Retracing Curriculum History: The Multiple Realities of Curriculum Making

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If one is going to write about curriculum, curriculum making, curriculum administration, and everything related to curriculum in daily use, one is expected to make the contents and activities, which are to be addressed, clear. The problem is, however, that what is meant by the label "curriculum" is bound to varying educational, social, political, etc. contexts (cf. Goodson, 1988; Cornbleth, 1990; Gundem, 1990b). By the very nature of curriculum making, it is basically impossible to integrate the different meanings into a single formula.

Normally, a written curriculum contains a more or less explicit selection of contents combined with some remarks concerning the use and/ or the usefulness of those contents. Thus seen, curricula are instructional guidelines in a double sense: they instruct about what may or will be instructed. However, this is but one function of a curriculum, under normal conditions, not even the most important one. A curriculum may also be:

- A symbol of political action;
- A step in a teacher's, a scientist's or an administrator's career; an educational or organizational experiment;
- An instrument to regulate quarrels inside school, between teachers and students, teachers and parents, or between different levels of educational administration;
- A treaty between administrations, politicians, and parents, etc.

Curricula can be studied as documents of social control, of educational sense, or historical meaning. They may indicate personal intentions as well

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as structural constraints or otherwise intervening conditions. Which of a curriculum's many contents, functions, conditions, and impacts prevail against the others is not only determined by the acts and facts alone but also depends on the spectator, on who is looking at the curriculum, making sense of it or of the processes involved.

The main focus of the following paper is the question, how these multiple realities (in the sense of Alfred Schütz) evolved historically and which of them still has an impact on current curriculum making. For that purpose, I will sketch three basic features of the social process of making a curriculum by administration as they emerged in Prussia and in most of the other Central and Northern European countries since around 1800: *compartmentalization*, *licensing*, and *segmentation*. I have reconstructed these features of curriculum administration in a more comprehensive way in a study concerning the history and present structure of curriculum administration in Germany (Hopmann, 1988). All data used in the following sections are—if not explicitly stated otherwise—taken from this analysis.

One limit of my contribution should be noted in advance. The story told covers the history of curriculum making as it is formed by the Prussian pattern. Prussia stands as an example. One has to be aware that, for instance, in almost all Anglo-American countries, the role of curriculum making has been constructed otherwise. Only in the last years, these countries have started to switch over to a comparable system of curriculum control, thereby continuing the well-known process of curricular assimilation in the Western hemisphere (cf. e.g. Englund, 1986, 1990). Following a functional analysis of the inherent structure of curriculum making as symbolic action (cf. Haft & Hopmann, 1990), I am, however, convinced that any large-scale system of curriculum making must have at least structural equivalents serving the same functions as the different realities of curriculum making outlined in the following sections.

I. Compartmentalization

State-run curriculum development, as it prevails in Germany and a lot of surrounding countries, is an invention of the late 18th, early 19th century. The French Revolution, combined with the following wars, set off a complete realignment of national and social borders in Central Europe. New,

disintegrating, or displaced states had to find ways and means strong enough to enforce national amalgamation and to restore their decision-making capacities. For this purpose, they turned almost naturally to administration.

Since the days of the Reformation, administration had emerged as one of the most powerful means to install or regain leadership in a crisis, and that had gradually changed administration from a tool of monarchial housekeeping into an instrument of political power. The challenge raised by the realignment in the early 19th century required even more than sophisticated political action. It reflected an enormous acceleration in the speed of economic and cultural change (cf. Koselleck, 1973). If the modernization process was not to destroy the already weakened social system, a far-reaching administrative control was necessary (cf. Wunder, 1986; Wehler, 1987). Especially, if social organizations like elementary and higher education were to be transformed into state-controlled instruments of an all-inclusive modernization. This task was given to the newly established Prussian educational administration in 1809 (cf. Koselleck, 1967; Leschinsky & Roeder, 1983).

It was not the first time in Prussian history that parts of the educational administration had been separated into a specialized department of its own (cf. Heinemann, 1974). But other than preceding "assessment" agencies, which held responsibilities in distinct areas of educational control only, the newly established department was in charge of almost all organized schooling (especially excluding military education). It was expected to strengthen the up to then not very impressive record of state control, which, at the end of the 18th century, the Prussian secretary of education, Zedlitz, had called a simple "mime for the public."

However, money was—as usual—lacking to pay for a thorough modernization of a rotten system, and the political leadership was by far not centralized enough to implement whatever policy it found suitable. Other means were necessary to force traditional school authorities to cooperate. The one and only administrative concept to tackle a problem that cannot be solved as a whole is to tear it up into pieces, formally speaking: to differentiate. Unable to enact an all-embracing school law, the reform program fell apart into a series of distinct regulations for examinations, promotions, matriculation, teacher training, secondary education, etc., covering nowhere near the originally planned scope of intervention. Moreover, a division of syllabi according to school type and level allowed further subdivisions into

timetables, examination and promotion regulations relating to a classroom system, instructions concerning textbooks, etc. In short, all conceivable areas of curricular organization were successively regulated on their own.

In Prussia, a last effort to introduce a comprehensive law of schooling failed definitively in the 1820's. The process of segmenting school law into distinct sections, which had already gathered momentum from the confirmation and matriculation regulations of the 18th century, produced a compartmentalized system of school legislation step by step. A side-effect of this differentiation was the modern concept of a written curriculum, the syllabus, as a guideline for centralized decision-making concerning the local selection of topics to be taught. In this system, the syllabus was not meant as an organizing tool of instruction, but as an instrument of administrative supervision. The first Prussian syllabus, the "Normalplan" of 1816, was explicitly constructed in this manner (cf. Lohmann, 1984). Each school had to submit its local syllabus to get it checked against the official guidelines. At the end of the 19th century, the written local plan shrank to a content-free timetable, and later on, even that requirement was lost. Since then, the administration has simply proceeded on the basis of the assumption that anyone's instruction followed the given guidelines—unless officially stated otherwise.

The enclosed idea, that it makes sense to regulate schooling by topic control, was not as self-evident as it may seem today. It opposed the contemporary search for "natural" system of education by declaring the content of instruction a matter of choice. As a result, the tasks and boundaries of schooling could no longer be legitimated in a one-dimensional approach, by the order of knowledge or the nature of a method, as had been conventional educational wisdom until then (cf. Künzli, 1986). Instead, one could argue with the practical necessities of different school levels and subjects. The Prussian administration followed this route when it composed the very first curriculum commission in 1809/16 (preparing the "Normalplan") by a careful blending of leading specialists, each representing a single subject matter area from classical language to mathematics and science (cf. Lohmann, 1984).

This kind of compartmentalization has had more impact on curriculum history than any curriculum theory or political movement. Based on it, any curriculum approach of a comprehensive kind did not stand a chance of survival in the long run. Indifferent to the special brand of its educational or political credo, an integrated approach could not exist alongside the prevailing system of

school subjects, which had come to be the most effective means of translating the social division of labor and reasoning into an administrative logic of content. And it did not fit into a fragmented system of planning levels, which could not be bound to common principles of content choice. On the other hand, such a fragmented structure allowed for new concepts to be at least partially adopted, provided borders between regulation levels and disciplines were not blurred.

For the administration, the practical returns of the ongoing differentiation served a double purpose. The first advantage of compartmentalization lies in the creation of a clear framework of reasoning. Curriculum issues were subject-bound matter of limited scope. There was no discussion about the purposes of schooling as a whole, but narrowly defined issues at stake, such as whether elementary science should start in the second or the third grade. Such detailed questions were clear-cut questions for experts, and not for the general public. At least the Prussian administration argued this way in the 1820s and 1830s: Each time interested individuals or social pressure groups tried to intervene in the process of curriculum making, they were rebuffed with the argument: for experts only.

A second advantage became important in the long run. In a compartmentalized system, no one can be held responsible for the whole. Following the separation of curriculum making from all other decisions about school principals and local implementation, there is simply no place left where the system as a whole is available to public visibility. Proposals to change more than particular parts of the curriculum could thus almost always be rejected with reference to other levels of regulation (such as laws, examination rules, or timetables) or the peculiar requirements of local implementation. On the other hand, any impact of non-curricular regulations could always be delimited or counteracted by independent curriculum administration.

Probably, compartmentalization was the decisive advantage the Prussian system of curriculum making had compared to other contemporary patterns, and which explains why almost all Central European states adopted the model until the turn of the century. This especially holds true compared to the competing system of curriculum administration by normal schools, as it had been created by Felbiger in Silesia and Austria in the second half of the 18th century, and which, now, in the early 19th century, gained new grounds promoted by the monitorial movement. Curriculum administration by normal schools meant that at one point, in the daily routine of the normal school, the official

concept of schooling could be viewed, tested, and changed as a whole. That was simple, cheap, comprehensive, and dangerous. There was no room left to buffer external interventions and unintentional impacts, and the increasing quarrels about the success and failure of monitorial instruction in the 1830s and 1840s gave a lasting impression of how difficult it could be to maintain state control in a blustering deliberation process (cf. Hopmann, 1990).

The problem gained political power in the years after the failed revolution of 1848, and in any of the following years when the social system stood at the threshold of radical change. The double-faced task of state-controlled modernization, avoiding political by evolving economic change, could only be reached if it was possible to limit the resulting range of social unrest by schooling or other instruments of social control (cf. ibid.; Baumgart, 1989, 1990). On the other hand, that meant that the teachers could be blamed for any unrest like that of the 1848s, because they evidently had not done enough to keep the people quiet. At least, that was what the Prussian king said in public in the aftermath of the '48 revolution, calling the teachers masters of "asshole education" and other normally unquotable nicknames. The parliament tried to pass the responsibility for the failures on to the national curriculum administration and thereby seize curriculum control. But the system of compartmentalized regulations held. All the parliamentarians could achieve was a new step of differentiation, namely the right to decree general rules of schooling, which certainly should not intervene in the process of the administrative arranged curriculum making.

II. Licensing

What kept the curriculum administration of the 1850s out of the reach of parliamentary criticism was another special feature of curriculum making created in the early years of Prussian curriculum administration: the separation of instruction planning at school or classroom level from state-run curriculum making. Modeled upon other areas of administration (curriculum administration can be described as a blueprint of the trade law), this separation can be called a kind of licensing. Licensing is a conventional administrative mechanism whereby the planning authority or supervision is disengaged from executive responsibility. It includes the assignment of unspecified, yet far-reaching functional authority provided that certain rules

(especially those of access) are maintained. Everyday examples are given by the driving license or the license to operate a certain business.

Practically, the Prussian educational administration referred to licensing when talking about the freedom to choose instructional methods. A teacher could be made to choose among prescribed contents, but not, if an approved teacher, to follow a certain method of instruction. Explicitly formulated in a draft version of a school law in 1819 for the first time, this principle had already been circumscribed in a number of curricular documents since the 1780s. If one keeps in mind that up to the late 18th century the method was seen as the key to any educational success (Pestalozzi being the last proponent of this notion), freedom of instruction, as guaranteed by the Prussian administration, sounded as if the teachers were allowed to follow their own or at least a non-administrative, educational judgement. All they had to do was to act within the limits of content-choice set by the written curriculum. All they had to do was to act within the limits of content-choice set by the written curriculum. However, the argument inhibited a change of perspectives: Up to then, in the method-as-a-key approach, the choice of content had to follow the methodological decisions. The central argument on behalf of monitorial or Pestalozzian instruction was the value of the method and not that of its contents. Now the postponement of the method reduced it to a kind of practical art of instructional presentation.

The explicit differentiation between substance and method allowed a useful division of responsibilities. In case of failure, nobody could decide whether the content or its presentation was to blame. As long as there was a consistent system of reference, both administrators and teachers could benefit from the resulting separation of planning and execution. Without it, taking the syllabus as binding for what happened in classrooms, the administration would have been responsible not only for the legitimation of its intentions but also for whatever should result from instruction. Based on it, the administration could use the licensing principle as an argument any time it is criticized because of schooling effects. In the 1830s and 1840s, it could be blamed on the teachers to be responsible for the much discussed "overburdening" of the students. Nothing else happened in the late 1840s and the 1880s, periods of social and political unrest: who else, other than the teachers, had failed to implant the prescribed loyalty? The argument returned at the beginning of our century, in the last years of the monarchy, and later on in the illness of

the Weimar Republic. The none and never satisfying teachers were responsible for any impact of schooling that no one had asked them for. Even the Nazis used the licensing principle in their sense, first to legitimate their political indoctrination in spite of counteracting syllabi, later on to require ideological obedience even if the written curricula did not ask for it.

Even though it created a lot of public blame, this special kind of de-liberation game had a strong foothold in the teachers' own interest. They needed a framework as a ground for appeal to fall back on in case of contention. State frameworks allowed them more leeway than any local control could. Once they had a syllabus in their hands, all they had to do in case of dissent was to show that the framework covered their activities. This was the reason why teachers, during the 19th century and especially in the revolution of 1848, fought for the expansion of state-run curriculum work. Moreover, the approved local responsibility and the related methodological qualifications were the most important tools in creating professional standards. A teacher was to be distinguished from a non-teacher by his proven methodological abilities to handle whatever content required, and in any single case, not to be measured by the uncertain outcomes of his instruction, which might have other causes.

Most of the professionalization efforts in elementary schooling and of the educational literature from Diesterweg to Ziller and Rein concentrated on the identification and development of those technical standards of instruction which could be generalized as necessary components of any professionalized education (cf. Oelkers, 1989). Accordingly, educational theory expanded its institutionalized career in German seminars not as a philosophy or psychology of education (as one would expect from the theoretical viewpoints laid down by Herbart, Schleiermacher, etc.), but as a technical discipline. As a peculiar "science of schooling," it was officially acknowledged by the first comprehensive elementary teacher education act in Prussia, the "Stiehlsche Regulative" of 1854. Starting in the 1820s, the state accepted this linkage indirectly in the area of higher education, too, by making the teaching license dependent on a year of practical experience, in which a candidate had to prove their practical insight.

Naturally, the teacher-centered science of schooling did not stop at the boundaries of methodological issues. The tradition of methodologically constructed curricula was still alive and regained strength with the renaissance of the Pestalozzian approach in the 1850s and the following decades. More

importantly, a more and more qualified teacher profession simply would not accept any decision made by amateurs (as they would address the involved administrators, who normally had a theological or juridical background, and neither theoretical knowledge, nor practical experience in the field of schooling).

In curriculum deliberation, the teacher used precisely the space given by the licensing principle: They were responsible for presenting the curriculum by professional standards, so it had to be guaranteed that the content of the curriculum did not counteract those standards. This met with a growing administrative interest to prove professional ability and to limit the scope of local variation without abolishing the idea of licensing. Both interests contributed to the emergence of a specialized curriculum in science—the didactics. The overwhelming success of Herbartian didactics in the second half of the 19th century as well as the following one of reform pedagogical didactics (as presented especially by Weniger) owed much of its momentum to the fact that both professional sides in the curriculum deliberation game, administrators and school practitioners alike, needed a frame of reference, which could bridge the gap between general planning and local instruction by giving rules of curriculum explanation—at least in a manner that could keep the other faction quiet.

III. Segmentation

Teachers were but one social group that demanded more influence on the process of curriculum making. With the accelerating process of social organization of interest groups, anyone affected by schooling started, as soon as his social group was organized, to complain that his interests remained underrated. Since the downgrading of elementary schooling and the upgrading of lower secondary education in the 1850s (including the official curricular birth certificate of the tripartite system of secondary education), the Prussian administration had found itself a midst lasting fireworks of attacks and counterattacks led by politicians, employer associations and other pressure groups, social institutions like the army and the churches, newspapers, scientists, and so on. As a parliamentarian put it: curriculum making seemed to be too important to be left to administration alone (cf. Berg, 1973).

The remedy the administration resorted to was successive segmentation of the levels of discourse. Beginning in 1849, it established conferences and other forums of preliminary discussion of educational policies, which would give all potentially interfering groups an opportunity to take part in curriculum policy making (cf. Tenorth, 1988). A combination of political and educational deliberation, as intended in the first conferences until the 1870s, proved to be counterproductive. The different factions and intentions did not paralyze each other, as some inside the administration had probably hoped, but produced almost uncontrollable coalitions across professional and political borders, united in a shared front against the unpopular administration.

Therefore, the next step had to be a subsequent segmentation of the political and the educational discourse by constructing different arenas for anyone asking for a share. Politics and education should not penetrate each other in public. Therefore, the teachers and their scientists had to leave the school conferences. Since 1890, these have been reduced to a kind of political brainstorming on educational principles. The conferences, on the other hand, lost the competence to decide or even delimitate curriculum issues. Those should, as the conference of 1900 recommended, be directly negotiated between the administration and school practitioners in specialized, subject matter-bound commissions. Noneducationists thus came to be almost completely excluded from the curriculum development in commissions, where the decision-making process could follow self-determined professional rules without the risk of interfering public scrutiny.

Since then, any major curriculum reform in Germany has been preceded by a comparable arrangement in which the general public has had access to arenas of general deliberation on educational politics, but has been kept away from the process of curriculum development in specialized commissions. Sometimes a complex organization was needed, sometimes a simple splitting of discourse levels by establishing parallel or subsequent commissions on planning principles (open to the public) and on the curriculum itself (as a closed shop) was sufficient. A classical model of organizing a segmented discourse was provided by the Prussian reform of the secondary curriculum in 1925 (cf. Müller-Rolli, 1977). It was preceded by an intensely controversial memorandum about the task of higher education. Public criticism was rebuffed with reference first to the curriculum planning, which had been excluded from the discussion: all criticized issues would be taken into account then. However, later on, the lasting criticism was rebuffed with reference to the

already terminated discussion about the memorandum. The preliminary negotiations about the memorandum, as a "provisional" assessment of key concepts, thus relieved the subsequent planning process of the obligation to take account of the more fundamental public debate. A similar construction was used, e.g., in Lower Saxony in the late 1950s and in Schleswig-Holstein in the early 1980s.

All attempts to proceed without such a discourse segmentation failed. If the entire process of curriculum making was handed over to a single body like, for example, academic institutes or general commissions on school reform, the administration's two direct counterparts in the deliberation process, i.e., the public and the practitioners from local or school levels, felt pushed aside and made the administration feel that its legitimation capacity would not be sufficient to overcome their combined intervention. This is exactly why some of the major West German curriculum revision projects of the 1960s and 1970s were closed down (Haft & Hopmann, 1987).

IV. Impacts

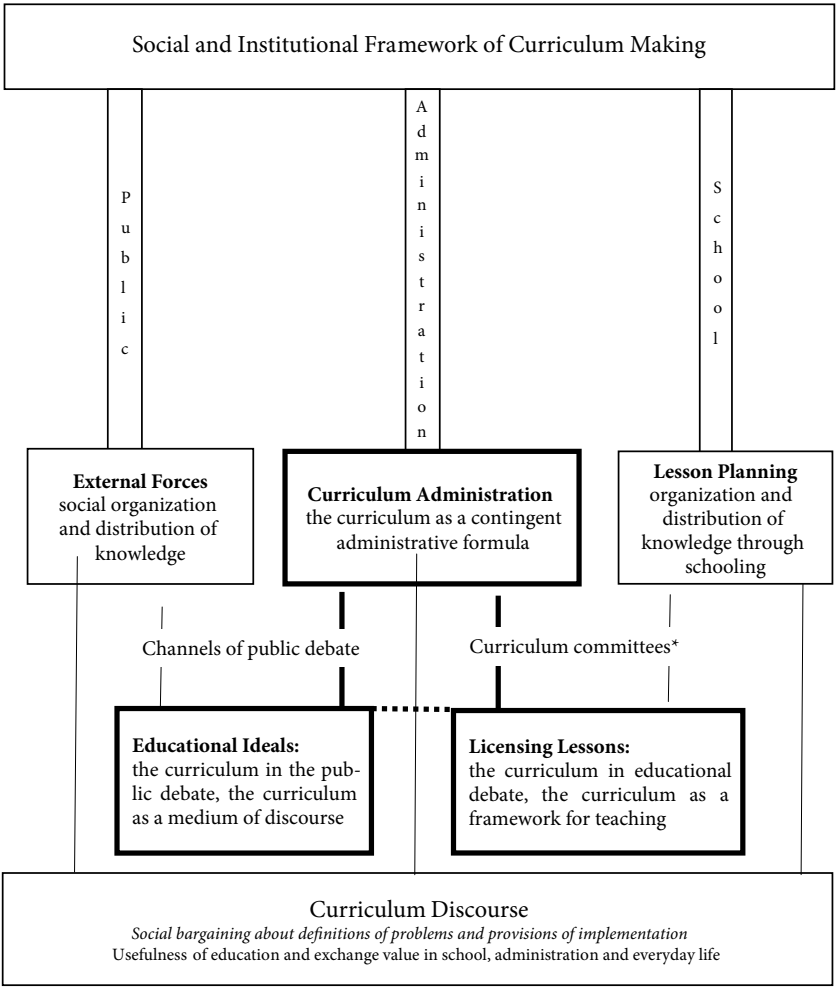
Within this framework, a segmented system of linkages has developed, which integrates the various special demands involved in curriculum making (see the diagram). External forces may offer their views and requests through regular channels of public debate (i.e., hearings, committees, or, occasionally, parliament) and by informal cooperation with people and powers from inside the administration. They may even try to mobilize the public, or, if they have appropriate means, to impose immediate constraints on curriculum authors (e.g., controlling the value or the assessment of educational certificates). Thus, all of the more or less influential social powers (employers and unions, political parties and churches, the academic community, and any other interested body adequately organized to voice an opinion) enjoy a certain degree of control over the curriculum. Even if they are not directly involved with the final wording of curricula (which has become the rule), they are powerful enough not to be ignored. The teachers and their colleagues from teacher education, colleges, universities, etc., on the other hand, are given a share in the work of specialized committees preparing draft versions of a curriculum, which are normally enacted without significant changes. Additionally, through their professional and subject matter associations, they have also gained access to the channels of public debate. Finally, the

administration, squeezed in between public demands, practical requirements, and, less visibly, their own political or legal objectives, must try to secure some room to move, as otherwise planning would be impossible. Hence, as there is no other instrument, administration is bound to increase both compartmentalization, licensing, and segmentation.

In the perspective developed here, which could be easily applied to other national curriculum histories (as Björg B. Gundem has done in her history of Norwegian curriculum administration; cf. Gundem, 1990a), the multiple realities of curriculum making are seen as an integrated and necessary result of social differentiation. There is, however, a double fallacy either to underrate or to overestimate the status of the multiplicity. In spite of a common place of educational administration theory (cf. Mitchell, 1984), describing curriculum making as a loosely coupled system would be inadequate: The linkages and boundaries of the construction have to interact in a precisely limited manner; any approach exaggerating the impact of one perspective necessarily enforces counteraction or at least neutralization efforts in affected compartments. Nor would it be correct to see the curriculum as an unfragmented whole, an intertwined system of documents and activities with a common core, which might be identified as a pedagogical concept or policy. Whereas curriculum and subject matter specialists (generalizing their access to the issue) tend to see it this way, those involved in the process of curriculum making at school, political, or administrative levels, do not. From their perspective, the curriculum is something different depending on the position one has in the compartmentalized and segmented system of curriculum making.

To put it in a short story (originally told by Weck, 1980): In the 1970s, a curriculum draft of the educational administration in the state of Bremen met strong opposition in a parliamentary commission, which objected to some seemingly radical goal assignments. That notion found backing in different social organizations outside the parliament (especially employer associations) as well as resistance by some organizations on the left side of the political spectrum. The wording of the goals of instruction had to be changed, in fact weakened, various times before the dispute came to a peaceful end. However, the goal-related contents were not changed a lot. Political deliberation could change declarations on principles, but left the process of content-choice untouched. Inside the curriculum commission, the political reasoning of parliamentarians and pressure groups could annoy, but not impress. Outside the commission,

the complicated didactical reasoning that grounded the draft curriculum has hardly ever been noticed. Moreover, if teachers were asked whether the new curriculum had an impact on their instruction, they could hardly complain. The new framework was not as revolutionary as the parliamentarians feared it to be or the didactical approach promised: In fact, it left, as did almost any of its predecessors, enough leeway for anyone to continue as he or she was used to.



*or comparable planning agencies

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