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CONCLUSIONS: PATTERNS AND TRENDS IN CURRICULUM MAKING IN EUROPE

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ABSTRACT:

This chapter provides a summary and a concluding discussion on the main findings from the different cases and chapters throughout this volume. The chapter revisits the approach on curriculum making as non-linear and as framed around a conceptualisation of interrelated sites of activity – supra, macro, meso, micro and nano – presented in the introduction. A central conclusion of this book is that the meso site of activity stands out as critical for current developments within curriculum making, both in terms of a transformed role for the nation state in macro curriculum making, as well as implications of policy flows and processes from the supra site of activity. Based on our observations, we suggest an elaborated model for understanding curriculum making, with special attention to the significance of meso curriculum making and teacher agency. In the final part of the conclusions, we argue that there are a number of lessons to be learned from curriculum making in the European context. In line with the significance of meso curriculum making observed throughout the volume, we emphasize the importance of middle ground and mobility, the necessity of participatory curriculum making, and that systems of accountability need to be based on trust. We also underline the importance of a delicate balance concerning regulation – providing support, guidance and steering – together with a critical awareness of destructive as well as progressive forces for maintaining and providing the agency of the educational system for good curriculum making.

KEYWORDS:

(Please supply up to 6 keywords for your Chapter)

1. Curriculum
2. Curriculum making
3. Meso curriculum making
4. Teacher agency
5. Sites of activity

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Introduction

This book has explored the dynamic and complex features of curriculum making, as a concept and as a phenomenon, by drawing on empirical examples across different national contexts in Europe. We have done so based on an understanding of curriculum making as a social practice, stating that curriculum making is an interactive and non-linear process that occurs and flows across various contexts and sites. Putting together this book has further supported our thesis that curriculum making is a highly dynamic and transactional process of interpretation, mediation, negotiation and translation, involving a double movement of systems changing while individuals and groups working within them, or indeed comprising them, change at the same time. Curriculum making is therefore not just a matter of creating the curriculum as product, but a powerful process of learning for those involved as well. However, as the chapters of this book illustrate, the goals and preconditions of such process differ. Curriculum making is also more or less planned, coordinated and orchestrated action, which may either engage or distance the participants involved. We argue that a better understanding of the processes of curriculum making, which reveals such complex underlying and regulating dynamics, would facilitate and enable social actors' agency towards curriculum change.

While classical questions of content and of what knowledge is of most worth are central to curriculum theory (e.g. Deng, 2012; Young & Muller, 2015), considerations of curriculum making adds questions such as "who is making curriculum?", "with whom and for whom it is made and for what purposes?", as well as "where and when is it made?". Hence, curriculum making involves an interplay between different actors, contested spaces and power relations, framed by particularities and contextual factors of social practices, shaping unique settings, and producing multifarious meanings of what curriculum is and for whom it is made (Priestley & Philippou, 2018). Multiple conditions, such as the room for manoeuvre and conceptual resources of policy, as well as the beliefs, values and professional knowledge of the participating stakeholders, inform and permeate curriculum making processes. Due to the inherent complexity of education systems, the intended changes and chosen direction of policy in some parts of the system sometimes cause unintended and unexpected changes elsewhere. Such complexity, historical and ongoing, requires nuanced analytical tools of thought for thinking about and studying curriculum making.

The idea of this book has been to move beyond conventional conceptions of curriculum as a system of distinct levels, as this entails risks of an oversimplified and uncritical understanding of curriculum

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making as occurring along linear, institutional and administrative trajectories. These risks have been recognized, but conceptual models have not necessarily addressed them adequately (e.g. Goodlad, 1979; Doyle, 1992a). Instead, we have suggested and employed a line of analysis based on sites of activity, allowing critical enquiry and exploration of variations of how curriculum making occurs and emerges in different social contexts. Sites of activity reflect different kinds of engagement and actions in curriculum making that may be rooted in, for example, professional cultures or the historical development of certain institutions. By using this heuristic framing, we embrace and take advantage of the variation in terminology and theoretical concepts in the chapters, spanning from, for example, the use of the Deleuze's concept "assemblage" (in the Irish case), discourse analysis through "discursive institutionalism" (Sweden) and "discursive power" with inspiration from Foucault (Cyprus), to the talk of "narrative" (Czechia). Of course, there is an empirical variety as well. Even though the countries share a common geographical and cultural space referred to (and imagined) as Europe, as well as membership to the European Union (only recently excluding England and Scotland), the heuristic and analytical vantage point with curriculum making as social practice has allowed an exposé of the country cases, displaying both significant differences and striking similarities regarding curriculum making at different sites of activity. Above all, it has illustrated the multilayered and rich ecologies of education systems, within which such curriculum making is embedded. We have tried to capture this in figure 1 to illustrate how layers, activities, and actors are intertwined rather than linearly connected, thus suggesting an alternative schematization of how curriculum making might be traced when compared to Figure 2 in the introductory chapter.

FIGURE 1 HERE

As we note in the first chapter,

The proposed typology places the supra and macro sites at the top of the diagram. However, this should not be taken as implying a hierarchy of levels or layers, but it does reflect existing discourses of top-down and bottom-up curriculum making and relates to Doyle's (1992a) observation, that Institutional curriculum is often a starting point or a framework for curriculum making in schools and classrooms. (add reference and page number)

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The revised schematic allows us to avoid this, for example using the heuristic to analyse curriculum making from the inside out, or bottom up, illustrating two-way or multi-directional flows of influence, information, actors and activity between the various layers. This also means that we do not position the sites as institutional levels or even institutional sites of formal or prescribed activity. The arrows connecting these are therefore multi-directional to denote all kinds of the processes, strategies and flows of curriculum making, which traverse institutional/administrative boundaries.

In the second part of this concluding chapter, we will illuminate and put into perspective themes and trends emerging from the cases, and identify the key processes and regulators of curriculum making within, between and across sites in different national contexts. From a standpoint that theorizes curriculum making as sites of activity to understand currently emerging themes and trends, we also ask what the future of curriculum making in Europe might be.

Processes, strategies and flows of curriculum making

By highlighting the different ways in which curriculum making as social practice occurs and is orchestrated at different sites of activity, we advance the understanding of the imbrication and interaction of activities, processes and flows in the European context. What might be considered eligible and logical in one site, could be invisible to or incomprehensible for actors in other sites. As described in chapters of this book, ideas flow between various sites of curriculum making. That is why constructing a sufficiently shared understanding of beliefs, cultures and procedures between sites is important for curriculum coherence, when curriculum is not “delivered” but constructed and re-constructed in the process of curriculum making. That is also why sites should be studied both on their own terms, and from the perspective of other sites and in relation to each other (Doyle, 1992), to be able to develop a theory of curriculum making.

Among the trends and patterns that emerge through the reading of the nine cases, it is possible to encounter themes reported in previous research. An example is the “curricular turn” towards competence-based and learner-centred curricula based on 21st century skills that has taken place in many parts of the world (Priestley & Sinnema, 2014; Young, 2008). The majority of the chapters represent countries that have adopted types of competence-based curricula, while England and Sweden have taken a somewhat different route towards subject-based curricula, emphasising disciplinarity and academic knowledge. Another example of a general trend that is discernable is a

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tension between regulation/deregulation (Alvunger, 2018; Leat, Livingston, & Priestley, 2013; Nieveen & Kuiper, 2012), paired with the expansion of performance-based systems and accountability regimes (Hamilton, Schwartz, Stecher & Steele, 2013; Yates & Collins, 2010). Besides “marketization”, such notions of top-down accountability and linear dissemination are closely related to the global neo-liberal reform movement and its ideas for the organisation of society and education during the late 20th century (Karseth & Sivesind, 2010). As Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) have argued, “performativity” is a characteristic feature of neo-liberal political systems, which works as an influential powerful mental construct for standards-based management, security and improvement.

Against the backdrop of such developments in global curriculum policy during the last decades, together with observations made throughout the chapters of this volume, we argue that it is possible to identify an emerging trend of a shifting in emphasis from macro to meso curriculum making: traditional macro curriculum making, for which the nation-state had a pivotal role, is being transformed; while the meso site of activity stands out as a significant nexus for flows of policy discourses and processes of curriculum making, with simultaneous movement between top-down and bottom-up approaches. This is a complex and multidimensional process and it cannot be explained unless the porous and fluent borders between sites are recognized. However, even if this transformation is accompanied by what can be described as a devolution of state control, it is still heavily focused on the construction of systems for evaluation and audit. It also places an emphasis on professional development for teachers that tends to favour instrumentality and performance, rather than engaging teachers in questions of curriculum theory. This resonates well with what Bob Lingard observes in his contribution to this book: ‘Systemic policy in education has tended to deal more with the curriculum and evaluation message systems, than explicitly with pedagogy.’ (p. XX)

The emerging significance of the meso site of activity as a coordinating and mediating “middle ground” for curriculum making will be further explored and developed later in this chapter. First, however, we will direct our focus towards the interplay of the different sites of activity and begin with the nano and micro sites of activity. Curriculum “is being made”, enacted and “lived” every day in classrooms, because it is produced through the different conceptions of students and teachers (Doyle, 1992). It is a question of relationships between teacher and students, as well as between students, the availability and nature of resources for teaching (e.g. textbooks engender particular types of pedagogy), and external pressures including accountability demands. Due to the contingent and transactional

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character of classroom activities, nano curriculum making and agency in classroom discourse is complicated to observe (Alvunger, 2018). In the contribution to this book from Ireland, by Dempsey, Doyle and Looney, we are provided with examples of nano curriculum making in terms of how students perceived and sought to make sense of classroom-based assessment, and the ways in which they related to their teacher. The Irish case especially highlights how the national level aspirations of the Junior Cycle Reform was initially causing frustration and confusion among students. Another perspective from the nano site of activity comes from England, where Leat and Parker illustrate how a prevailing educational discourse of competition, marketization and standardization put students under pressure to perform “good grades”, in order to be able to advance to university.

As actors in the micro site of activity, teachers are responsible (and held accountable) for planning, teaching and assessment in schools. What seems to characterize the Czech case is that the abrupt withdrawal of the state in the field of education led to a situation where schools became very autonomous, with minimal input regulation, and with curriculum making largely becoming dependent on school leadership. However, as Dvořák notes, “autonomy should not be confused with agency” and indeed, too much autonomy (i.e. freedom from regulation combined with low macro/meso support) seemed to impede teacher agency in micro curriculum making in Czechia (see also: Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015). Another interesting example, of how different expectations from teachers result in different implications for both how curriculum is made and how structural relationships take different shapes in the micro as a site of activity, comes from Cyprus through the example of “subject-area counsellors”. Kontovourki, Theodorou and Philippou explain how subject-area counsellors were constituted as “hybrid experts”, combining academic and practical expertise and suitable to support teachers during curriculum change. By moving between the macro, meso and the microsites of activity, their expertise provided spaces for curriculum planning and design for engaged teachers. However (and similarly to the example of Czech schools being granted autonomy above), the authors also found examples of teachers who did not embrace the opportunity of engaging in curriculum making, in terms of being co-creators of curricular material, but were rather restricted to traditional hierarchical relationships where they expected to receive teaching materials from subject-area counsellors instead.

It has already been stated, both in the Introduction and Bob Lingard’s chapters of this book, that we are witnessing a transformation of macro curriculum making; but even if there are indications that

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nation-states are in some ways withdrawing from the field of education policy, national structures and policies of course continue to play a strong regulating role in curriculum making in each of the presented country cases. In the Netherlands, for example, there has been a long political and historical tradition of “freedom of education” which serves as a foundation for a decentralized education system. Curriculum making has thus been driven by teachers and schools as the main architects of curriculum. On a national level, this has presented challenges since it has resulted to a lack of coherence and little means to monitor the quality of education in the country. As a consequence, the Netherlands has sought to boost influence from the macro site (national government) by organizing actors from the micro site to form groups to perform activities which are usually driven by experts appointed by the government (macro-site). As Nieveen and Kuiper show in their chapter, this strategy turned out to be problematic because several actors in micro curriculum making did not possess the expertise needed for designing a national curriculum. A similar rhetoric of school autonomy as a key feature of national reform is observable in England, with the difference being that it rests on strong input and output regulation and is entangled with accountability and a “market discourse”. Parker and Leat describe how certain innovative and prominent schools were used as “proxies”, creating a model for how the government wanted school-based curriculum to be organized. The curriculum reform in Portugal from 2016 displays a comparable logic. The government selected six model schools to work flexibly with the curriculum and, after that process, other schools were invited to make changes on their local curriculum. As Mouraz and Cosme show in their chapter, the reform was also sparked by the Portuguese government’s intentions to decentralize curriculum making and implement a competence-based curriculum.

Despite such trends of macro curriculum making being devolved from the state to schools, teachers and other actors, states continue to be significant in shaping and framing curriculum making. One important site where this becomes visible is the supra, since a common trend among most of the chapters in this book is the tangible influence of supranational policy discourses on national macro curriculum making. Macro actors often hold power to make official translations and act as a filter of supranational ideas. The transformation of macro curriculum making takes different shapes depending on context, but undoubtedly, it can involve processes which occur at supra sites of activity. As Bob Lingard describes in his contribution, curriculum policies during recent decades have been formed as responses to globalization, reflecting both how notions of national identity are invoked as well as the influence of international organizations like the OECD and the World Bank as well as supranational governing bodies like the European Union (EU). However, somewhat

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surprisingly the EU is not particularly emphasized as a supranational actor in the country cases even though it is an essential actor in terms of agenda-setting regarding qualifications frameworks and standards for the member states. This may imply that the EU influence is so integrated with the national policy that macro, meso or micro actors may simply fail to perceive it as a distinct set of discourses. There are also supra actors who are not always recognized in discussions of what is influencing national curriculum making. The Czech case widens the scope from "traditional" policy actors to such organizations as the World Health Organisation and George Soros's Open Society Fund. Lingard draws our attention to a new player and potential game changer in the different sites of curriculum making: EdTech companies. These companies are not only suppliers of digital infrastructure and tools such as learning management platforms and assessment software, but also education. In this respect, they are new and powerful actors.

Indeed, there are references to number of such international organisations in the chapters of this volume, but they seem to exert differing influence on countries. To illustrate this, we can take two examples from northern Europe: Finland and Sweden. Finland is known for listening closely to policy advice from the OECD and the European Union, but has still remained quite uninfected by the global education reform movement (GERM). A reason for this is the strong professional identity of Finnish teachers, together with the interconnections of different public sector policies and the education system (Sahlberg, 2012). In Finland, the schools also have legal objectives to attain both individual and societal wellbeing. In the Swedish case, policy influence from the OECD is directly translated into the local curriculum reform agendas. What is evident is that these flows of policy help to underline the importance of alignment to national standards and guidelines, and reinforce notions of accountability and standards in curriculum making as warrants for social equity and higher student achievement. The positive view on state interventions from the OECD is merged with traditional notions of how the local community is important for the organization of schooling and guidance and support for principals and teachers in curriculum making.

In addition to flow between supra, macro and meso sites, an additional trend visible in the chapters is that the meso site of activity emerges as a space "in between", where ideas and experiences of nano and micro curriculum making meet supra and macro curriculum making. The meso site of activity is, in a way, comparable with a "melting-pot", where policy, support and guidance on curriculum making are (although with varying success) provided, coordinated and communicated. The different country cases provide both similar and diverging dimensions of how "flows", in terms of policy from the supra-site of activity, initially may by-pass or simply be endorsed without

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questions in the macro site, and then mediated by actors engaged in meso curriculum making. An example from Czechia of such interplay between supra and meso curriculum making was the creation of “innovative local hubs”. These local hubs were in the next phase embraced by the national government (macro). In Portugal, the Curricular Autonomy and Flexibility Project (PAFC-reform) was clearly orchestrated by the national government but, as Mouraz and Cosme underline, one of the main objectives in the PAFC reform was to push for meso curriculum making. Other examples are: the already mentioned subject-area counsellors in Cyprus, who operate as a meso site of activity between micro and macro; expert teachers in Sweden, assigned to lead and support meso and micro curriculum making; and in Scotland, the formation of Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) to support and improve micro curriculum making. In the following section, we will highlight and further explore the meso site of activity and its significance for teacher agency in curriculum making.

The importance of meso activity for teacher agency

One of the main conclusions to be drawn from observations in the country cases and broader research is that the importance of actors and infrastructure within meso sites of curriculum making has been something of a “blind spot” in existing theorizations of curriculum making. In educational change and school development research, conversely, the role of, for example, local education authorities, superintendents and school districts has been highlighted increasingly (Anderson, 2013; Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008; Seashore Louis, 2013; Wahlström & Sundberg, 2017). District authorities often support capacity building and commitment to school development, including the development of interventions and initiatives for changing structural and cultural elements. They take on a brokering role in intermediating and communicating policy, and they distribute resources for maintaining equity (cf. Rorrer et al. 2008). Through our heuristic frame of curriculum making as sites of activity, we discern a trend of the increased importance of meso curriculum making to enhance teacher agency; this also allows us to observe and discuss examples where such processes seem not to have evolved in a similar direction.

Curriculum making actors in different sites of activity may both enable or restrain the interaction between sites, affect what flows between them, and shape the kind of strategies that are used. As demonstrated above, actors within meso sites of activity play a significant role in curriculum making,

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mediating and translating messages flowing from supra and macro, as well as from micro and nano sites of activity. Their power positions, objectives, skills and orientations direct both the “what” and the “how” in curriculum making and create conditions that may either hamper or facilitate teacher agency in the system. Throughout the chapters, different kinds of meso actors emerge, orchestrating processes and creating local strategies for curriculum making: district level authorities (Finland), local education authorities and expert teachers (Sweden), subject-area counsellors (Cyprus), RICs (Scotland), local innovative hubs (Czechia) and seconded teachers and leaders (Ireland). For example, the aforementioned creation of RICs in Scotland illustrates how, on the one hand, support and guidance are provided to micro curriculum making and, on the other hand, how RICs are engaged in quality assurance activities that are synced with the work of local authorities and macro curriculum making. These different foci can, of course, exist in considerable tension with one another, with the potential for the latter to undermine the former, for example. The Finnish and Swedish cases, to a great extent, reflect traditional roles for school districts, but they also point to the importance of shared sense-making focused on engaging educational practitioners in learning across several sites of activity. For example, actors in local educational authorities in Finland – which have great responsibility and power over the local curriculum – are usually principals and (former) teachers. By having a background in education, these actors inevitably shape, communicate and guide meso curriculum making in a way that makes it easier for teachers to enact the curriculum. Moreover, teachers are more likely to experience ownership in reforms since they recognize and understand the theory and concepts behind it. The process itself is designed to enhance their agency. On a more general level, this implies that educational expertise should not only be involved in creating aims, content and values of curriculum, but also in designing novel and ecologically valid ways for orchestrating complex and dynamic curriculum making.

Teacher agency is a focal question in curriculum making and is addressed in many ways in the chapters. Even in contexts where teachers’ professional agency does not seem to be promoted, teachers still enact, translate and mediate curriculum into pedagogical practices in their work with students. Hence, they are always “curriculum makers” (e.g. Braun, Maguire & Ball, 2010; Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). However, with teacher agency in terms of curriculum making, we refer to a professional orientation that combines will, skills and opportunities to steer and develop not just ones’ own teaching, but to be able to act as an accountable author in different sites of the educational system (e.g. Priestley et al., 2015, 2015; Pyhältö et al., 2014). This is related to

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resources, which are both personal, such as existing professional knowledge, dispositions or beliefs, and contextual, such as accountability, materials or decision-making conventions. The country cases clearly indicate that contextual and professional resources are very closely intertwined. For example, in the English case, Parker and Leat describe teachers' difficulty in determining what curriculum actually is. Their struggle is caused by several factors: the lack of pedagogical knowledge (for example, through an insufficient teacher education), mechanisms and processes within the educational system, and, not least, the pressure placed on them in terms of accountability and performance in a result-driven system.

Talking about teacher agency often brings up the question of a gap between "intention and enactment, including how teachers responded and how curriculum reform impacted on their sense of professional identity" (Humes & Priestley, p. XX in this book). There are numerous efforts for dealing with implementation gaps or uneven enactment of reform. A common example is programs for professional development to support curriculum making, that is, interventions and initiatives to "teach the teachers". The idea of a teacher-proof curriculum is sometimes (often unintentionally) prevalent in these. Such "training" is generally based on the idea of telling teachers how the curriculum should be understood, instead of starting with their expertise, allowing teachers to explore how they can turn new ideas into relevant and apt pedagogical practice. Our argument is that to ensure a high-quality curriculum, we should educate curriculum-proof teachers, who are skilled and knowledgeable, and able to consider and reflect and to modify the curriculum to meet their own ends and the ends of their students, regardless of the quality of the curriculum-as-product *per se*. At their best, meso site activities and actors support teachers and schools in this, that is, enabling them to achieve their agency and expand it by helping them to increase resources (for example by creating spaces for shared sense-making and peer learning). A key specific actor group in this is school leaders and teachers with a leading or mentoring role. For example, the hybrid teacher-subjects in the Cyprus chapter are shown to move between meso and micro, and even macro sites, and thus have insight into resources available, expectations of actors in different sites and the required support. Such middle ground teachers are actors able to facilitate context-specific curriculum making and, simultaneously act as a driver for influencing macro curriculum making.

In practice, school leaders and teachers may not be particularly inclined to comply with policy (Cuban, 1998; Taylor, 2013). Resistance may be seen as an important manifestation of agency. In the country cases, teacher criticism is related to global drivers, for example, international assessment

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coming from the supra-site of activity. However, it may also stem from deficits in national curriculum making processes. As an example, in Scotland, many teachers agreed with the general approach of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), but did not subscribe to its “constructivist” views of teaching and learning. Humes and Priestley argue that the tensions brought about by CfE among teachers (micro) was due to the lack of resources for teachers to discuss and interpret the curriculum. This created suspicion and resulted in a superficial adaptation of the curriculum. The Irish case reports similar experiences of enactment problems, through the wide-spread skepticism among teachers concerning the launch of the Junior Cycle Reform. The initiative from the national government was not immediately followed by resources, support and guidance for schools and teachers, for meso and micro curriculum making. In Finland, teachers largely agreed with the pedagogical direction, which has long been constructivist both in schools and in teacher education. However, they were skeptical or confused about transversal competences as one of the big ideas of the new national core and questioned how it should direct school development (Sullanmaa, 2019). In the cases of Scotland and Ireland, there have been developments that have improved the situation for teachers, enabling possibilities for sense-making and an increased trust. Also in Finland, meso actors, such as the in-service training agencies of districts, have been active in offering support and spaces for discussion.

It thus seems that a prerequisite for maintaining, or reclaiming, professional integrity and autonomy – and to enable agency – is the functional support from meso actors. Guidance, resources and support from, for example, district authorities or regional bodies that create conditions for teacher agency, help to encourage and increase receptiveness to ideas coming from the bottom-up. The engagement of teachers in sense making and the design of curriculum can be viewed as a means for quality assurance. However, adopting such an approach to educational change and curriculum requires a holistic view on education. Moreover, it requires meso actors to be aware of their role in the educational system. We know that teachers, who consider systemic reforms as something which is limited to a certain area or their school subject, tend to take a more passive role in enacting reform which implies that sense of agency and the way the reform aims are perceived are interrelated (Pyhältö et al., 2014). Thus agency is not something that teachers have or not; it is constructed in the processes of curriculum making and, especially in processes that emphasize joint knowledge creation, facilitate a sense of agency and, hence, enhance the impact that curriculum reforms have on schools’ every day practices (Priestley et al, 2015; Tikkanen et al., 2019). As Kontovourki, Theodorou and Philippou state in relation to the Cyprus case, the subject-area

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counsellors constituted “a meaningful and dynamic meso-level” and became a site of curriculum making themselves. This calls for social sites of curriculum making that facilitate teacher collaboration, which in turn can enhance the agency of teacher communities. In the Portugal chapter, the development of cooperative professional cultures was one of the widely acknowledged challenges, and this has been common to many other national contexts as well.

The majority of the country cases address examples of the increased importance of meso sites of curriculum making. In comparison with countries like Finland and Scotland, Sweden and England seem to have taken a somewhat different route and serve as interesting exceptions. Parker and Leat show that meso actors (school districts) have come to play a lesser role than previously, due to the strong focus on accountability and inspection imposed by the national government. The construction of a reinforced national audit and testing system seems to have eroded the sites of activity for traditional local curriculum actors. These sites have been replaced by external agents working on a government basis. In this respect, global trends towards stronger state regulation in terms of input and output on curriculum policy (Alvunger, 2018; Leat, Livingston, & Priestley, 2013; Nieveen & Kuiper, 2012) and the expansion of performance-based systems and accountability regimes (Hamilton, Stecher, Russell, Marsh, & Miles, 2008; Yates & Collins, 2010) have come to shape conditions for teacher agency. In Sweden, the transformed role of macro curriculum making is expressed through state interventions as a kind of soft governance based on indirect normative pressures (Adolfsson & Alvunger, 2020; Nordholm 2016).

Learning from curriculum making in Europe

Through the heuristic of curriculum making as occurring in diverse sites of social activity, we have moved across the map of Europe, from Cyprus in the southeast corner, across the Mediterranean Sea to Portugal in the southwest, then northbound, first to central Europe and Czech Republic, then to the west with the Netherlands, England and Scotland and Ireland. Finally, the journey took us to northeastern Europe, with Sweden and Finland. Bob Lingard provided us with a global outlook that enhances our understanding of how processes of globalization can challenge as well as reinforce notions of national identity and ethno-centrism. In concluding this journey on curriculum making and education in the European context, it seems productive to ask questions around potential lessons that can be learned. Curriculum making is essential, in order to build strong educational systems and, thus work to develop and maintain the basic, yet contested, values of democracy,

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equality and participation. In this last section of the book, we aim to map out features of good quality curriculum making, based on what we have learned in the chapters. Existing theories of curriculum making offered us a good starting point and helped us to identify layers and sites of activity, as well as give us insights on their complex relations. We aimed to elaborate our understanding and theorization of curriculum making by taking a closer look at transformative, dynamic and non-linear processes of systemic learning that constitute curriculum making. In this final section of the book, we suggest some features that seem to be beneficial for curriculum making in our cases.

Participatory curriculum making. Participation of diverse social actors across sites of activity seems of key importance. Enormous resources seem to be lost if the competence, enthusiasm and will of people involved in educational systems are not acknowledged and utilized in curriculum making. When looking through our European lenses, it seems that curriculum making strategies that allow actors to experience themselves as trusted and capable participants in curriculum making and make sense of it together with others are the most effective ones – “effective” meaning here that people relate to the aims of the curriculum they co-construct and feel ownership, and through that are willing to adapt and develop not only curriculum, but also the educational system and settings within which they work. However, this requires that sense-making about both the “big ideas” of curriculum and how the change is brought about is done in every layer of the system, as suggested in the Finnish chapter.

Accountability based on trust. One recurring theme in the chapters, that seems to regulate many activities in the layers of curriculum making, is the question of trust and accountability; how does the system ensure that curriculum making in other layers is in line with the chosen policy at the macro layer? Accountability based on trust, for example in teacher expertise, and not on close monitoring, provides spaces for learning. The chapter on England describes a situation where teachers achieve apparent agency, but in the end, test-based accountability directs their pedagogical practice, that is curriculum making in the classroom with pupils. Mistrust hinders learning in the system and failed curricular reform may result into a blame game between the layers, with no actor accepting their share of the responsibility and without considering any lessons for future curriculum revisions, as described in the Czechia chapter. Accountability based on trust in curriculum making is of course related to a wider frame than curriculum or even education. It seems that trust in the general policy, politics and public sector of the nation is reflected in curriculum making. It also requires capacity building, in a sense that curriculum makers in every layer of the system recognize

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the boundaries of their personal expertise and, at the same time are able to consider a wider frame of curriculum making outside their own immediate professional environment. The Netherlands chapter offers an example of how curriculum thinking and expertise differ in the layers of the system, and how constructing an understanding of the whole takes intentional effort and contextual support to learn.

The importance of middle ground and mobility. It seems that the activities and actors in meso sites play a key role in attempts to accomplish curriculum making, which facilitates agency, offers support and creates trust. Moreover, it seems that strategies that encourage actors to move between sites of activity and from one layer to another create new spaces for learning and sense-making. Porous and dynamic systems need actors with ability and access to different activity sites, who can communicate with macro, and micro and nano activities. If these mobile actors can form expert groups that are knowledgeable, both in micro and macro curriculum making, they may claim power in the system, negotiating the top-down and bottom-up flows, as shown in the Cyprus chapter. This requires collaboration and may be challenging, for example, requiring changes in the individual working culture in schools, as described in the Portugal chapter.

Balanced regulation. Based on the chapters there also seems to be a need for balanced regulation in curriculum making. This means sufficient amount of both guidance and instructions as well as room for dialogue. Regulation, however, may be divided among different actors and layers. Moreover, regulation has to be accompanied by resources, and both regulation and resources need to be used and allocated wisely in the process of curriculum making. They should be focused on supporting sense-making, for example time for teachers to discuss seems to be one of the main resources that is scarce in experiences from around Europe, evident for example in the Ireland, Cyprus and Scotland chapters.

Agency of the educational system. All of the features of good curriculum making described above are preconditions for agentic educational actors in school systems, but also requirements of an agentic educational system that can act as a counter force to developments that are undemocratic or uncritically borrow their logic from market rather than pedagogical agendas. In his contribution, Bob Lingard provides an insightful review of the consequences of globalization of the educational sphere and its effects on curriculum making in national contexts. He also brings up an emerging question of global privatization and the increasing role of EdTech companies in the global educational field. In debating their influence, along with the top-down accountability and linear dissemination related to the global neo-liberal reform movement and its ideas, educational systems

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and social actors therein need to be supported in curriculum making processes.. Such processes would involve interaction, transaction and mediation across layers and sites of activity and around key curriculum questions of purpose and enactment.

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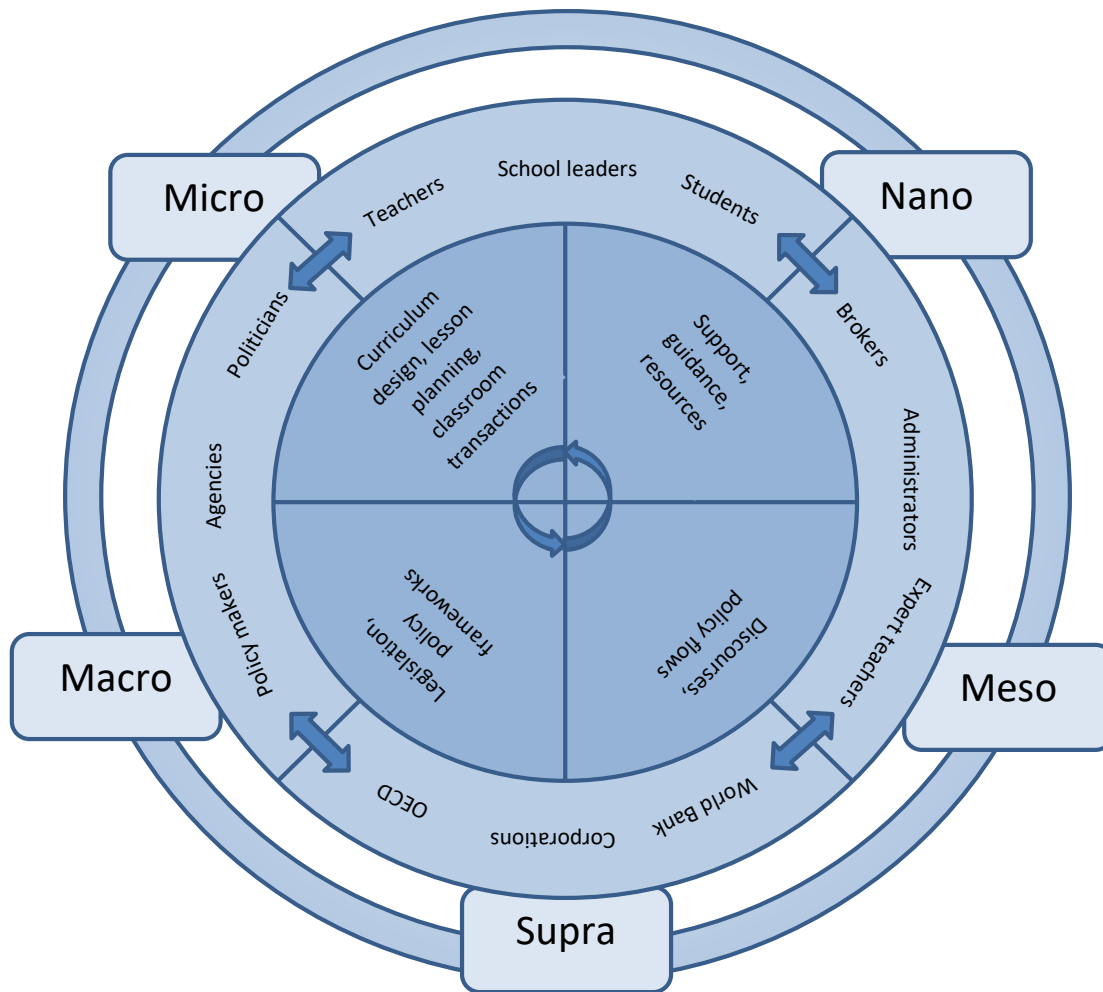


Figure 1. Sites, actors and activities