

Wer bestimmt, was im Lehrplan gelten soll?

Who decides what should be valid
in curriculum guidelines?

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Who decides what should be valid in curriculum guidelines?

- 1. Comparative context.**
- 2. Programmatic decision making.**
- 3. Political decision making.**
- 4. Practical decision making.**
- 5. The multiple realities of the curriculum.**



FDE Schleiermacher
1768 – 1834

Wer bestimmt, was im Lehrplan gelten soll?

1. Comparative context.

- An only seemingly simple question.
- Drawing on a classical definition (Weniger).
- With a double meaning:
 - **Who decides what is written in the guidelines?**
 - **Who decides what should be valid?**
- Based on 30+ years of comparative and historical research.
 - Künzli/Fries/Hürlimann/Rosenmund: Der Lehrplan- Das Program der Schule. 2013
 - JCS etc.
- Utilizing a systematization developed 20+ years ago.

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1. Comparative context.

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political	Cultural heritage: Selected traditions	Educating Identities (<u>Bildungsideale</u>)	Social expectations: Future of societies
programmatic	Programmatic heritage: Curriculum sedimentations	Curriculum Making	Programmatic expectations: Futures of schooling
practical	Practical heritage: Subject Matters	School identities: School wisdom	Practical expectations: Future usability

Wer bestimmt, was im Lehrplan gelten soll?

2. Programmatic decision making.

- Who decides what is written in curriculum guidelines?
In the end, those who own a given system of schooling or have jurisdiction over it.
- In most states, there is a public school system based on laws and governed by public administrations issuing such guidelines.

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2. Programmatic decision making.

- In most cases the actual writing of (draft) **curriculum guidelines** is done by appointment.
- Who is appointed varies considerably in time and place. E.g.:
 - 19th century: From single authors to practitioner committees.
 - Early 20th century: From practitioners only to experts included.
 - Late 20th century: From teaching experts only to all kinds of expertise.
 - Early 21st century: From internal solutions to “outsourcing”.
- There is only limited research: But in most cases the draft versions seem to get approved with only minor revisions.

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2. Programmatic decision making.

- However, those who write the draft almost never start from scratch.
- They do so embedded in a vast infrastructure of sedimentations of former curriculum decisions such as laws, school structures, school subjects, text books, tests, teacher education patterns, etc.
- **Curriculum sedimentations** are intertwined and fairly robust: My guess would be that ca. 80% of what is laid down in curriculum guidelines for compulsory schooling nowadays has been around for at least 150+ years, only slightly modernized and re-arranged from time to time.
- This “core curriculum” has been spread worldwide by the export of the Western model of schooling, leading to a kind of “world curriculum”.
(Meyer et al.) Otherwise approaches like PISA would hardly be convincing.

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2. Programmatic decision making.

- The difficult task of curriculum authors is to mediate between these curriculum sedimentations and with whatever **futures of schooling** seem to be at stake (by policies, mandates, public discourse etc.)
- They do so mostly either by changes within the less robust 20% of curriculum sedimentations or by trying to add to the core.
- Historically, most of such changes remain temporary and volatile. Only those changes, which manage to become an intertwined part of the robust core, have a decent chance to survive in the long run. (Cuban, Tyack, Künzli etc.).

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3. Political decision making.

- Of course, those deciding and writing curriculum guidelines are embedded in a much broader social and political discourse on what should be made valid in the curriculum. (Rein 1893 etc.)
- In most cases, this is a discourse on **what (public) schooling should be about and aim at.**

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3. Political decision making.

- Historically, the center piece of this discourse can be described as one about **educating identities**, i.e. what kind of educated people schooling should bring about. Within nation-states, this unfolded often as question of shaping “future citizens”. (Labaree, Tröhler et al.)
- The problem with this is that it is hardly possible to create and maintain a social consensus on what such an identity is about in late-modern societies.
- However, the legitimation of what counts as valid identity is clearly beyond the abilities of political and administrative procedures, i.e. those involved have to look for other validating resources.
(Habermas et al.)

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3. Political decision making.

- How this discourse on educating identities unfolds, differs considerably in time and place. However, my impression is, that one can identify two main patterns of this discourse.
- The first has been mostly driven by well established social forces and re-connects to the tradition side by an attempt to define what is considered being **basic education**, i.e. the minimum to continue society as it is and to include future citizens.
- Historically, there has been a wide variety of attempts to define such **essentialism** e.g. based on philosophical, sociological, economical, psychological, religious etc. conceptualizations.

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- None of these attempts has ever created lasting change within the core of curriculum sedimentations. Nor have attempts had lasting success to re-define these essentials empirically. (e.g. Bobbitt, Robinsohn etc.)
- This has changed in recent years, by new actors moving into the field, e.g. national and international organizations, testing and other media industries etc., which try to develop more pragmatic frameworks and a new language of standardization. (UN, World Bank, OECD, PISA, etc.)
- Yet, lacking an empirical or normative foundation beyond the claimed expertise of those involved, these initiatives are forced to define their **essentials within the given frame of curriculum sedimentations** (e.g. as domain specific literacies, competencies etc.).

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- The other pattern has been mostly connected to emerging social forces and re-connected to the future side of the equation by an attempt to define what might be future **necessities**, i.e. useful for a successful inclusion in future developments.
- Curriculum ideas from this direction come often along as added content, new subjects, cross curricular topics or other **attempts to re-arrange subject matter boundaries** (from projects to integrated subjects).
- Historically, there has been a wide variety of attempts to define what should be considered as such **knowledge of most worth** (Spencer), often grounded in some kind of utilitarianism, and contested based on social, political, and not the least economical interests (e.g. new technologies, emerging industries, labor movements, emerging political movements).

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3. Political decision making.

- Actually, such movements have been highly successful in certain cases: There is almost no relevant new technology, no fast spreading industry not having had almost immediate impact on the curriculum. Likewise, successful political (social, religious etc.) movements have often managed to set their foot print on what should be emphasized or forgotten in future curriculum guidelines.
- However, almost all of their success came within the 20% of the curriculum which are not secured by the common core. Thus, such **utilitarian necessities have always been at risk to be overturned and left behind by a new wave of believed future necessities.**

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4. Practical decision making.

- Whatever was intended by or written down in curriculum guidelines is not yet practically validated, i.e. enacted in actual classrooms.
- There are two main reasons, why **school wisdom**, i.e. what is actually taught and learned in schools, **is situated, emergent and to a certain degree contingent, depending on local circumstances.** (Hopmann 2007 etc.)

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4. Practical decision making.

- The first reason connects to the tradition side: As no practicable consensus on minimums has ever been achieved, curriculum sedimentations have always carried expectations, which move clearly beyond what average teachers with average students can achieve in average classrooms.
- Thus teachers have always been confronted by the need to decide on what to emphasize and what to leave out, thus **adapting their school wisdom to what seems feasible here and now**. The very first Prussian curriculum guidelines acknowledged this leeway as “pedagogical” or “methodological” freedom.

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4. Practical decision making.

- The **situatedness** of teaching and learning adds a second layer to this problem: The curriculum **matter** which is presented by the teacher may take many different **meanings** within classroom interaction and the learning of the students, depending on their particular biographical, social, cultural etc. trajectories.
- All this leads to the fact that there can be much variation in what is validated at the practical level. Therefore there have been considerable attempts in recent years to limit this variability by all kinds of control mechanisms such as tests, centralized exams and teacher accountability for the emerging results.

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4. Practical decision making.

- However, caught in **domain specific essentialism**, such measures tend to have at least two undesired outcomes:
 - They tend to reduce what counts as valid to the assumingly most basic elements of a given subject matter domain, thus reinforcing the robustness of the curriculum sedimentations and contributing to a curricular shrinking. (Porter et al.; Cuban, etc.).
 - By reducing the local leeway to adapt curriculum enactment to the actual learning possibilities at hand, they tend to lower both excellence and equity in outcomes. (Berliner, Koretz, etc.)

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- The second reason for the limits of **school wisdom** connects to the future side: All involved in validating curriculum guidelines practically, i.e. teachers and students, act under time, space and other resource constraints. **Thus they have to decide which necessities are of immediate concern, which knowledge has known worth.**
- As indicated above most **future necessities** start their curriculum career as add-ons (e.g. digital literacy), cross curricular (e.g. 21st century skills) or temporary activities (e.g. environmental projects) outside or beyond subject matter boundaries.

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4. Practical decision making.

- This explains why they have easy access to curriculum enactment as soon as they are broadly acknowledged as being useful in the everyday life of those involved, often long before they are finally included in written curriculum guidelines. (e.g. communication technologies)
- But at the same time it explains the limits of their success: As, according to school wisdom, **the most important reason to learn what we did in school today is that we need it in school tomorrow**, such future necessities are always at risk of getting marginalized or replaced by new necessities if not sustainably embedded into the fabric of the core curriculum sedimentations.

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5. The multiple realities of curriculum making.

- *Who decides what should be valid in curriculum guidelines?*
It turns out there are many actors and spaces in which curriculum decisions are made, and which overlap and contextualize each other only to a certain degree.
- This implies: **Doing curriculum** does not know a privileged position from which the others can be subdued.

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5. The multiple realities of curriculum making.

- The most influential power at the **programmatic level** seems to be the grammar of schooling itself, built around **an interwoven matrix of curriculum sedimentations**. A fundamental re-doing of this part of the curriculum would require the end of schooling as we know it. Actually, I do believe that this might be in the making. (Hopmann 2013)
- Who is in charge at the **political level** has been changing depending on time, place and social developments. If a new common understanding of **educating identities** will emerge or more fragmentation happen, is beyond what doing curriculum itself decides. Actually, I believe that at least the concept of **educating citizens** is pretty much at risk now (and thereby the feasibility of democracy).

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5. The multiple realities of curriculum making.

- The one thing which makes me anyway optimistic about the future is that the validation of curriculum guidelines is unavoidable limited by the inner fabric of **school wisdom** at the **practical level**. Those, who want to bring about change empowering the learners, should focus more on what is going on in the daily grind of schooling. History proves that there is way more possible than one would expect based on the other two levels. After all: Change happens!
- In this perspective, **teachers and learners are the strongest powers in validating curriculum** if they understand and realize what is possible for them within the multiple realities of the curriculum.

Thanks for your attention!