than numbers.** Welcome to Etis!")

Anglophone transnational education, curriculum and teacher policy

- “economic thought is coterminous with rationality” (Couldry 2013) replacing the rationality of “*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*” as drivers of education policy since French Revolution 1789
- The over-emphasis of economic models as the political and educational authority; economy as the political construct = neoliberalism, “New Public Management” (OECD, GB, NZ, Australia), evaluative state, audit society, “evaluation industry” as “trust killers”(Leeuw 2002); neoliberalism as “a theory of everything” (Goodson)
- The marriage btw economy and education: “Bottom line” in business; “test scores” in education; standardization and accountability; “quality and excellence” rhetoric, education as the imitation of commodity production
- Business corporate and production life as the generic model for an ideal public institution, the school/university as no exception; the shrinkage of the public sector – and the demise of the notion of public good and public education?
- The main role of the teacher is not to “educate” in a European sense but transmit pre-structured knowledge and raise the test scores among students; the teacher as the passive “conduit of the system” (Westbury 2000)

Some milestones preceding the current worldwide education crisis

- **The Sputnik shock** 1957 lead to the “Educationalization of the Cold War” , the founding of the OECD and the radical narrowing of the U.S. curricula, an invention of a concept of “core curriculum”; math, natural sciences, foreign languages, (cf. PISA)
- Throwing the baby with the bath water: *The enemy was not only Russians but also progressive, democratic American education ideology (Dewey) and powerful teacher unions* (Tröhler 2011)
- The intellectual shift from philosophical and political concerns to instrumental learning theories and “Learning Sciences” as quasi-developments of behaviorism: educational psychology as a political, uncritical construct rather than an intellectual endeavor aware of its political and theory of science (classical mechanics) affiliations
- The shift from the concept of education to “learning” in terms of measurable outcomes in the language of education, after Coleman not even “learning theories” as such but “learning outcomes” is that matter in education and curriculum policy
- The shift *from education process to measurable outcomes* that James Coleman’s huge survey *Equality of Education Opportunity* in 1966 (576 000 students) consolidated

The Coleman Report “Equality of Educational Opportunity” 1966

- Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Sociology Professor of Harvard: **“The most dangerous report in the history of American education”**
- The shift in reforms *from inputs (family care, housing, nutrition, social policy in general) to outputs, from resource investment to learning outcomes*; Coleman insisted: **“there was equal educational opportunity only if students from differing groups scored roughly the same scores”**
- The Report decisively paved the way to test- and “evidence-based” education reforms and commercial testing industry
- Set unrealistic burdens on teachers in a pseudo-causal way: ‘teaching is the cause and learning is the effect’ that is deeply unconvincing, simplistic claim: **low academic achievements is in average related to unfavorable or poor circumstances of students, not to bad teachers**
- Sahlberg (2006); GERM, Global Education Reform Movement, “virus that is killing education”, against hopes attached to the GERM, it seems detrimental to national economic competitiveness, leading to tightening control, assessment, and measurement rather than enhancing creativity, flexibility and risk taking. Resulting in the narrowing of the scope of teachers and students, competition, anxiety, stress, even burnout

The practical implications for the image of the teacher

- **The image of the teacher in the Anglo-American tradition:**
 - Teacher's role as the intellectually passive "agent of the system" (Westbury 2000)
 - Teacher-proof curricula; "existing teachers are a (if not **the**) major brake on the innovation, change and reform that the schools always seem to require" (Westbury 2000)
 - Curriculum-as-manual; a very limited space for professional autonomy, freedom and judgment
 - Teaching essentially means teaching to the test
- **The image of the teacher in the *Bildung* tradition:**
 - Curriculum is an organizational **and intellectual** centerpiece of education
 - "An autonomous professional teacher ... has complete freedom within the framework of the *Lehrplan (curriculum)* to develop her or his own approaches to teaching" (Westbury 2000).
 - This relationship btw the curriculum and the teacher; teacher as **the** curriculum theorist/maker (Canada, China, Finland, Singapore)
 - High trust in well-educated teachers
 - Tests are not externally mandated but teacher-driven
 - Relaxed and task-oriented atmosphere in classrooms instead of competitive, stressful and test-driven classrooms

The Union between Teaching, Curriculum and Education Reforms

- Every teacher at all levels of education is the curriculum maker and theorist while interpreting and translating the official or planned curriculum; good teaching combines subject matter and teacher's personality: **teacher is the cornerstone and touchstone of any education system – and, by implication, any sustainable society**
- **The key is trust, the sheer existence of externally mandated, high stakes nationwide tests may signal the lack of trust in teachers – and democracy?** (14 % of Estonian, 5 of Swedish, 18 of Danish, 31 Norwegian, 57% of Finnish teachers think they are trusted and appreciated by their society, TALIS 2013)
- The canary bird effect: best teachers and students leave the profession when the air gets toxic due to the lack of oxygen: trust, appreciation and professional freedom and autonomy (Sweden has the lack of 60 000 competent teachers after adopting the GERM policy after a long social democratic tradition since the early 1990's)
- The recognizance of globalization in Nordic curriculum theory puts forward an increased interest in the practical levels of schooling and argues that **globalization should be investigated not only as a policy phenomenon but also as instructional matter in different contexts.** (Wermke, Pettersson, Forsberg (2015))

From knowledge toward wisdom in Chinese curriculum theory and education reforms

- Curriculum, Kèchéng 课程, has 2500 years history in China
- **In China, curriculum theory and curriculum studies provide intellectual and organizational resources for education policies, reforms and teacher education at all levels of education**
- Zhang Hua (2014): **"Education is a liberal cause: No Freedom, No Curriculum"**
- Zhang Hua: What is the aim, content, and methodology of curriculum studies? From Franklin Bobbitt to Ralph Tyler, the aim of curriculum studies is to control the process of curriculum development. The content is to seek the "laws" and "rules" of curriculum making. The methodology is scientism and proceduralism. Transforming knowledge into wisdom, integrating wisdom and morality, are two main themes of Chinese curriculum studies. ... The wisdom traditions of China, especially Confucianism (social order), Taoism (ying/yang, nature and ecology), and Buddhism (enso, incomplete circle = beauty of incompleteness, enlightenment), are of potential to construct curriculum wisdom and meet the need of curriculum studies in a radically changing society.

William Pinar (2014) and Weili Zhao (2018) about the reforms in China in comparison to the U.S. ones

Pinar (2014): “Rather than degrading public education, as US politicians have done since Sputnik, in China the Ministry of Education encourages reform through consultation with experts... Rather than imposing a simplistic model of reform, as in the United States, in China the ministry demands complexity and local innovation, not in the service of standardization but to promote organizational diversity and student-centeredness. In their intellectual courage, their ethical conviction, and their cosmopolitan incorporation of concepts ancient and contemporary (East and West), curriculum researchers in China demonstrate that the future of education is not inevitably the tragic tale it too often is in the West today”.

Zhao (2018): “China has launched its 21st-century *suyang* curriculum reform as a replica of the US’s 21st-century skills and OECD’s core competencies. This paper unpacks this form of borrowing globalizing/ed Western discourses as another example of *epistemicide* (Paraskeva, 2016), **the killing of alternative knowledge system, in China**. However, this epistemicide has gone largely unnoticed under China’s predominant call of “going global”. ... this paper explicates the happening of epistemicide in three steps and envisions an alternative paradigm to recalibrate China’s curriculum reform in an age of globalization”.

Example 1 of the curriculum as complicated conversation in teaching practice

- ... curriculum guidelines must never be more than guidelines. Subjectively situated, historically attuned teachers must be free to follow wherever their imaginations and instincts lead them, acutely aware of the disciplinary knowledge which structures their ongoing inquiry and testimony. ... The teacher is in this sense an artist and **complicated conversation is the teacher's medium** ... It might be helpful to the teacher to reflect on what her or his intentions are, but “objectives” are hardly primary concerns. **What matters is how complicated the conversation becomes. ... what students make of such knowledge** ... Moreover, what students make of their study may not be known, and then only by the students themselves, for years (Pinar 2011)
- “One of the cornerstone of modern pedagogy is the notion that autonomy is the highest objective of education” (Uljens 2016)

Example 2 of the curriculum as complicated conversation in teaching practice

- ... being non-prescriptive is an essential aspect of education if we are not to produce robots or widgets, but independent individuals, capable of innovative thinking and of challenging the status quo in order to build a better future (yes, another normative concept, but also without a clear prescriptive path for its attainment). This certainly requires,..., opening up the dialogue and creating space in which various perspectives may be heard and paths taken *to make sense of the selected curriculum materials on one's journey to individual freedom* (Carol Shields 2017)
- to promote change without telling learners what they should think or do, by creating spaces where they are safe to analyse and experiment with other forms of seeing/thinking and being/relating to one another. ... If educators are not 'critically literate' to engage with assumptions and implications/limitations of their approaches, they run the risk of (indirectly and unintentionally) reproducing the systems of belief and practices that harm those they want to support. (Andeotti 2006)

Bringing education, curriculum and teaching back: beyond “Learning Theories and Sciences”

- a language of education always needs to pay attention to questions of *content*, *purpose*, and *relationship*, hence arguing for a broader view of education than simply that of teaching and learning based on anachronistic image of home teacher. Only then ... can we overcome the current equation of learning with test scores and recognize that “education is always about the transmission and acquisition of some content (knowledge, skills, dispositions), **but always also** ‘connects’ students to particular traditions and ways of doing and being and, in addition, has an impact on their formation as a person (Biesta 2017);

The present understanding of curriculum studies

- Curriculum as an organizational and INTELLECTUAL centerpiece of education at all levels from Kindergarten to university; also outside institutions, lifelong “*Currere*”: world and life as subjectively experienced
- Curriculum is an academic study in its own right (Kelly 2009, Pinar 1995 etc.) that takes into account but hybridizes the former four-box-model of educational research: history, philosophy, psychology and sociology of education. Curriculum studies is a kind of “de-differentiation” beyond the specialisms of those sub-disciplines to get a novel overview of education in its current policies, theories, and practices at different levels of education
- keep an eye on the big picture of education, its intellectual histories and its engagements with political ideals, particularly with democracy, in different parts of the world
- the value of curriculum theory to other fields of research, such as comparative and international education
- F. D.E. Schleiermacher (1776-1834); education research is intellectually located “zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik”, education in practice is not direct application of science, politics makes it contingent

The present understanding of curriculum studies 2

- In today's society, it is by no means enough to be an expert in some narrow field of education. It is a sign of expertise to be able to grasp and understand the larger whole, and to automatically think about things of education on a wider spectrum
- Verticality and horizontality as methodological means: “intellectual histories and present circumstances” at (inter)national levels; the history of the present (Foucault); authentic academic expertise covers the genealogy, “lines of descent” of the discipline
- Internationalization as contrasted by globalization: learning from each other from different intellectual, political, practical and geographical locales in order to build cosmopolitan, internationally informed but nationally distinctive education and curriculum strategies
- Globalization in education means detrimental, antidemocratic standardization (Powell 2003) rather than enhancing creativity and the ideal of “the educated subject” as a cornerstone of working democracy (Horlacher 2016); *education is of and for democracy*

- Giroux (2004), for example, when discussing critical pedagogy, stated that its normative nature does not offer guarantees as much as it recognizes that its own position is grounded in modes of authority, values, and ethical considerations that must be constantly debated in terms of the ways in which it both opens up and closes down democratic relations, values, and identities. (p. 36)
- the central question is not whether the theory is normative, but whether, instead of being uncritically accepting of the status quo, it opens up debates about “relations, values, and identities” in such a way as to be non-prescriptive.

- ...both the purpose and process questions of education and curriculum turn on the values and goals of democracy. Also discussion of transformative leadership share the interests with curriculum inquiry – democracy, globalization, and dialogue. These and many other scholars thus come down on the side of a normative but not prescriptive argument, as they embed the concept of education itself in the norm of democracy, without identifying a list of rules or injunctions (authoritative orders) about how to attain it.
- Curriculum and its study is a complicated conversation not reducible to philosophical, psychological, sociological, historical, political discourses though informed by them among other sources

- Pinar's account of the nature of curriculum and teaching makes more explicit what kind of intellectual and political leadership is required in sustainable education reforms and educational leadership: "*New research findings in education reform patently show that personal and professional commitment must exist at the heart of any new changes or reforms.* Not only is it neutrally absent, it is in fact positively absent in the sense that there is a mixture of profound indifference and active hostility to ... changes and reforms" (Goodson (2014, 16)).

- Uljens and Ylimaki (2017) state that autonomy is “the highest objective of education.”
- The failure in myriad reforms in education is partly due to the failure to recognize and acknowledge the complex dynamics and character of curriculum and teaching. The shortcoming is reflected across the professional span of being a teacher. Finnish experience tells us that talented students interested in teaching are very sensitive to the intellectual, aesthetic, moral and organizational appeal of the profession. If these principles—professional freedom and autonomy of highly educated teachers and public trust in them—is violated, the index of which is excessive external testing and measurement, the best students and teachers seem to leave the profession. The absence of trust toward teachers by the assessment industry is symptomatic of intellectual and ethical insensitivity in understanding education, curriculum and teaching—and by implication, the characteristics of being human/human being and dynamics of democracy (Autio 2017)

Post-Standardization Times in Education Policy and Teaching Practice in the Angloworld?

- In the Anglophone world, there are signs of shift from instrumental approaches to curriculum and teaching, closer to European-Scandinavian theories and practices; “Post-Standardization Era” (Hargreaves)
- From corporate “accountability” and “quality” discourses with the academic support of “Learning Sciences” to ecological, moral, social and political issues and global responsibility
- Recognition of subjective transformation and social reconstruction as a complex template for curriculum design and teaching
- There is some evidence that economically and ecologically sustainable countries trust teachers’ competence, creativity, professional judgment, and academic freedom to teach from early grades on

Present shifts and challenges in education and curriculum theory and teaching practice

- From survey to theory and history: the global primacy of ecology
- From psychologized, universalized, standardized receptions of curriculum to notions of individuality that emphasize the indissoluble links among culture, subjectivity, and politics
- Globalization/internationalization in Nordic curriculum theory puts forward an increased interest in the practical levels of schooling and argues that ***globalization/internationalization should be investigated not only as a policy phenomenon but also as teaching practice matter in different contexts***
- Education means to become socialized first, then aware of the forces and powers that shape(d) us, to become an individual; education is about transformation; why study if it doesn't transform us?
- **To become free in the tradition and meaning of *Bildung* means to become educated:** to be aware of the internal and external forces that makes "me", our past and context constitutes and restrain us but they don't *determine or define us exhaustively* – there are always "sparks of hope" (Walter Benjamin) for transformation

Orderism as a guiding ideology of the current world; columnist Jochen Bittner's in New York Times 2016

- "... it is ideological without being an ideology. It is mercurial, pragmatic and cynical; its meaning and values change to fit the circumstances. ... Orderism prioritizes stability over democracy and offers an alternative to the moral abyss of laissez-faire societies. Russia stands as a model for this new social contract. ... What is striking, though, is how compatible orderism is with the attitudes of many voters in the United States and Europe. Donald J. Trump's campaign boils down to a promise of tough order. And the decision of British voters to leave the European Union, catalyzed by the promise of the U.K. Independence Party and others of an orderly, independent England, was nothing but an attempt to stop the frightening and discomfiting effects of globalization."
- The dictionary definition: Fascism tends to include a belief in the supremacy of one national or ethnic group, a contempt for democracy, an insistence on obedience to a powerful leader, and a strong demagogic approach.