11

The Dynamics of Curriculum Design and Development: Scenarios for Curriculum Evolution

Juan Manuel Moreno

> After her six years' residence at the Mall, I have the honour and happiness of presenting Miss Amelia Sedley to her parents, as a young lady not unworthy to occupy a fitting position in their polished and refined circle. Those virtues which characterize the young English gentlewoman […] will not be found wanting in the amiable Miss Sedley. […] In music, in dancing, in orthography, in every variety of embroidery and needlework, she will be found to have realized her friends' fondest wishes. In geography there is still much to be desired; and a careful and undeviating use of the blackboard for four hours daily during the next three years is recommended as necessary to the acquirement of that dignified deportment and carriage, so requisite for every young lady of fashion. In the principles of religion and morality, Miss Sedley will be found worthy […]. (*Vanity Fair*, Thackeray 1848: Chapter I)

Introduction

Curriculum is a socio-historical construction which is expressed through general systems of knowledge characterization and hierarchy; these systems are in turn translated and transformed into legislative and administrative regulations, academic/achievement standards, textbooks and teaching aids, and the practice of teaching and learning in classrooms and schools. Goodson (2000) claimed that curriculum researchers should aim to comprehend how particular forms of knowledge are canonized and how power consolidates them. This chapter presents and deals with two fundamental dynamics of curriculum design and development—the very processes whereby curriculum is constructed as a social institution—change/control, on the one hand, consensus/conflict, on the other. This chapter will analyze specific elements of

A. Benavot and C. Braslavsky (eds.),
School Knowledge in Comparative and Historical Perspective, 195–209.
© 2007 *Springer.*

curriculum policy that allow us to have a deeper understanding of such dynamics. Stemming from the contrast and intersection between the dynamics of both curriculum design and development, four different scenarios of curriculum evolution and change can be identified and used in the analysis of current worldwide trends of curriculum reform. The resulting analytical framework will be supported and illustrated with specific curriculum trends and country examples from different regions of the world.

The dynamic of change/control in curriculum development

Alternative policy choices with regard to curriculum design and development can be accounted for in the light of a dynamic of change/control, which operates as a sort of engine for such processes. A comprehensive/explanatory model of this dynamic has been used in different ways by many authors in the field of educational change and innovation, school improvement and educational reform. Rodriguez Romero (2001) carried out a literature review in this regard, where the issue is presented in terms of the stability/change dynamic. Quoting Popkewitz, the author states that "the study of stability has been traditionally absent from research on educational change" (Popkewitz 1983: 175). Nonetheless, and even if it emerged in another context and with very different policy intentions, research on the implementation of educational reforms and, more specifically, on *factors* affecting such implementation has been informing us for decades about the individual and institutional dimensions of change, innovation and reform in education, and about the conditions in which such stability is expressed and assured.

In the context of a comparative study of secondary school-leaving examinations (Moreno 1992), I suggested that, instead of stability and control, the specific dynamics involved in curriculum design and development were rather of *change and control*. National/public examinations are the best possible example of this dynamic: external examinations are used in many countries as tools to steer the curriculum in the desired direction, creating a whole system of incentives for students, parents, teachers and local education administrators. Curriculum change and control have a radically dialectic relationship with great potential to understand and explain the issues at stake; this vision of curriculum dynamics, in addition to accounting for the phenomena, processes and levers of curriculum change and control as such, allows for the analysis of more complex issues involved in the *control of change* initiatives and, naturally, in the *change of control* mechanisms.

Using external examination as a policy tool, educational authorities can propel the school curriculum in the most desired direction: more generalist or specialized, more vocational or academic oriented, more or less demanding in terms of performance standards, and with stronger emphasis and premium on selected knowledge areas, competencies and skills. External examinations can simultaneously fulfill the functions of innovation and reproduction, curriculum change and curriculum control (Eckstein and Noah 1993). In other words, examinations are particularly amenable to political utilization, both in terms of political debate, or as Tyack and Cuban put it (1995)

political chat, and from the governance standpoint, to control and change the school curriculum at each and every level of decision-making.

As for their potential as instruments of curriculum change, it is remarkable how external examinations can be effectively used to legitimize and consolidate new subjects and knowledge areas, pushing up their market value, while usually (though not always) devaluing others. Granted, this is the way examinations reflect wider and stronger socio-cultural, economic and political trends; yet there is little doubt that the strong presence—or the explicit elimination—of any given subject in a secondary school-leaving examination confirms its social status as a knowledge area. And this has a number of important effects and implications on the corresponding status of the related professional families. Hence, the fact that most of the struggle to obtain—and to keep—a recognized place in the school curriculum has occurred in the context of external and public examinations faced by students at critical points during their school experience. In this regard, for instance, the multiplication and diversification of examinations in many education systems in order to integrate and mainstream new vocational tracks in upper secondary education has played a crucial role in their development, consolidation and increased recognition within both secondary and tertiary education.

In parallel, the evolution of both the content and the format of examinations may lead to changes in pedagogical methods and strategies used by teachers. Thus, teachers tend to make different curriculum and pedagogical decisions, depending on whether the upcoming external examinations for their students are going to be a standardized multiple test, an essay test, an oral examination or a practical test—to name but a few examples. In those different testing scenarios, schools and teachers tend to select and arrange curriculum content, design activities and choose materials that are going to better ensure the success of their students. In other words, the potential attributed to textbooks and other curriculum materials in shaping the curriculum in action may be dwarfed by the shaping power to be found in external tests and examinations. *Teach to the test* is the short way to describe what happens in primary and secondary schools, especially during the years immediately before external testing and high-stakes examinations take place. The trend to multiply the number of theses texts and to enhance their diagnostic reach obviously has to do with increased demand for school and teacher accountability but, as we argue here, also with an important capacity to shape the curriculum.

The agenda-setting function of curriculum design and development

The function of curriculum control is complementary and runs parallel to the one of curriculum change. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this lies in the crucial relationship between the content and results yielded by examinations and public perception about the overall level of student performance. Increasing publicity and media attention devoted to examination and test results and its political utilization—especially in the context of international comparative studies of student performance—have become one

of the key issues not only in the professional or the academic education debate, but in the mainstream political debate as well. Thus, the content, format and specific arrangements of tests and examinations have a strong shaping influence on quite a few other elements of what is commonly understood as the process of curriculum design and development. As a result, both teachers and students need to align their curriculum choices with the features and specific incentives implicit in tests and examinations (thus blocking potential change initiatives). Schools and local education authorities have to carefully weigh the available options when they use their autonomy in curriculum matters, and even textbook publishers take external examinations and tests—their format, content and priorities in terms of examined skills and competencies—as the guiding criteria to design their products. In addition, tests and examinations, as quality-assurance mechanisms, fulfill a control function for the uniformity and consistency of the curriculum delivered by every school under any given administration.

When it comes to the dynamics of change and control, school curricula seem to fit the principles of the agenda-setting theory. This theory was put forward by McCombs and Shaw (1972) in the field of mass-media communication. It provides evidence to state that mass media are not quite so successful at telling us what to think as they are at telling us what to think about. As a result, the theory goes, it is assumed that if people are exposed to the same media, they will place importance on the same issues, i.e. will have a similar agenda, even if their personal stances for each of the agenda items differ sharply. Transposing the theory to the curriculum field, one can argue that the school curriculum sets the agenda for students, teachers, parents, employers and the other educational stakeholders. Even if specific contents and dominant classroom practices of curriculum areas differ sharply, the overall framing of the curriculum tells everybody what to think about and to what extent it is important. And disciplinary-based interest groups assume that if students are exposed to the same curriculum, they will develop a similar mind frame about what is worthwhile knowledge, a certain hierarchy of knowledge areas, and a set of specific conceptions and beliefs on each of them.

This leads us to the second and complementary dynamics of curriculum design and development.

The dynamic of conflict/consensus in curriculum development

Curriculum can also be defined as a public space of debate; as a matter of fact, curriculum development could be depicted as an ongoing public, policy and even electoral arena; also as a process of professional deliberation between teachers, their representatives and education managers and administrators; it is also a process of social debate among the different stakeholders of the educational community at local, regional and national levels. As an arena of ideological confrontation and political struggle, the school curriculum reflects ideological, religious, professional, economic, corporate and strictly academic interests.

To be sure, the school curriculum features high in the political debate and, in many countries, even in election campaigns. This necessarily implies ideological clashes, conflicts of interest and difficult processes of consensus building. Ever since education has been publicly and politically conceived as a strategic sector of the economy, it is possible to better understand nowadays frequent political statements that link educational performance and outcomes not just with national economic competitiveness but with national defense interests as well. Slogans and political labels in that regard are just the mass-media translation to the world of politics of the perennial issues that traditionally occupy educational debate. If we were to collect all these slogans and electoral campaign stereotypes related to education, we could put together a 'repository' of standard arguments, sometimes very strongly rooted in our societies and cultures. At other times, it is just a product of the 'political chat' about the school curriculum and the set of practices related to it.

So, for instance, we have to mention one of the most recurrent—and resilient—educational slogans and discourses that have existed ever since formal school systems were set up (and even before then): complaints and accusations about the 'lowering of standards' in schools and student performance as a result of allegedly mistaken policies and interventions or, sometimes, just as a token of the overall *decadence and degradation of education* and the urgent need to go 'back to basics'. If effectively handled, such discourse can have a huge impact on public opinion, even to the point of creating a certain awareness of national emergency. The United States is probably the most visible national example in this regard, where education reform has been presented—at least since the late 1950s and the 'Sputnik Shock'—as a key issue in terms of national defense (i.e. the now legendary National Education Defense Act). More recently, the results of PISA studies are being used by the media and some politicians in a similar way, especially in countries like Germany, Chile and Spain.

The struggle for a recognized place in the curriculum

Parallel to the dynamic of change/control, there is also a dynamic of consensus/conflict as an explanatory model of curriculum design and development. In this case, the constant succession of conflicts, confrontations and pressures, and the necessity to reach agreements and consensus, no matter how provisional they may be, not only refers to the macro-political dimension of curriculum design and development, but especially to the micro-political dimension of each school community, teaching staff and individual classrooms (curriculum in action). The school curriculum emerges there as a space of deliberation in which all stakeholders try to build consensus on the best possible arguments at any given time to back and support decisions to be made. Thus, curriculum design and development become a cyclical, evolutionary and deeply situational process, since the task is about constructing and reconstructing, through complex plans, the curriculum of a particular school. Deliberation and—as a potential outcome thereof—consensus turn curriculum design into a matter of practical problem solving. Senge (1994) identifies two types of consensus, namely, a leveling consensus,

which looks for the minimum common denominator out of multiple individual perspectives, and a forward-looking consensus, which aims to reach beyond the perspective of each individual stakeholder. Thus, consensus can be pursued as a conservative search for the minimum common denominator, or it can be understood as a more risky bet to accomplish a *moral commitment* among those involved in curriculum decision-making. To be sure, it is this second type of consensus that is sought after in the framework of deliberative rationality or, in the words of Habermas, 'communicative rationality'.

However, despite these principles, mostly related to curriculum *in action*, the dynamics of consensus/conflict have to do mainly with the fact that the *struggle* for a recognized place in the curriculum is at the core of political debate and confrontation at various levels and instances of public life. In our societies, perhaps one of the most frequent ways for groups and individuals to claim that some knowledge area or particular skill is of utmost importance and should be seen as a priority is, precisely, to say that 'it should be taught at school'; or to put it in our academic jargon, that it should enter the school curriculum as worthy knowledge that should be part of the common experience of all citizens. Thus, to give but a few examples, it is common currency in the media, NGO communiqués and in political campaigns to read or to hear that schools should be teaching cinematography, chess and HIV & AIDS prevention. Schools should also devote time—and therefore money—to prevent smoking and alcoholism, and to teach children what to do in case of a natural disaster. Students should be working with the Internet; there should be a poetry workshop in every classroom; and at least two foreign languages should be taught as compulsory subjects from as early an age as possible. The school curriculum should also deal with selected democratic values that need to be taught within every subject and as cross-curricular themes. This entails gender equality, environmental education, citizenship ethics, consumer education—and even driver training. Schools should also address the issues of racism and xenophobia and, in so doing, they should highlight studies on ethnic minorities, countries, languages and cultures that are not mainstream. Schools need to teach students to think but also to develop competencies that go beyond cognitive skills; and, of course, the curriculum has to be relevant to the labor market if schools are going to remain attractive and meaningful to many students and to their families. This last means that the applied dimension of all subjects, even the most academic ones, should be stressed. This list, as we know well, could go on for several pages!

The most important nuance, though, is not the increasing number of demands on what should schools deal with and how. Rather, the key is that such demands, in most cases, tend to be formulated in quite a radical way, that is to say, their promoters are not only asking for it to have a place into the curriculum, they are also claiming that the new area or skill should be *compulsory for all students*. Hence, it is a part of the common experience that every citizen should have access to. The more importance and relevance is assigned to a particular area, the greater curriculum centrality and duration is going to be claimed for it. A good historical anecdote that fits well here is brought by Tanner and Tanner (1980: 218) and refers the case of a state governor in the United

States in the nineteenth century who forcefully defended before the state capitol that the penal code should be adopted as a mandatory textbook in all secondary schools.

The pressure on the school curriculum comes from new contents, skills and knowledge areas that are being promoted by different groups. These new *entrants* seek more curriculum time, more human and material resources and, ultimately, more social recognition and economic reward. But time and space in the school curriculum are not endless; on the contrary, financial constraints in many countries are actually limiting them more and more. As a result, there is a harsh struggle among all those claims, forces and pressures. Behind the struggle, there are interests of all kinds, beginning with professional and corporative ones. Let us look at some basic examples. Behind the demands to introduce cross-curricular themes, one finds, first of all, the *experts* in each of those areas who see their specialized knowledge more demanded and, therefore, more rewarded. Behind the demand to increase the number of compulsory and optional foreign languages, one can see philologists and foreign-language teachers, especially those of minority languages. It is not difficult to figure out who is behind the drive to introduce ICTs, both as curriculum content and as teaching/learning materials. In short, acquiring a recognized place in the school curriculum equals—or is closely related to—occupying a recognized place in the patterns of socio-economic reward and recognition and, as a result, in the labor market and occupational hierarchy.

Furthermore, in all of the previous examples, there are also political interests and goals of a quite different nature and reach: There is data available on the social and financial impact of HIV & AIDS preventive education in secondary schools in Africa (World Bank 2005a). The increase of *collective competency* in foreign languages is nowadays considered one of the best indicators of national competitiveness and, in particular, the marketing capacity and tourism potential of any given country. The penetration and, more specifically, the effective use of computers in secondary schools is an indicator that matches almost perfectly the national competitiveness index. And it would be perfectly possible to come up with a quantitative estimate of the benefits and externalities (including budgetary savings) derived from the introduction of chess in the school curriculum, in terms of reduction of impulsivity and increases in reflexivity of pupils (among many other possibilities).

Conversely, if and when a decision is made to drop classical languages as compulsory subjects in the secondary school curriculum—or even to eliminate them altogether—the interests of educators and researchers of Latin and Greek are seriously threatened. Their realm of work is devalued and job opportunities become severely endangered. Ensuring a recognized place in the curriculum leads to creating the conditions to attract the more able students, so that the related occupations in the job market maintain or increase their status. Shaping and developing in students what Bernstein (1977) called ‘disciplinary loyalty’—specialization, to use a not so literary and less-precise word—would be one of the most relevant and interesting correlates of the dynamics of curriculum conflict and consensus. Studies about the formation of school subjects could be framed in the context of this particular dynamic (Goodson 1985; 1987b).

Schooling and the construction of individual and collective identity

In the framework of the dynamics of conflict and consensus, the main challenges our school systems are facing are the dilemmas emerging from globalization and related to the role of educational institutions in the construction of personal and collective identity in a multi-ethnic and culturally plural society, which aims to continue to exist as a democracy. The dialectic play between consensus and conflict, both as it refers to policy decision-making and to the daily life of schools, is now under unprecedented pressure and tensions in the history of our school systems. Such pressures and tensions even go beyond the realm of the curriculum that has been dealt with so far in this chapter.

Against the fading away of national identities as a result of globalization, there is the paradoxical emergence of a series of local identities underpinned in religion, language and ethnic background. Thus, the more globalization advances, the greater the resurgence of local identity as a way of not giving in to the logic of homogeneity. As a reaction to the identity crisis brought about by globalization, many contemporary education systems tend to highlight local cultures as a way to offset the fading national identity. Local and regional administrations, taking advantage of the leeway created by educational reforms promoting decentralization, are keen on pushing traditional contents and even new subjects based on local cultural traits into the school curriculum. Ironically, many of these attempts at restoring traditions and reconstructing knowledge related to the local heritage indirectly reinforce the academic side of the most traditional school subjects. One of the paradoxical consequences of globalization is that schools in many countries find themselves compelled to adopt a defensive stance embracing parochial and self-centered values.

Globalization has definitely changed the conditions of personal and collective identity formation. For those with less success in the global market, the search for identity is now taking very different directions. Religious fundamentalism is one of the alternatives now chosen by those who do not know how—or do not want—to be successful in that market. Religious fundamentalism is also, paradoxically, a globalization phenomenon to the extent that it is an identity culture that transcends any national project. Cultural identity, be it religious, ethnic or gender-related, local, national or global, is an antidote against the complexity and the cruelty of the global market as the ultimate judge on the value of each and every individual. If schooling—increasingly democratic and massive throughout the world—is presented as a market and takes on the role of being the *first measure* of success and competence in that global market, then it is only normal that those who fail that test may tend to build and shape their identity through one of the 'antidotes' mentioned above, thus abandoning the school as the source of collective identity. Speaking again of religious fundamentalism, it is no coincidence that a good part of its confrontation with secular states takes place precisely around public schooling.

Yet, despite all of the above, to the same extent that schools are the arena for struggles about the definition of culture, they also represent, for those not included in

the global economy, the most important route to access relevant knowledge and key competencies. For minorities of all kinds, there is a dilemma between being acknowledged as different and, at the same time, that active recognition not standing as an obstacle to access the traits of a global identity, including the competencies and skills of high value in the global economy. There is sharp paradox in the fact that the hegemony of meritocracy as an ideology, based on the ethos of the free market, overly harms those minorities and disadvantaged groups. At the same time, it may be the only available vehicle for the inclusion and upward mobility of those minorities and collectives.

Scenarios of curriculum evolution

The discussion on both dynamics creates a new analytical framework with some potential as a general explanatory model for the processes involved in curriculum design and development. A very basic graphic representation is shown in Figure 11.1.

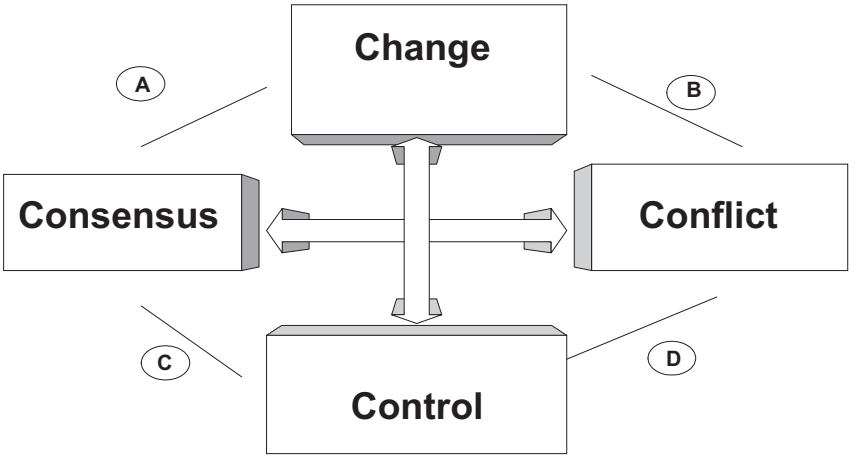

Figure 11.1: Four scenarios of curriculum evolution

Despite the need for a more careful *fine-tuning* of this model in order for it to clearly distinguish and effectively reflect the macro aspects of curriculum policy and the micro dimension of curriculum in action, we can tentatively suggest that four different scenarios of curriculum evolution and change emerge from the contrasting dynamics of change and control on the one hand, and consensus and conflict, on the other. These are: (a) scenarios of change/consensus; (b) scenarios of change/conflict; (c) scenarios of control/consensus; and (d) scenarios of control/conflict.

Scenarios of change/consensus

The best examples here are to be found in the *big-bang* large-scale education reforms of the 1960s and 1970s around the world. Also, the legendary literacy campaigns in some developing countries—Nicaragua, South Africa—would fall under this heading. Scenarios of change and consensus tend to emerge around initiatives of curriculum reform related to and aligned with simultaneous changes in the process of constructing and defining a new national identity in a country or a given community. In contemporary times, the national projects of post-conflict reconstruction of education in countries such as Kosovo, Sierra Leone or Cambodia are the most visible national cases in that regard (World Bank 2005b).

But scenarios of change/consensus also belong within the realm of the well-known comparative assertion that there are world patterns of educational institutionalization that include an increasingly uniform and converging school curriculum (Boli, Ramírez and Meyer 1985; Meyer and Ramírez 2000). To be sure, it is quite remarkable that our knowledge society—or *late modernity*, in Giddens' vocabulary—has produced such a wide consensus on a number of new skills and competencies that are said to be crucial for individual socialization and national competitiveness in the twenty-first century. All over the world, government reports and white papers cluster around the need to implement a competency-based curriculum in secondary education, where emphasis is placed on problem-solving, teamwork, peaceful conflict resolution, dealing with complexity and living with ambiguity, thriving with change, becoming lifelong learners, etc. (See Table 11.1 with a summary from the Definition and Selection of Competencies Project—DeSeCo.) Nevertheless, while there seems to be consensus on the competencies, there is still profound disagreement as to what is the right balance of disciplines and pedagogical approaches for students to acquire such competencies. Or, in other words, the challenge remains as to how to integrate the discourse and the substance of the key competencies in a traditionally framed school curriculum. Key competencies are certainly at the top of the curriculum agenda—to bring back our agenda-setting function of curriculum design and development—but school systems, especially at the secondary level, are far from being able to align their implemented curricula with them.

The second global trend in the curriculum scenario of change/consensus is the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in schools. Nearly all countries in every world region are investing heavily, setting ambitious targets in providing Internet connectivity to every school and lower and lower ratios of available computers per student in primary and secondary schools. Yet, even in developed countries, the outcomes of those huge investments seem to be quite frustrating or, in OECD terms, 'disappointing' (OECD 2004). In an apparent paradox, as skepticism mounts concerning the potential impact of ICTs on educational quality and student performance, governments in both the developed and developing world continue to increase their investment in ICTs for education (World Bank 2005c). The issue here is not the often-alleged resistance of teachers to use ICTs in the classroom; the difficulty

is rather how to carry out the curriculum integration of ICTs. The secondary education curriculum has a *grammar* that does not easily let these changes take hold and this constraint on the curriculum integration of ICTs is probably the key in explaining low levels of use—and also irrelevant use—of ICTs in schools.

Table 11.1: Key competencies (Definition and Selection of Competencies Project)

Interacting in socially heterogeneous groups	**Acting autonomously**	**Using tools interactively**
Relating well to others	Acting within the big picture or the larger context	Using language, symbols, and text interactively (written and spoken communication, and mathematical skills in multiple situations)
Co-operating	Forming and carrying out life plans and personal projects	Using knowledge and information interactively
Managing and resolving conflict	Defending and asserting one' rights, interests, limits and needs	Using technology interactively (understanding the potential of technology and identifying technological solutions to problems)

Source: Rychen and Salganik 2003.

Scenarios of change/conflict

As suggested above, the school curriculum, particularly at the secondary level, is a political battlefield, where different and opposing interests clash with each other, often turning curriculum reform efforts into political nightmares for Ministers of Education. Scenarios of change/conflict in the evolution of curriculum reflect and project power struggles that go well beyond the arena of education policy decision-making. Thus, one can speak of the existence of 'curriculum lobbies', both national and international, as the active players in the change/conflict scenario of curriculum development.

The first illustration of curriculum evolution within this scenario has to do with the massive and increasingly democratic nature of contemporary education systems. In such a context, curriculum change and reform become ever more challenged with the issues of student cultural, ethnic, linguistic, cognitive, sexual and religious diversity

and, as a result, is turned, *de facto*, into a social artifact designed either to include or to exclude people. The most significant changes taking place in the curriculum nowadays have to do with the *politics of difference*, i.e. with attempts at the mainstreaming of cultural and knowledge traits of marginalized groups and, therefore, utilization of the school curriculum as a tool to combat social exclusion. Some seemingly technical issues are involved here, since it would appear that both interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches have failed to accomplish this goal, and contra-disciplinary approaches would be required instead (Giroux 1994).

A related manifestation of the scenario of change/conflict is to be found in what one may call the *textbook wars*. Usually—but not only—in the field of civics, history and social studies in general, textbook wars reflect the wider curriculum wars already referred to above. Examples can be drawn from many countries, from the banning of evolution theory in science textbooks in many states of the United States to the strong resistance to authorize alternative history books in Romania. Strikingly enough, textbook wars have recently become internationalized, when changes in Japanese history textbooks concerning the Second World War led to street riots and demonstrations in the Republic of Korea and China in April 2005.

Finally, it can be argued that efforts to reduce curriculum overload are probably the best illustration of the change/conflict scenario. In practice, curriculum overload may work as a device for student drop-out and failure and, therefore, exclusion. For example, in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, curriculum overload is a critical issue that stands on the way of successful secondary education reform. During the early 1990s, the focus in the region was on cleaning up the ideological slant embedded in official curricula and on reviewing textbooks in some key curricular areas. A few years later, traditional subjects were revisited to introduce national elements, and new subjects were added in line with curriculum reforms then being carried out in countries of the European Union. Currently, reformers are incorporating the discourse of standard-based, skill-centered and outcome-oriented curricula. Despite the appearance of curriculum modernization, the practical outcome has been widespread curriculum overload and a *de facto* increase in academic demands and requirements for secondary school students. In Ukraine, secondary students deal with up to seventeen different subjects, and in some tracks or streams almost half of the students receive only one hour or class session per week in some subjects. In Uzbekistan, the average secondary school student may be taking twenty-eight different subjects (World Bank 2005a). While these are extreme cases, the fact is that most students in upper secondary schools throughout the world are faced with overloaded timetables and with encyclopedic curricula (McLean 1995).

Scenarios of control/consensus

Curriculum development processes resulting from decentralization reforms, enhanced school autonomy and increased accountability may be identified within this scenario of control/consensus. These reforms have been strongly pushed in both the developed and

developing world over the last couple of decades on the assumption that interventions that focus on improving governance in general and governance of social services in particular may be the most cost-effective way to increase student retention and student learning for the society of the twenty-first century. Moreover, the discourse of devolution of power to regional and local authorities and some approaches to teachers' new professionalism have also boosted this 'zero-cost education reforms', as Carnoy (1999) calls them.

Among others, school-based curriculum development, school-based review and school-based management are all trends reflecting the drive for more local and institutional control of the curriculum in a frame of the overall steering control on the part of the state (Caldwell and Spinks 1998). Australia and Canada, among OECD countries, and Chile, El Salvador and South Africa in the developing world may be the most representative national examples. The emphasis in this scenario lies in the production of school curriculum projects as a result of local professional consensus among teachers and with local stakeholder participation, including parents, employers and sometimes even students.

School improvement policies, including competitive grants and the creation of networks of innovation, are also to be mentioned here, linking teachers' professional development needs with the process of curriculum design, adaptation and innovation in school contexts. In such a context, services and institutions of external support to schools become crucial, as they function as *controlling* buffer bodies between local and regional education authorities and teachers and schools (Moreno 1999). In short, it could be argued that control/consensus scenarios seem to be the ones creating the space and the opportunity for grass-roots and bottom-up curriculum change and innovation.

Scenarios of control/conflict

The movement towards curriculum standards is the global trend at the core of scenarios of control/conflict. To be sure, curriculum standards mean very different things in the United Kingdom, in France or in the countries of the former USSR. But, in all of them they reflect a growing stress on the outcomes of schooling, and the corresponding decline in public and political attention to input and process variables. The legal enactment of standards as the drivers of curriculum-making implies that national tests and examinations, as suggested earlier this chapter, are really steering the implemented curriculum in the classroom.

Test results are demanded and valued as the grounds for informed decision-making on the part of educational authorities, and as the substance of how educational providers are made more accountable to tax payers. Policy-makers use them to close down schools and to fire principals and teachers; or as a justification to hire new inspectors, superintendents and school principals, to change textbooks or to retreat to back-to-basics curriculum approaches. In an increasingly complex world, decision-makers, media and public opinion are craving for simple and, most of all, nuance-free information. And what is more nuance-free than a ranking? This is probably why the

publication of school league tables at the national level and of country rankings stemming from the results of international comparative studies of student achievement has such a remarkable impact on the media and public opinion at large.

These policies, because of the incentives they create among all educational stakeholders, are leading to a *de facto narrowing* of the implemented curriculum in many countries. Moreover, the narrowing of the curriculum, as reflected in standardized tests, leaves out of the public and political focus everything that goes beyond basic knowledge and basic competencies. In other words, it pushes down to a nearly invisible position most of what schools are actually doing and teaching to students. This may end up consolidating a much more restricted and artificial hierarchy of worthwhile school knowledge, apart from strongly limiting the public view on the desired effects of schooling. On the positive side, however, the standards movement could potentially serve as a radical measure against curriculum overload. Once again, the perennial curriculum question of 'what counts as good education' emerges here.

External tests and examinations can be used—and in fact have been used in some countries—to claim (with quite fragile evidence, by the way) that public delivery of education is inefficient, almost by definition. But, obviously, tests and examinations may also be used to identify districts, schools and even individual students in need of more attention and targeted resources. The political utilization of tests and examinations implies that they may become a regulatory practice which allows investing more and spending better in education, and not as an alibi to invest less.

Conclusion

Education reform all over the world is increasingly curriculum-based, as mounting pressures and demands for change tend to target and focus on both the structure and the very content of the school curriculum. At the same time, school curricula show high levels of stability and resilience and it is indeed difficult to name a country where the majority of education stakeholders are not complaining about the irrelevance of the curriculum, especially in secondary education (World Bank 2005a). Thus, it is quite perplexing—and sometimes even alienating, especially for teachers—to watch the contrast between the nonstop curriculum reform initiatives and *moves* on the part of successive education administrations and the fundamental conventionality and traditionalism of the implemented curriculum—the grammar of the school—when seen in historical perspective. There seems to be extreme volatility on the one hand; and extreme stability, on the other. The chapter by Kamens and Benavot in this volume provides convincing evidence of such paradox when the authors report that between 1980 and 2000, 41.7 percent of the countries in the world decided to move from a comprehensive secondary curriculum to a 'multi-track' model while a strikingly identical percentage of countries were making exactly the opposite reform, i.e., adopting a comprehensive curriculum in secondary education, exactly over the same time period. As far as curriculum reform is concerned, there seems to be a lot of movement but not much progress; lots of *chat* but not much discourse; lots of

declarations of intent, but not that many full-fledge and long-term policies. One could even argue that the keys to the governance of the school curriculum appear to be similar to those of, for instance, monetary policy so that Curriculum Development Centers at Ministries of Education would behave pretty much like Central Banks, which raise or lower interest rates depending on context-specific circumstances within different and evolving economic scenarios. In that regard, the key issue is not just some sense of 'progress' implicit in a series of reforms but rather the extent to which curriculum policy—and the resulting curriculum change in historical perspective—is responsive to the evolution of the needs and demands of any national society and, in turn, contributes to shape and steer those demands.

The analytical framework presented in this chapter has attempted to elicit and then make sense of all those paradoxes. The contrasting dynamics of change- control and consensus- conflict enable the mapping of curriculum evolution in a systematic way, accounting for the tensions, dilemmas, contradictions and *games* involved in curriculum design and development processes in contemporary education systems. A whole research program can be envisaged in that regard, one which is equally relevant for sociologists and historians of the school curriculum, curriculum policy analysts and comparative and international educators: For a start, it would be interesting to identify which of the four scenarios prevails in different world regions and countries, according to development levels and other political, economic and strictly educational variables. A second issue open for future research is the use of this analytical framework based on the dynamics of curriculum change to determine indicators of democratization of the curriculum, and the analysis of the concrete policy interventions which appear to lead to such democratization in different countries and world regions.