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The Current Discourse on Curriculum Change: A Comparative Analysis of National Reports on Education

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Introduction

Why should educational authorities decide to change intended subjects and topics of teaching within their jurisdictions? One may conceive of different answers to that question. Interest groups both within and outside the education system may exert pressure in order that educational content reflects scientific developments, corresponds to structural changes in the education system or adapts to new theories or philosophies of teaching and learning. Politicians may feel unhappy with their country's performance in international achievement studies and attribute the poor results to the selection and organization of teaching content. Or a situation of social transformation or crisis may lead to vague feelings of inadequacy regarding what is taught in schools. But whatever the driving forces of curricular change may be in each specific case, state authorities need to make the rationale behind their decisions explicit in order to legitimize them. This chapter deals precisely with what educational authorities at the nation-state level consider most important when they are asked to give the reasons or motives behind curriculum reforms in their countries.

As a database, we have used the national reports on education presented by about 100 countries to the forty-sixth session of UNESCO's International Conference on Education, 2001 (IBE-UNESCO 2002b).[1] While these reports, which are presented each time the International Bureau of Education organizes this conference, usually describe countries' educational institutions in terms of their structures and achievements, a majority of the reports in the 2001 series included a specific section dealing with change in educational content over the last decade of the second

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millennium or considered this issue in the context of other topics, such as descriptions of comprehensive educational reform. Inasmuch as the reports deal with the curriculum change at all, they generally addressed the issue of the reasons for planning, launching or even accomplishing reforms in the 1990s.

Each report reflects a unique national education system. Correspondingly, we expected the motives of curricular reform to emphasize unique features of the educational institutions, stakeholders and pressure groups, as well as the discourse on education typical of individual national contexts. Within each country the discourse on educational content is made up of many different voices all striving to obtain public acceptance for their proposals. State authorities will take these voices into account and refer to them selectively when giving a rationale for policies related to curricular issues. In order to gain legitimacy for curricular decisions, they will relate them to widely accepted values that are assumed to be better achieved through a change of educational content. As will be shown later on in this chapter, national development and individual self-direction and empowerment are among the values receiving most emphasis when curricular policies are being reviewed.

While in that sense the reports reflect the particular situation in individual countries, they simultaneously describe them on behalf of a transnational audience. Though mainly national in scope, they contribute to a more general, global discourse on education. As Baker and LeTendre (2005: 3) state, "there are all kinds of trends suggesting that ideas and demands and expectations for what schools can, and should, do for society have developed well beyond any particular national context." We may reasonably assume that these expectations will be reflected in national actors' reasoning about why educational, and in particular curricular, change should occur in their countries. Thus, the reports both contribute to and draw from a discourse that is no longer simply the expression of some idiosyncratic national need or interest.

Cross-national analysis of the rationales given for curricular reform offers the opportunity to derive some features of the global narrative from statements about the driving forces in specific countries. After a brief overview of international comparative research on curricula and curriculum-making, this chapter describes state-based curriculum-making as the institutional frame of both decisions on curricular stability or change, and the discourse that gives legitimacy to such decisions. As the subsequent section suggests, the latter is organized on three levels, each of which dealing with different issues of the curriculum: classroom teaching; management of the education system; and educational policy.

The findings are presented in two sections. We first discuss the distribution of statements across categories pertaining to the level of institutional and political discourse. In the first one we find an interesting tendency to explain the need for curriculum reform in terms of a change in the relationship between individual learners and educational content. While a few decades ago the idea of a canon of knowledge to be acquired by all students of a given grade was prevalent, now the selection and organization of educational content should instead provide an opportunity for self-directed learners to construct knowledge according to their individual needs and

interests. Moreover, the datum point of individual citizenship, which has been a focal issue of education since national school systems were created in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, appears to have shifted markedly in recent years. Competent citizens of nation-states have been at the core of education for a long time. While this national citizen is not absent in the reports, the most recent values to be developed through education also reflect a far more cosmopolitan view of the individual.

Statements pointing to the political discourse relate curriculum reform to individual countries' development and adaptation to social change. While the latter mainly describes change occurring within an individual country, a considerable number of reports also emphasize the need for adaptation to external change.

In the subsequent section, groups of countries are compared according to the world regions to which they belong and their national income, as well as their status as transition countries or their membership of OECD. While the overall distribution is generally reproduced in the different groups, some interesting variations can also be observed.

State-based curriculum-making in an international comparative perspective

Since education has become institutionalized in sovereign nation-states or their constituent jurisdictions, the curriculum itself, as well as its development and implementation, has generally been considered to be an internal matter. Educational content was thought to reflect an individual society's concern about transmitting its unique heritage to the next generation and preparing for the future. Educational research has generally accepted this assumption and studied the curriculum, as well as its development and implementation, i.e. curriculum-making, as a national issue explained by the situation existing within that state. It is only in the past two decades that the curriculum has gained attention as a topic of international comparative research. In a pioneering study, Meyer, Kamens and Benavot (1992) showed an increasing standardization of the structure of primary school curricula across nations and decades. And while Benavot (2002b) concludes that the trend is still continuing on the primary school level, another study (Kamens, Meyer and Benavot 1996) identifies a similar tendency for academic secondary education.

Scholars in agreement with this line of research argue that standardization must be explained by the worldwide diffusion of a cultural model presenting society as a highly rationalized structure, committed to common modern values, such as development, democracy and social justice. Education itself reflects these values through universal participation and emphasizing rationality (McEneaney and Meyer 2000). Correspondingly, educational content as presented in textbooks increasingly transmits—besides disciplinary knowledge—a new conceptualization of the learner as a participating rational actor (McEneaney 1998; 2002). According to this institutionalist approach, the curriculum and its changes must be understood as the

result of exogenous, worldwide forces acting on national education systems (Meyer et al. 1997).

This view has been challenged by other authors, who emphasize the internal dynamics of educational institutions as they have developed within nation-states (Cummings 2003). While acknowledging that a semantic construction of world society exists, Schriewer insists that "there is an abstract universalism of transnationally disseminated models, which fans out into multiform structural patterns wherever such models interact, in the course of their intellectual adoption and/or institutional implementation, with differing state-defined frameworks, legal and administrative regulations, forms of division of labor in society, national academic cultures, context-bound social meanings and world views shaped by religious beliefs, philosophical traditions, or ideological systems" (Schriewer 2003: 273). This view would suggest that endogenous forces and interrelationship networks (Schriewer 2000b) lead to a high degree of variety, instead of isomorphism.

While this research and debate has considerably increased knowledge of the outcomes of curriculum-making in terms of structure and content, less is known across countries with respect to processes enacted in order to select, organize and implement content in schools. Until recently, international comparative studies, such as TIMSS or PISA, largely neglected both the institutional frameworks in which such outcomes are produced and differences in subject-matter content covered by school levels and grades in different countries (Westbury 1994). Research on the stability and change of the curriculum generally focuses—as does its structure and content—on determinants inherent in nation-states or smaller units (see, for example, Pinar 2003a; Rosenmund, Fries and Heller 2002). Only in recent years have there been some attempts, within the context of IEA studies, to relate educational outcomes to curricular content and the institutional framework in which decisions about selection and organization of educational content are made (Schmidt et al. 2001; Steiner-Khamsi, Torney-Purta and Schwille 2002).

One may define the construction of the school curriculum as the overall social process of valuing and selecting elements of the collective memory, as well as of organizing it as educational content and applying it in teaching practice. One should assume that this process occurs in every society perceiving itself as 'historic', i.e. as changing over time. Findings in a study by Le Métais (2003) for a group of highly developed countries reveal that reviews of educational content occur periodically. As far as the system of public education is involved, the process becomes institutionalized within the framework of the political, administrative and educational structures of nation-states or smaller sovereign societal units. On the one hand, this state-based curriculum-making encompasses the whole set or arrangement of organizations, professions and roles involved in the shaping and re-shaping of the curriculum as it is supposed to be enacted in schools. On the other hand, it includes all routine and non-routine processes, including the discourse on educational goals and educational content as they should be formally expressed in the curriculum.

The curriculum-making process takes on a considerable variety of forms, involving all sorts of organizational frameworks, stakeholders, their interests and activities and so forth. While in some cases a radical renewal of educational content in all school subjects occurs in the context of an overall reform of the education system, in others smooth changes in a single subject pass almost unnoticed. And while some curriculum reforms evolve in the framework of complex project organizations, involving all sorts of actors—educational researchers, teachers, teacher trainers, politicians and the general public—in other cases the curriculum is developed by a highly restricted group of specialists. Furthermore, in many cases the definition of an intended curriculum gives rise to major controversies and discussions among stakeholders within the society where a curriculum-making process occurs (Goodson 1998). Debate may focus on issues such as to what extent the curriculum should be organized according to a model of individual development or on what social actors see as the functional needs of society, whether these needs should be conceived in terms of the transmission of a cultural heritage or the creation of the prerequisites to cope with future challenges, or whether some core knowledge has to be acquired by all students as a common cultural base. There is also the matter of the extent to which learners themselves should be allowed to shape their own learning trajectory.

An issue deserving particular attention is curriculum stability and change over time: what factors account for curricular change and stability in districts, schools and classrooms? Cuban (1992) suggests adopting a political perspective when explaining curriculum change. He argues that "economic, demographic, political, social and cultural changes mediated by groups and individuals reshape schooling inexorably and alter policies and practices at the district and school levels" (Cuban 1992: 215-216). Later in his analysis, this strong emphasis on the external pressures that the education system is exposed to becomes attenuated by the distinction between coercive (external), bargained (external/internal) and voluntary (internal) forces. Seen in this perspective, curriculum-making appears as an adaptation or response to changes occurring both within the education system and in society at large, and the new curriculum itself looks like a selection of knowledge whose acquisition enables individuals to master their everyday lives and to contribute to social well-being and democracy. While in this view knowledge is seen as a tool for structuring individuals' relationships with their natural and social environment, a different approach treats knowledge as an important means for shaping cognitive and motivational patterns of the individual, linking him/her *to* politics, culture, economy and the modern state (Popkewitz 1991). Rather than simply adapting school knowledge to a changing world, the change in educational content appears driven by power relationships and social regulation and as "a strategic site in which the modernization of institutions occurs" (Popkewitz 1991: 13). From this standpoint, curriculum change cannot simply be seen as a planned 'technocratic' reform to improve the productivity of the education system, but should also be understood as a political measure that re-shapes relationships between individuals and institutions of the nation-state through the selection and organization of school knowledge.

Rationales for changing educational content

The reports analyzed in this study deal with the issue of change when answering the question about 'motives' for curriculum-making in the 1990 to 2000 period. The question about 'motives' for curriculum reforms refers to reasons and rationales given by social actors for their own practices. In the context of this study, the issue concerns situations or events that, in the view of actors themselves, have caused state agencies to start a process that should lead to changes in the content and structure of knowledge schools are supposed to transmit to their students. Answering the question of why the process of curricular reform had been set in motion, our respondents not only presented 'objective' information about the 'real' reasons for curriculum-making processes but also, even more frequently, interpretations or rationalizations for these processes. It is highly probable, however, that the respondent interpretations are shared by many other actors in the field and accepted as legitimizing the action of different agencies involved in the process. We assume this sharing of a consensual view is possible because interpretations or 'explanations' refer to a more general social discourse on education.

As Hopmann (1999) suggests, this discourse can be divided into three distinct parts: the political, administrative or 'programmatic', and classroom or 'practical' levels. In his view, reconciling social expectations concerning the effects of education and teachers' views on what can and should be done in everyday classroom practice is an almost impossible enterprise. Therefore, societies tend to create separate arenas for different discourses. Within these arenas different sets of arguments are developed to address the curriculum issue. We should expect this to be reflected in national reports on education as pointing either to the level of the education system itself (institutional level) or to the relationship between education and society (political level).

One major distinction should be made as far as the institutional level is concerned. Education displays an inherent tension between the teaching profession, which attempts to defend its autonomy and has developed and cultivated its own specific knowledge base and rationales for everyday classroom practice, and the state bureaucracy that governs the education system. Teachers believe that they know what is best for their students and what really 'works' in the teacher/learner relationship. For this reason, they also have clear ideas about what educational content can and should be transmitted in school. This may be expressed—in terms of a critique of the existing curriculum or as a shift in the perception of the student, the teacher and their relationship—as the need for curriculum change. Administrators, on the other hand, need to organize and co-ordinate a complex system consisting of different school types, levels and grades, assessment systems, teacher education, textbook production and so forth. Moreover, they are often under pressure to increase the overall effectiveness of the system. Both co-ordination and pressures about educational outcomes may strongly affect administrators' expectations about the curriculum. For that reason, teachers' interests in a curriculum in accordance with what they perceive as the classroom reality, and administrators' concern about co-ordination and the education system's outcomes, may

be expressed in terms of a need to change the school curriculum. Both justifications may be offered when a rationale for curriculum reform is required.

Productivity aside, although the relationship between education and society at large is usually absent in the institutional discourse on educational content, it is clearly the main focus of the political discourse. In the political arena educational content is evaluated in terms of what part of its cultural heritage society wishes to pass on to the next generation. And it becomes particularly related to what a society perceives as an improvement of its situation. As is well known, there are strong convictions that education has an important impact on the attainment of that goal. Generally, such expectations become expressed either in a narrow-minded sense or as generalized expectations. On the one hand, discussions start with specific social problems, such as youth unemployment, AIDS or violence, and/or claims that education does not sufficiently address this kind of 'real' problem. On the other hand, we find more generalized beliefs: that education is an institution that helps societies and their inhabitants to deal adequately with social, economic, technological, political and cultural progress, and contributes to social development on some or all of these dimensions. When applied to statements about the need for curricular change, this distinction between specific and generalized societal expectations seems to be useful to distinguish two categories of statements: (a) about the relationship between the curriculum and specific social issues; and (b) curriculum and social development or progress.

Obviously, by the end of the twentieth century social change cannot be conceived of as strictly 'homemade', i.e. resulting exclusively from the internal dynamics of an individual society. As McEneaney and Meyer put it:

> The model of the modern society increasingly locates this society in a global context, economically, politically, socially and culturally. Emphasis on national autonomy, autarky and tradition is weakened. Thus, the curriculum must be globalized, to create a broader understanding. (McEneaney and Meyer 2000: 199-200)

The relationship of the single nation-state with its globalized environment has become an important topic in the political discourse of most societies. This is symbolically expressed in the interest attracted by the yearly World Economic Forum in Davos (Switzerland) and its counterpart, the Social Forum in Porto Alegre (Brazil). We should expect this to be reflected in the current discourse on necessary changes in educational content. First, advocates of curriculum reform may simply point to globalization as an important change of the environment we are living in and infer from this a need to adapt the curriculum to that new reality. In a second way, direct reference may be made to challenges individual societies are confronted with as a result of globalization in the realms of economy, society, culture and communication. This kind of reasoning is quite similar to claims that curricular reform is needed for society's adaptation to social change and for societal development. The difference lies in the fact that the source of

Table 10.1: Rationales for curriculum change

Levels	Issues	Articulated in terms of …	Examples from national reports
1. Institutional discourse (education system)	1.1 Curriculum and classroom practice	Critique of the curriculum itself: • Obsolescence; • Overload; • Lack of coherence within and across subjects and grades. Incongruence of the curriculum with: • (new) learners' needs; • (new) approaches to teaching.	"The existing curriculum was overloaded." "At the beginning of the 1990s the scope for adapting education and training to various kinds of pupils' needs was deemed insufficient."
	1.2 Curriculum and education system	Need to adjust the curriculum to changes in: • structure of the education system; • approaches to system control. The need to improve academic outcomes and quality of education.	"The overall reform in the education has then led to curriculum change." "… faced with the need to overcome articulated insufficiencies and to meet the demand for education services and to raise the quality of education."
2. Political discourse: single national society	2.1 Curriculum and specific social issues	Mismatch of educational content and the social reality of learners. Expectations to resolve specific problems (AIDS, unemployment) by changing educational content.	"The curricula and the content thereof are not generally integrated with or related to the realities of the learner and the society at large." "Emerging issues such as the HIV/AIDS pandemia, gender imbalance, environmental issues, drug education."

	2.2 Curriculum and social development	The need to change the curriculum in response to fundamental (social, economic, political, cultural) change. The need to change educational content to support national development.	"Educational content also needs to be aligned with emerging and developing needs of society." "Education programs are designed for the overall development of the country … economic development, socio-cultural development, and political independence."
3. Political discourse: world society	3.1 Globalization	New (global) social environment common to all countries. Global problems (health, environment, etc.).	"… dominance of communication and information systems which has resulted in the whole world becoming a global village."
	3.2 National adaptation to global development	The need to deal with: • global markets; • global communication; • global culture.	"Information and communication revolutions have started to influence our daily life in all fields … necessary for us to initiate a comprehensive process of adaptation with the new technological environment."
	3.3 International exchange and integration	Prerequisites for: • transnational exchange; • integration in networks of nation-states.	" … accession to the international processes of integration."
Not specified	Secular trends		"… almost explosive production of knowledge."

change is seen in the global environment. Finally, the need for curricular changes may be related to an emphasis on active participation of one's own society in a globalized world.

When running the content analysis of the national reports[2], a framework of categories was used reflecting the above discussion. In the first and second columns, Table 10.1 summarizes the categories used for coding aspects of the institutional and political discourse, thereby differentiating, in the latter case, between the societal and the global frame of reference that statements are related to. The third and last columns then give a general explanation of what is meant by each category and illustrate this with examples of statements found in the reports.

Institutional and societal pressures on educational content

In Table 10.2 the overall distribution of statements is presented, first in the form of the percentage of reports referring to the levels of discourse and then as the percentage of reports containing statements pertaining to individual categories. It becomes clear from the condensed presentation in the third column that both institutional and political arguments have high impact in the social discourse on the need for curriculum change. And it becomes equally obvious that, while statements relating education to the situation and development of each society clearly dominate this discourse, a considerable set of arguments considers this relationship against the background of a globalized world of which this society forms part.

Within the institutional discourse, emphasis is quite balanced between statements referring to the classroom and the educational administration. This is not surprising since, as a closer examination of the reports reveals, they are closely connected. Rather than as separate entities, they should be understood as focusing on one single object—the educational institution.

> The subject area objectives are such that they do not indicate the interrelatedness and integration with the subject areas within the same class or level.
>
> (National report of Ethiopia)

> A major task of the educational reform will be the curricular reform—whereby a new National framework needs to be defined, new standards set, the appropriate procedures for educational content regulation and roles of diverse actors in the future decentralized system defined, as well as capacity for school or local curriculum design developed.
>
> (National report of Yugoslavia)

Table 10.2: Percentage of reports including statements referring to levels and categories of discourse

Levels	Categories	% reports	% reports
Institutional discourse		61	
	Curriculum and classroom practice		46
	Curriculum and education system		43
Political discourse: individual society		62	
	Curriculum and specific social issues		32
	Curriculum and social development		50
Political discourse: global society		33	
	Globalization		14
	National adaptation to global development		22
	International exchange and integration		14
Level of discourse not specified		21	

They all focus on changes needed in institutional arrangements for the transmission of knowledge in the framework of schools. In a more in-depth analysis, however, at least two transversal patterns show up. In the introductory remarks to this section, it was hypothesized that the motives emphasized by the authors of the reports should be viewed as expressions of a more general discourse on education and the education system. We suggest that the statements in this analysis should accordingly become interpreted as elements in this same kind of discourse. We may refer to the patterns mentioned above as typical forms or 'figures' characterizing the discourse, i.e. the way social actors think about and justify educational issues.

> There is a great deal of interaction between the two aspects of school development and curricular reform, i.e. the one concept almost inevitably gives rise to impulses for the other.
>
> (National report of Germany)

> Predominance of the transmission of information over the development of skills and the shaping of personalities […] To change the teaching philosophy and culture of schools.
>
> (National report of Poland)

In a first pattern, the change in educational content is presented as continuous adjustment to the development of socially available knowledge on the one hand and changing structural arrangements within the education system on the other. We may label this pattern of reasoning as that of *routine, ongoing reform,* explaining and justifying the adaptation and renewal of knowledge transmitted in classroom teaching. A second pattern—clearly distinguishable from the one above—points to more fundamental transformation of the premises for the transmission of knowledge in schools. It is clearly expressed in the numerous statements dealing with the learner and the teaching/learning relationship. The discourse accompanying this pattern, which we may refer to as the *qualitative shift* pattern, may be described as follows: it is generally acknowledged that the availability and accessibility of knowledge has increased tremendously due to the spread of information and communication technologies. At the same time, it has become more difficult to anticipate what kind of knowledge and competencies schoolchildren will need in the future. In this situation, a radical shift must be envisaged with respect to the knowledge transmitted by the school. Curricula should be lightened to give learners the opportunity to develop their knowledge base and competencies in a self-directed way. The autonomous learner becomes the new centre of the teaching/learning process. This topic is in accordance with McEneaney's (1998; 2002) findings on the development of textbooks.

> According to the new view, while not overlooking the subject areas, the focus of the teaching programmes should be the student, not the content.
>
> (National report of Chad)

> At the beginning of the 1990s the scope for adapting education and training to various kinds of pupils' needs was deemed insufficient. […] efforts have to be made through the reforms to develop better ways of encouraging pupils' participating in their own learning and of expanding their opportunity to take charge of their own personal development.
>
> (National report of Norway)

> […] the apparition of new concepts of learning that define it as a process not of mechanical appropriation of pre-established truths, but of personal construction of knowledge. […] And […] they make relative the traditional means of transmitting knowledge.
>
> (National report of Peru)

> Introduction in the curricula of inter-disciplinary activities to develop skills/abilities for current needs/realities.
>
> (National report of Cyprus)

The shift of perspective from a content-centered to a student-centered approach in the organization of educational knowledge is pervasive throughout the reports. It is expressed in different ways. Some authors refer directly to the need for student orientation or child orientation and reject the outdated teacher- and content-oriented models. Others emphasize the active, autonomous and creative contribution learners (should) make to the accumulation of knowledge and competencies. Still others point to curriculum-making in their country being based on the constructivist paradigm. Consequently, many reports criticize the traditional rigid selection of compulsory teaching content and emphasize the need for a flexible curriculum providing scope for the individualization of the learning processes. Obviously, this approach implies significant changes in the teachers' role and tasks. Several reports point to the challenges that the new paradigm presents in terms of teachers' qualifications and training.

A complementary principle which is repeatedly mentioned assumes that learning should no longer be understood as the acquisition of knowledge structured according to separate disciplines or subjects, but increasingly as an understanding of topics, themes or problems based on elements drawn from different disciplines. Correspondingly, the reports reveal a growing tendency to establish trans-disciplinarity as a main principle orienting curriculum-making and giving it concrete form. This may be achieved, for instance, by combining several subjects into larger subject areas, by fostering a problem-oriented approach to teaching and by recommending teaching based on the students' everyday experience, including methods such as projects, experiments and so forth.

> Since many school leavers failed to get employment the curriculum was blamed for unemployment.
>
> (National report of Zimbabwe)

> Since the content of most curricula is subject matter-based, students do not acquire a variety of skills directly related to real-life situations and to their lifelong needs.
>
> (National report of the United Arab Emirates)

> Laying a foundation for life-long learning in students and helping them to become good workers and members of the community is certainly a crucial aspect that will need to be taken into consideration when developing the system of education.
>
> (National report of the Czech Republic)

This imagery of the autonomous learner is clearly related to the concept of the competent individual, one who is expected to deal actively and rationally with his/her environment. Helping students develop the necessary competences to deal actively and successfully with social change, for example in science, technology or the labor market, is an idea that can be found in the narratives on curriculum-making all over the world. While in some reports it becomes expressed in terms of a need to transmit competencies enabling one to cope with social reality in the narrower social context, in others the need to prepare young people for lifelong learning is emphasized. A term covering both ideas can be found in many reports: 'life skills'.

But curriculum-making is not solely concerned with knowledge and skills. According to the reports, it should also consider a wide variety of values to be instilled in students through education. These may be summarized as universalism, individualism and identity. Universalism is expressed as the need for students to develop a sense for justice, human rights and responsibility. Students should learn to participate in society as responsible citizens. They should develop respect for others, openness toward the world and an intercultural perspective. Peace education is mentioned here, as well as environmental education. Furthermore, young people should develop a sense of social cohesion and integration and contribute to the development of national culture. This may imply, depending on the specific case, learning the national language, developing patriotism, adhering to Islamic values or developing a socialist consciousness. Finally, the reports put considerable emphasis on individualism during curriculum-making. Education should be directed toward personal development in terms of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-direction. Creativity and critical thinking are essential 'ingredients' mentioned in this realm.

> Educational content also needs to be aligned with emerging and developing needs of society.
>
> (National report of Namibia)

> Education programmes are designed for the overall development of the country […] economic development, socio-cultural development, and political independence
>
> (National report of Pakistan)

The political discourse at the societal level relates curriculum-making to features typical of the society in which the process occurs. As Table 10.2 reveals, the need to change educational content becomes predominantly 'explained' in terms of general

social development. This may be expressed in a more 'reactive' way: as a necessity to adapt curricula in response to economic, social, political or cultural changes that a given society has to deal with. To a lesser extent, it is also expressed 'proactively': as an attempt to use curriculum-making as an instrument to lay the groundwork for planned social development. In any case, reforms are clearly more related to societal change than to a static social reality. And although a number of reports relate curriculum-making directly to some important problems, such as AIDS or unemployment, a simple problem-solving approach in curriculum-making is certainly not the main issue.

It should be emphasized that the adaptation-to-change approach shows up in two distinct varieties. Generally, developments—such as changes in the economic structure, especially the labor market structure, and the concomitant shifts in qualifications, or new challenges of everyday life and political developments—are mentioned. A different pattern can be found in some countries formerly belonging to the soviet bloc, especially most Eastern European countries. In these cases, the fundamental transition toward a market economy, western-style democratic regimes and new citizens' rights are presented as an overall pattern, which inevitably brings about profound changes in educational content and in the education system in general.

> […] imperious need of social and cultural mutations for the transition period as an irrevocable passage from the centralized and authoritarian educational system to an educational system appropriate for a society based on individual freedom, political pluralism, legitimate state and a market economy
>
> (National report of Romania)

Many changes mentioned when describing social change in an individual country have their roots in developments occurring on a global scale, such as scientific progress and technological development. They affect all countries indifferently. In Table 10.2, references to that kind of driving force in curriculum change are summarized in the bottom row. Although they imply processes occurring outside national borders, at least in part, they should be distinguished from those that present an individual country in its relationships with the global system as a system of nation-states. Globalization is seen as a system exerting pressures to which individual countries need to respond, or as the integration of independent countries in international networks or political entities, such as the European Union.

> Internationalization of the employment market […] Political developments on a global scale such as the international nature of almost all aspects of life.
>
> (National report of Germany)

> Social ideologies and political changes that emerged in the world and their influence on life aspects in Egypt which requires including such changes in the education curriculum.
>
> (National report of Egypt

> […] the globalization and the 'educational response' to it […] the internationalization of education.
>
> (National report of Bulgaria)

> To prepare the nation for global competitiveness that will be started in early years of the twenty-first century.
>
> (National report of Indonesia)

> […] integration in the European and global economy and communications […] Having gained its independence Slovenia decided to seek integration into global economic and communication trends. […] In education this calls for closer links with European countries and the co-ordination of curricula.
>
> (National report of Slovenia)

As shown in Table 10.2, the reality of worldwide interconnectedness does not yet have the highest impact on (national) discourses on educational content and the need for change. Just one-fifth of the reports explicitly refer to secular processes and about one-third relate curriculum reform to a country's external relationships, sometimes in quite vague terms.

> Scientific novelty and rapid changes witnessed in modern technology, particularly in the fields of informatics, communications, genetic engineering and space science.
>
> (National report of Syria)

We may summarize this section as follows. The contemporary narrative on curriculum reform relates education and school knowledge mainly to two issues: (a) the self-directed, competent and rational individual; and (b) societal development. Not much remains of the more traditional approaches to educational knowledge. A few decades ago educational knowledge was seen as a canon, framed by erratic disciplines and transmitting school subjects indifferently to all young people in a country. In our account of mass education the picture is quite different: acquisition of knowledge is not an end in itself (for instance, in the sense of the German idea of *Bildung*), but is a means for human beings to cope with change and to act as responsible citizens—and for society to develop wealth, democracy and equity. This comes close to what neo-

institutionalist theorists claim to be a worldwide cultural model to which nation-states' policies are committed, at least symbolically (Fiala and Lanford 1987).

Motives for curriculum change in a cross-national perspective

What kind of variance, and how much, should we expect in this pattern between countries? Assuming a global cultural model shaping education worldwide, we should expect it to be particularly reflected in two ways in the narrative on curriculum change. First, although different semantics will be used across cultures to express that model, the general pattern found in Table 10.2 should not vary in a systematic way between groups of countries characterized by different economic, political or cultural situations. For example, the pattern should be reproduced in the core group of countries forming OECD, as well in the countries not belonging to that group. Second, since education itself is thought, according to the model, to be a crucial vehicle for attaining modernization and participation in global politics, we might expect those countries which perceive themselves as 'backward' with respect to some features of the model to emphasize some institutional and/or societal expectations related to curriculum change more than others.

In Table 10.3 the data set is broken down by different groupings of countries. Values in the cells express the percentage of reports within each group in which a reference to a single category could be detected. Overall, a majority of groups reproduce the basic pattern shown in Table 10.2. Issues relating the need for curricular reform to national development are prevalent, whereas the main features of the institutional discourse retain a high and generally equivalent importance.

However, the table also reveals some interesting types of 'deviance' with respect to the overall picture, in the sense that stronger emphasis may be put on the institutional discourse and/or aspects of the global discourse. In looking at the Arab world (Middle East and North Africa), the data show that, in this group, changing the educational content is not only more connected to political discourse at the level of each state, but also to the issues of adaptation to globalization and international exchange and integration. It would appear that existing curricula are perceived not only as obstructing societal development, but also as inadequate for these countries to cope with globalization and for their involvement in a larger community. This does not necessarily imply the acceptance of a standardized dominant model of education and an indiscriminate adjustment of educational content in accordance with this model. As Ramírez and Meyer (2002b) suggest, the Islamic world may strive for distinctiveness, i.e. for an alternative model of education and a different selection of educational content. They argue, however, that today it is 'difficult to imagine a competitive alternative [to the dominant model] that does not emphasize globally legitimated core goals such as socio-economic progress and justice' (Ramírez and Meyer 2002b: 11). This is reflected in the Middle East/North Africa group by a considerable number of statements emphasizing those values and other statements pointing to the need for more integration in the community of Arab countries.

Table 10.3: Percentage of reports where types of motives are mentioned,

	World regions					
	South-East Asia	Eastern Europe/ Central Asia	Latin America/ Carib-bean	Sub-Saharan Africa	Middle East/North Africa	Western Europe/ North America
(n =)	*(11)*	*(19)*	*(12)*	*(28)*	*(15)*	*(16)*
Institutional discourse:						
Curriculum and classroom practice	55	58	33	43	47	44
Curriculum and the education system	18	47	33	54	40	44
Political discourse: single society						
Curriculum and specific social issues	27	21	17	50	40	19
Curriculum and social development	45	53	50	46	67	44
Political discourse: global society						
Globalization	18	10	0	11	13	31
National adaptation to global development	45	16	17	7	40	25
International exchange and integration	9	26	0	7	27	12
Not specified						
	18	10	17	21	40	19

by groups of countries

Income groups				Transition country		OECD		Overall
Low	Low – middle	Middle – high	High	Yes	No	Yes	No	
(31)	*(28)*	*(17)*	*(25)*	*(17)*	*(84)*	*(17)*	*(84)*	*(101)*
45	36	71	44	65	43	47	46	46
42	28	59	48	53	40	47	42	43
48	11	35	32	24	33	24	33	32
52	46	59	48	59	49	47	51	50
13	7	6	28	12	14	35	10	14
13	21	29	28	18	23	24	21	22
6	7	24	24	29	11	12	14	14
19	21	14	20	12	23	24	20	21

A second type of 'exceptionalism' is characteristic for the group of transition countries. Here, the same or even greater importance is attributed to institutional arguments for curricular change than to societal development arguments which in turn are revealed to be over-represented. Moreover, arguments related to international exchange and integration are particularly emphasized. It is almost a tautology to say that transition countries are not only undergoing fundamental changes to their political and economic systems, but also experience strong pressures to conform to some worldwide norms of behavior. It is less obvious, however, that such pressures equally relate to the organization of education systems and to the educational content transmitted by them. Indeed, they translate into perceptions of a need for transforming all aspects of the educational institution. To meet world standards through changing the educational content with respect to the education system and classroom practice appears to be a prerequisite for participation in the larger community of nation-states. A more detailed examination of the reports reveals that this is exactly what many countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia are striving for.

When classifying countries by their economic strength, other interesting findings emerge. In wealthier countries the discourse on curriculum change is largely shaped by arguments relating this change to the global environment. While in the middle-to-high income group this applies mainly to arguments about a country's adaptation to world-scale developments and the need for international exchange and integration, several countries in the high-income group also emphasize globalization as a property of the contemporary world. They describe globalization as a new reality they are used to dealing with actively for their own profit. Correspondingly, the relationship between globalization and educational content becomes expressed more as a matter of fact, which should be taken into consideration in curriculum reforms, than in terms of the need to adapt to developments in the international arena. Knowledge transmitted by schools has to account for a new global environment. In sum, comparison across the national-income variable reveals a considerable cleavage as to the extent curricular reforms become justified by the countries' relationship to world society.

We would expect this finding to be confirmed by comparing OECD countries, most of them belonging to higher-income groups, with the majority of countries not belonging to this organization. Surprisingly, the only significant difference refers to the 'globalization' variable. One interesting feature deserves special attention, however. As part of its educational policy, OECD places high emphasis on the issue of the effectiveness of education systems. We would therefore expect the discourse on the curriculum to reflect the need to improve the productivity of the system, resulting in a higher score on the curriculum-and-education-system variable. However, neither in Table 10.3 nor in a more differentiated analysis where the efficiency issue was treated as a separate variable can the expected relationship be detected.

Conclusion

Educational policy does not only deal with strategies and decisions affecting stability or change of the education system. It is equally concerned with the problem of making strategies and decisions look reasonable and meaningful. This particularly applies to the selection of educational content and its distribution and organization across school levels and grades, i.e. curriculum-making. In order to make curricular decisions meaningful, attempts have to be made to relate them to the desired outcomes of the school system for individuals and society. Not surprisingly, when describing the rationale for curriculum development, decision-makers predominantly focus on the desired outcomes for individual learners and for the national society as a whole.

The impact of education on individuals and societies cannot be assessed within an abstract frame of reference. It must be related to some ideas or models of what the individual and society should be like if it is to make given ways of education appear meaningful. And while the assumption of desired outcomes of schooling may be an invariant feature of the educational institution, the specific ideas or models mentioned above may change over time. As our analysis suggests, the patterns found in analyzing reports from 2001 probably differ with respect to the reasoning we might have detected a few decades before.

Most remarkably, there seems to be a good deal of agreement across nations about desired outcomes of education in general and about the curriculum in particular. Educational content should help in shaping the autonomous and, to some extent, cosmopolitan citizen, improving national development and welfare and connecting these nation-states with global interchange. While there is variance across individual cases with respect to the features emphasized when explaining the reasons for curriculum change, there is considerable homogeneity between groups of nation-states with respect to the emphasis on the general pattern.

Notes

1. 102 countries presented a National Report on Education to the IBE in 2001 (available online at: www.ibe.unesco.org/International/ICE/46english/46natrape.htm). The size of the texts varies from about 10 to over 150 pages. In order to obtain comparable information, the IBE had invited Member States' ministries of education to organize the reports according to a structure indicated by guidelines (IBE-UNESCO 2000). The first part should give an overview of the education system at the end of the twentieth century and its development between 1990 and 2000. The second part should deal specifically with the renewal of educational content within that period, i.e. the curriculum, in view of the challenges of the twenty-first century. Analysis presented in this chapter concentrates on the second issue. Consequently, it mainly draws on the second part of the reports. The first part could not be entirely neglected, however, for a number of reasons. First, as several authors mention explicitly, the development of educational content cannot easily be separated from other developments and reforms taking place within the education system and affecting structures,

the distribution of responsibilities, forms of school management, etc. Accordingly, information concerning the development of content may already be found in the first part of a report. Moreover, there are countries where development of educational content has actually been a main focus of educational development in the last decade of the twentieth century. In these cases, obviously, the whole report refers, in one way or another, to curriculum-making. Finally, some authors have adhered less scrupulously than others to the guidelines recommended by the IBE, organizing their report according to their own desires. In these cases, a search for information pertaining to curricula and curriculum-making must necessarily be extended to the whole text in order to identify elements relevant to the development of educational content. The most important point creating difficulties for content analysis relates to the problem of different understandings among authors of seemingly identical concepts, such as 'curriculum' or 'syllabus'. While in some reports 'curriculum' is obviously used to designate the overall selection and organization of content transmitted in schools, in others the term is used in a narrower sense to describe only the temporal distribution of subjects between grades. Still other authors seem to understand the concept as synonymous with 'textbooks'. In sum, the database consists of texts whose format has not been entirely standardized by the IBE's questions.

2. It should be noted that both data collection and content analysis of statements related to curriculum change were of a highly exploratory character. The authors of reports had to deal with questions of a highly general nature. Since questions were submitted to national ministries of education, which appointed authors according to their own requirements, in most cases nothing is known about the social status and intellectual background of the reporters. As a result, the degree of standardization across countries is very low.

   In defining the criteria for composing the categories, inductive and deductive steps were combined in an interactive approach. As a result, statements relating to the reasons for undertaking curriculum reforms were first classified into twelve categories, four relating to features of the *educational system*, four to issues of the *individual society*, three to a *relationship between that society and the global system* and one residual category. In a subsequent step, both the categories for the educational and the individual-society level were condensed to the categories presented in Table 10.1. Since coding was done by one person only, it was not possible to evaluate the reliability of the ratings.