

## EDITORIAL

## Curriculum versus Didaktik revisited: towards a transnational curriculum theory

This special issue collects papers presented at the Fifth Nordic Curriculum Theory Conference that took place at Uppsala University, Sweden, on 23 and 24 October 2013. Around 60 researchers from all the Nordic countries gathered to discuss the challenges presented by the emergence of curriculum theory over the past 20 years. This issue is devoted to approaches which theorise curriculum from both novel and revitalised perspectives. In doing so, it aims to elaborate on analytical instruments for the understanding of our object of study in a globalising world. There have been explicit expressions of desire for a *transnational curriculum theory* which might satisfy a need for devices that contribute to an understanding of how public education is reshaped, at a time when earlier reference frames, such as the nation state systems which took a Westphalian form, are undergoing transformation within highly interdependent transnational spaces. This issue presents, in particular, approaches that on the one hand provide possible analytical as well as empirical means which have the potential to sharpen our arguments and deepen the discussion on curriculum from a transnational perspective. On the contrary, the approaches illustrate the value of curriculum theory to other fields of research, such as comparative and international education.

First, we focus on the relation between the phenomena of curriculum theory and didaktik, which in some way recalls the origins of our field, a recollection of the relationship between curriculum and didaktik, or as further on and synonymously, called Didaktik, as interrelated research interests. Both betray the complexity of the phenomenon on which they focus, that is, public education. In recent years, there have been several endeavours which have attempted to contribute to the understanding of the political factors which influence public education. We have witnessed the ongoing observation of transnational spaces and fields, the expression of a convergence, a reassembling of the world, built on the foundations of transnational policy, and indeed scientific networks (Nordin & Sundberg, 2014). However, a complementary focus on Didaktik also reminds us that while policy might change, the practice often remains static, and vice versa (Anderson-Levitt, 2007). The *Didaktik versus Curriculum Network* was established over 20 years ago by Stefan Hopmann, Ian Westbury, Björg Gundem and colleagues to improve understanding and to develop analytical

instruments concerning the relation between the organisation of schooling in its nation-specific context. Their ideas and their subsequent development were a primary focus of the conference.

Education takes place through curriculum enacted in specific classrooms in specific schools and universities, in specific neighbourhoods in specific municipalities. We must therefore conceptualise curriculum in relation to the different sites where it takes place. Here, we can also return to a historical recollection of the Nordic field, in particular, of curriculum theory, which draws significantly on the work of Basil Bernstein. His thoughts on how instruction is controlled by pace, sequence and selection (Bernstein, 1971) relate to the idea of didactical planning (Klafki, 2000). Moreover, the reasoning of Bernstein (1971) on code and message systems, that is, pedagogy, curriculum and evaluation can contribute to a further understanding of how different sites, from a national and transnational perspective, are interrelated.

The ideas of Bernstein (1971) about framing and classifying finally lead us to the second theme of this special issue: the matter of spacing and scaling. In times where, through globalisation, the space of schooling is apparently being stretched and extended, our theorising needs to demonstrate a deep awareness of the concepts and devices which we apply when we consider this issue, in particular, the spatial aspects of the term 'transnational'. Stated differently, we need strong analytical devices to theorise where public education takes place, where it is governed from, or where it takes its inspiration from. However, we must also consider how spaces are constructed beyond a transnational policy sphere (cf. Nordin & Sundberg, 2014), which also points to the relational aspect of 'transnational', who decides in favour of whom, about what and why?

One final aspect of this issue should also be mentioned here. We are not concerned with the question of whether certain modes of coping with transnational curriculum issues are more or less sophisticated. We theorise rather how something takes form: which problems are identified, which solutions are preferred in which contexts and why? The use of the term context here covers all the levels, spaces, fields and spheres of public education: transnational, national, municipal, school or university level.

The issue is divided into three sections: First we present the *keynotes of the conference* (Section 1), followed by

Section 2, which concerns the *revitalisation of the curriculum/didaktik relations*. Section 3, *Space reconsidered: Reframing curriculum theory*, is the final part of this issue.

For the sake of clarification, the terms *Didaktik* and *didactics* are used synonymously in the articles of this issue.

## Keynotes

Part I presents the three invited keynotes of the conference. They were presented by persons deeply involved in the emergence, development and discussions on the curriculum and Didaktik research field. It is also worth noting that they have each been involved from different national contexts, illuminated in how they describe borrowing and lending in curriculum and Didaktik. Each of the contexts they represent has a different history and perspective, but they have a common interest in discussing curriculum and Didaktik. As such, the invited keynote speakers prepared papers for their speeches held at this same conference. Each has contributed, bringing with them a rich set of personal experiences and perspectives, to the evolution of curriculum theory and Didaktik – historically, in its present state and into the future.

*Ulf P. Lundgren*, a long time professor and theorist within curriculum theory in Sweden, describes the development of the Swedish educational system from an explicit personal experience and perspective. Drawing on an analysis of the Swedish development, he elucidates the emergence of curriculum research in Sweden, focusing especially on curriculum theory and how it was formed by borrowing from the Anglo-American research context. In his historical exposé, he asserts that curriculum theory has had a strong impact on the educational field in Sweden, both among policymakers and researchers, but concludes by highlighting the risk that educational and curriculum research may become a mere tool used to assist in the design of a manual on how to teach a specific set of knowledge.

*Stefan Hopmann* is one of the researchers who have helped to shift the research focus and develop new questions within curriculum research. Hopmann currently sits as professor in Vienna, but was for a considerable time active in Norway, and is thus very familiar with the Nordic educational field. The article is somewhat personal, focusing on the points of contact between Didaktik and curriculum theory within a continental European perspective, where Didaktik is more commonly used than curriculum for describing the issues under scrutiny. By highlighting these points of contact between a continental European description of Didaktik and an Anglo-American description in curriculum, Hopmann looks into the future, discussing some probable developments within education.

*Michael Uljens* is professor at Åbo Academy in Vasa, Sweden. In his recent research, he has reshaped and

reframed some of the historical limits and limitations of curriculum theory. By drawing on a recognition-based tradition of education and a continental European conceptualisation of Bildung, he outlines the foundations of a critical but non-affirmative educational leadership theory with traditions in both curriculum and Didaktik. In doing so, Uljens describes how the classical pedagogical paradox takes a new form and asserts that educational leadership now means paradoxically to recognise the Other as if he or she was already capable of what he or she might become capable of through his or her own activity, and to act accordingly.

## Revitalisation of the curriculum/Didaktik relations

The three papers in this section concern the relation between curriculum and Didaktik. Agneta Linné, Tomas Englund and Jonathan Lilliedahl deliver three different proposals for revitalising this relationship.

*Agneta Linné's* starting point is the evolution of the Swedish curriculum theory tradition and its implications for her own research, emphasising the importance of temporal and cultural concepts and theories for understanding change and stability, focusing especially on Koselleck's concepts of temporal layers of past, present and future which form our horizons of expectation and spaces of experience. According to Linné, the uses of temporal and cultural concepts from other theoretical traditions have contributed to the strengthening of the socio-historical and socio-cultural aspects of curriculum theory and educational science. This leads to a concluding discussion of the boundaries between curriculum theory and Didaktik where Linné argues that the socio-historical and socio-cultural approaches could help to bridge the two, contextualising Didaktik and updating curriculum theory.

*Tomas Englund* aims to introduce a deliberative understanding of curriculum and school subject formation, which he argues might allow for a more deliberate process of curriculum making. The ideal deliberate curriculum-making process, according to Englund, involves a wide range of actors, allowing teachers and professionals primarily to decide upon matters of content and teaching in different subjects and leaving a scope for deliberation in the classroom. Englund claims that the curriculum researchers of the 1970s and 1980s identified the political and ideological components involved in curriculum making but did so at the expense of recognising different subject content interpretations, that is, didactic typologies. He also rejects Deng's notion (2009) that school subjects are distinctive, purpose-built enterprises for being deterministic and thereby ignoring the possibility of different interpretations, especially the ones taking place within classrooms.

*Jonathan Lilliedahl* investigates the curriculum/didactic relation from the social realist perspective, in a neo-Bernsteinian tradition. From this point of view, the selection of educational content and its organisation involves both curriculum and Didaktik as interrelated recontextualisation stages. From a social realist approach, education is regarded not only as socially constructed but also as something more than an expression of power. Social realism, according to Lilliedahl, recognises objective knowledge as an entity which is in constant interaction with critical Didaktik. He argues for social realism as a theoretical platform for amalgamating curriculum and Didaktik, as it implies that knowledge is internally given and externally regulated at the same time.

### Space reconsidered: reframing curriculum theory

The three contributions presented in this section consider the issue of space in education curriculum, assessment and education policy through three different lenses.

*Wieland Wermke*, *Daniel Pettersson* and *Eva Forsberg* illuminate the current thematic of globalisation in contemporary education and discuss its consequences for theorising curriculum. Drawing on an analysis and comparison of the issue of globalisation as presented in social science textbooks from three countries, they argue for a turn from *what* to *how* in curriculum theorising. Based on an overwhelming proliferation of new borders, spaces and relations in a globalised world of curriculum, the authors underscore the importance of examining how a particular matter is constructed within a transnational curriculum, theorising rather than focusing on what particular curriculum matter is or means in different contexts.

*Tine S. Proitz* discusses another aspect of space in education. Drawing on a study of OECD recommendations, she considers the perspectives of Nordic education research and the potential for adopting a broader viewpoint in education research that uses the theoretical and

analytical key concepts of uploading and downloading which are employed within European integration studies.

With contributions by *Henrik Román*, *Stina Hallsén*, *Johanna Ringarp* and *Andreas Nordin*, a third approach to the investigation of space in education is discussed. They present a comprehensive historic and comparative investigation through the analysis of municipal school policy in Sweden over a period of six decades of persistent school reforms. The study portrays municipal school policy as dealing with national and transnational school initiatives which affect local school actions. The authors argue that local school policy studies make an important contribution to the development of a historically oriented and transnationally informed curriculum theory.

*Daniel Pettersson*  
*Tine S. Proitz*  
*Henrik Román*  
*Wieland Wermke*

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