

Curriculum policy and instructional planning: Teachers' autonomy across various school contexts

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journals.sagepub.com/home/eer**Alessandra Dieudé**  and **Tine S Prøitz** 

University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway

Abstract

International trends promoting school diversity and choice have reshaped education across Europe, leading towards a multiplicity in ownership structures and varied governance configurations. More recently, this can also be seen in European countries with a long history of state-owned and governed public schools, such as in the Nordic states. The aim of this article is to explore autonomy and curriculum control in teacher's work in public and independent schools within a country context where there are long traditions of 'one public school for all'. The article draws on interviews with school leaders and teachers on a Waldorf school, an IB school, and a Norwegian public school as well as analysis of local school documents. The analysis shows that varying school contexts present both different and overlapping characteristics of curriculum control and teacher autonomy. All schools have accommodated to educational outcome governed regimes, however, teacher autonomy in the school context appears to differ. Teacher autonomy is more related to teachers' practices, not the educational outcomes required. The study shows how policies intending for the standardisation of schooling may work in conflict with policy intentions of educational diversity, provided by independent schools of different character.

Keywords

Curriculum control, teacher autonomy, policy instruments, marketised education, varied school contexts

Introduction

Decentralisation and recentralisation reform waves starting in the 1990s have opened up for the development of national school systems that are characterised by multiple governance configurations at the national, municipality and private owner levels (Moos et al., 2004; Naumann and Crouch, 2020; Telhaug, 2003; Turner, 2004). With these reforms, the private actors have been seen as

Corresponding author:

Alessandra Dieudé, University of South-Eastern Norway, Borre, Kongsberg 3603, Norway.

Email: Alessandra.Dieude@usn.no

important to fulfil the goals of diversity in public schooling, which is actually needed to promote public choice. Related to this, there is also an assumption that increased diversity and freedom of choice can lead to improved quality of education and practices of citizenship, which can be understood as democratic control over services (Sivesind and Trætteberg, 2017). At the same time, privatisation and market-oriented approaches in the education sector can impact the fundamentals of public schooling, for example, the equality of access (Verger et al., 2017).

It can therefore be stated that, teachers' work by a multitude of policies on different levels. Not only from national policies, but also of local policies in the landscapes of diverse schools, and indeed also of international influences (which are provided by owners, municipalities or national education agencies). Multiple policy messages put high demands on teachers, who must serve as the interpreters of education policies and whose practices are crucial for student learning outcomes (Mølstad & Prøitz, 2018). However, little is known about how teachers negotiate and interpret such multiple and eventual conflicting policy requirements within different governance configurations. Researchers have argued for the necessity of enhancing knowledge about how local practices both construct and instantiate organisational routines and processes (Apple, 2018; Deng, 2010; Little, 2012; Mausestagen et al., 2018; Spillane and Anderson, 2019). In fact, teachers' policy interpretation and enactment of policy requirements can often be seen in their regular instructional planning, for example, when teachers relate their decisions to governance documents (Mølstad et al., 2020).

Drawing on such issues, in the current paper, we examine teachers' interpretations and enactment of curriculum documents in public and independent schools. As curriculum in this paper is understood as public policy instrument (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2007), the study focusses on different curriculum for public and independent schools. Recently, the introduction of a more result oriented and a strong accountability script reform, teacher autonomy has been noted to be challenged (Mausestagen and Mølstad, 2015). In this context central documents aim to regulate teachers' enactment. Through the analysis of teachers' meaning-making work we can highlight the process of policy interpretation (Ball et al., 2011; Singh et al., 2013; Wagenaar, 2011). It follows that teachers within different policy frameworks will form meanings which they will enact in the classroom and shape the school. The purpose is to investigate the differences and similarities in these varied school contexts in relation to envisioned practices of education diversity in the Nordic countries. Moreover, the paper aims to understand the forms of control and autonomy that characterise teachers' interpretative work in different school contexts. The national context of the presented study is Norway. The case of Norway in regard of the issue stated is very interesting for an international audience. Norway constitutes a unique case for its low but fast-growing enrolment in independent schools,¹ a traditional cross-political agreement on education change and reform including the objectives of education and a national curriculum largely adopted without major debates. These processes of education reform have also been found to be highly connected to global trends and developments promoted by a traditional close relationship between Norway and the OECD (Pettersson et al., 2017; Prøitz, 2015). This paper compares a Waldorf school, an International Baccalaureate school and a municipal school. In general, all the schools are required by law to follow the national regulations of the Education Act; the national curriculum covers age 1–13, however grade 1–10 is compulsory for all Norwegian students, while 11–13 is not mandatory but all students have the right to fulfil upper secondary education and training. Private schools are also required to follow the Education Act, however, they have more autonomy on whether to follow the national curriculum, but, they have to ensure equally good education. After recent reforms, Waldorf pedagogical principles and tradition, for example, principle of adapted learning, have been built around a curriculum that follows a framework oriented towards learning outcomes and outputs in line with the curriculum framework for public schools (Mathisen,

2014). The Waldorf school context have distinguished themselves as opposing political ideas that saw school instrumental for economic growth and trends such as the standardisation of education, trying to keep its process free of grading (see Stabel, 2016). At the end of lower secondary school (10th grade) students receive a written graduation certificate with a final assessments grade to ensure the possibility of admission to a public upper secondary school. The international schools (IB licenced) context is characterised for not having to teach the same curricula of the national hosting country (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). The international school in this study follows the IB Middle Years Programme (IBMYP), designed for 11–16 age range and with ‘the emphasis heavily on teacher assessment’ (Hayden, 2006: 123). Similarly, to Waldorf schools, at the end of the IBMYP (11 cohort), grades are aligned to match the national system and students receive their competency certificate based on grades from VG1-upper secondary school. Only the municipal public school of this study is required by law to follow the outcome-based national curriculum which goals and objectives are defined at national level, while school actors’ autonomy is traditionally recognised by deciding content and method. Thus, the base of the comparison is teacher autonomy as it evolves in the three different school contexts complex policy configurations.

The study asks: *how and in what ways is teacher autonomy enacted under different types of curriculum control of public and independent schools in Norway?* Further, the overarching research question is supported by two subquestions enquiring about (a) what characterises the curriculum control of public and independent schools in Norway as defined in school policy documents and (b) how teachers experience their autonomy in planning and organising their teaching in the three schools of this study.

Education policy and independent schools: The context of the study

In general, independent schools represent a diversified offering in different countries across Europe. Generally, these schools are characterised by a particular belief, pedagogical visions or practice and receive state funding without being owned by the state. This trend has been accelerated by neoliberal oriented educational policy based on decentralisation, choice and accountability. These developments can challenge professional authority (Hall et al., 2015). As in most Western education systems, the Nordic countries are affected by the performativity and accountability agenda. However, while these developments can be found in different degrees, the commitment to the comprehensive school project remains strong (Dovemark et al., 2018; Telhaug et al., 2006). At the policy level, this contradiction is attributed to the current need to compete within the global economy (Aasen, 2007; Imsen and Volckmar, 2014). For Sweden and Norway, adherence to the global economy and neoliberal trends has brought about changes to the role of teachers, the classroom practices and the learning processes (Carlgren et al., 2006). For instance, in the current Norwegian policy context, greater accountability demands for student results are placed on teachers’ work (Aasen, 2012; Hatch, 2013; Mausethagen, 2013; Møller and Skedsmo, 2013; Prøitz, 2015).

In Norway, the very context of the study, the policy process of the past few decades has gradually increased the legitimisation of diversified educational provision beyond public school. This legitimisation is grounded both under human rights conventions and expectation that practices and competition between schools with different pedagogical profiles can improve the overall educational system (Dieudé, 2021). The issue of school choice is increasingly seen as a democratic right that allows parents and students to pursue active citizenship within the educational space (Sivesind and Trætteberg, 2017). Thus, schools and their stakeholder have offered diverse types of content and practice, which can be understood, for instance, by public school teachers transforming state

policy and national curriculum into practice, while private school teachers transform the principles and curriculum guidelines of the private school into practice.

Since we know that teachers interpret the curriculum differently in different contexts and that independent schools represent an alternative to the public sector offer, studying how teachers in varied school contexts interpret the curriculum for classroom practice has great importance for understanding teacher autonomy. Also, how the changing educational landscape with a stronger outcome orientation and accountability script may affect teacher autonomy in different school contexts is a central empirical question.

Research overview

We have identified studies that explore teacher's practices in various educational contexts and the multidimensional nature that governs teachers' work. A central question within these fields is how teachers relate to policy messages and the complex and multidimensional relationship with policy and practice.

Research on autonomy in diverse school contexts. Research has become increasingly focussed on understanding the developments and characteristics of private schools and their classroom practices from a historical² and comparative perspective (Giota et al., 2019; Koinzer et al., 2017; Salokangas and Ainscow, 2017). For instance, in Sweden, scholars have found that independent schools tend to emphasise more teaching practices based on self-regulated learning than public schools (Giota et al., 2019). Other studies challenge the logic assuming that more autonomous schools would improve the process of education (McGinity, 2015; Salokangas and Ainscow, 2017). In fact, the case of the English Academies shows that these schools are autonomous just in theory because the national examinations can set a tight frame limiting practitioners in relation to their influence over curriculum planning and teaching practices (Salokangas and Ainscow, 2017). Taking a step further, the authors conclude that it is curious to claim that teachers working in contexts characterised by an exam-focussed culture are autonomous in relation to their teaching practices (Salokangas and Ainscow, 2017). Moreover, the authors also show that autonomous schools do not necessarily lead to autonomous teachers. An issue related to research on independent schools, in particular in the North, is that independent schools in such research are often seen as uniform group – often associated with international chains of school companies –, despite a tremendous variance within the sector (Montelius et al., forthcoming). The paper at hand aims to cope with this by comparing different independent and municipality school forms with each other.

Teacher autonomy: The multidimensional nature of controlling teachers' work. Locally, teachers' work has had space for various degrees of autonomy based on how the national curriculum is designed, and this curriculum work can comprise activities for the further development of national curriculum (Dale et al., 2011). However, this presupposes that local actors possess professional and adequate curriculum language and models, which can vary to a great extent (Dale et al., 2011).

The curriculum provides opportunities to define teachers' work (Gerrard and Farrell 2013), and the teachers themselves and their activities can be framed in different ways, leading to varied interpretations and practices. Various aspects of control and decision making have also been raised as crucial in the literature when investigating what autonomy means for actors operating in various national and local contexts where comprehensive reforms have occurred (Bergh, 2015; Priestley et al., 2015; Wermke et al., 2018). Across the literature, teacher autonomy and teacher agency are both defined as the capacity to act by the individual teacher or school actor, however while

autonomy is studied by acknowledging that teachers' capacity is framed within a system of rules set by the state; the achievement of agency instead is mostly studied by emphasizing teachers' capacities combined with ecological conditions (Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson 2015; Cribb and Gewirtz 2007; Priestley et al. 2015; Wermke et al. 2018). Recent empirical studies have discussed conceptual issues regarding teachers' role as street-level bureaucrats, particularly related to their work with curriculum (Wermke and Prøitz, 2019) and to understand teachers' policy enactment through the concepts of 'politics of use' (Schulte, 2018). For instance, Schulte (2018) reveals the importance for teachers and school leaders to possess policy literacy skills to decide which values to implement in a context where strong ideological force(s) affect professional autonomy. Rather than examine autonomy through dichotomies, these studies point to the multidimensional nature of teacher autonomy (Mausethagen and Mølstad, 2015). Looking at autonomy from different viewpoints has also shown that increased decision making leads to more complexity and risks for teachers' professional work (Wermke and Salokangas, 2021).

Here, though, there may be more room for the individual teacher, student or parent to influence the direction of development, forming a conglomeration of influences rather than a singular state-based governance. Thus, within a context characterised by new forms of governing emphasising accountability and results, multiple influences and expanding differentiation and more varied provision of types of schools, the question of how teachers interpret curriculum and plan for teaching and learning in varied school contexts has become an important topic.

Theoretical and analytical framework

The analytical perspective for the current study sees the centrality of curriculum as a key instrument in education policy and practice (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2007). Within this understanding, the curriculum is considered a device that supports and secures the alignment between the policies of governing bodies and individual actors responsible for operationalising the policy (Deng, 2010; Hopmann, 1999). With this curriculum work and planning can be divided into three parts: the first, which is handled at the institutional and *political level*, sets the framework, the normative and ideological basis of what schooling should be. A *programmatic part* that writes and develops curriculum documents and guidelines based on the expectations of the institutional level. Finally, the *practical part* unfolds at the classroom level, which involves teachers' interpretation of the curriculum materials and guidelines to deliver relevant learning experiences (Deng, 2020; Hopmann, 1999). Drawing on this understanding, in the study at hand we focus on the nexus between the policy messages communicated from the institutional and programmatic level and teacher interpretations of these in their practical work with planning.

Curriculum control

The work of Hopmann (1999) is also useful for studying variation in the ideas and values of different school systems and educational contexts. Variations can be attributed to different curriculum modes, which control the work of teachers according to their different approaches to education for example, process versus outcome-based education, and tradition of curriculum, for example, didactic versus curriculum. Hopmann (1999) identifies four basic modes of curriculum control in Western countries: *the philanthropic model*, *licence model*, *examen-artium model* and *assessment model*.

Within the *philanthropic model*, the main actor controlling educational ideas through the curriculum is the state. This model is based on a double strategy in which the state (through its educational agencies and representatives) stipulates teaching ideas through curricula and school rules combined with information on content and methods of lessons. One central feature is

represented by the explicit expectations towards teachers to align the planning, learning and results (Hopmann, 1999).

In the *licence model*, the state also controls the content of teaching but mainly through framing the subject matter, while schools and teachers are responsible for the implementation by their own pedagogical means. Within this model, state certified teachers (e.g. by state regulates teacher education) receive a licence to design their instructional in relation to pedagogical freedom, indeed within the frames of the curriculum and also, indeed, school laws. Typical for this model is the division of levels between the state, administration, schools and teachers.

In contrast, the *examen-artium model* is not characterised by a state-binding curriculum or state intervention to frame the content and teaching methods. Curriculum control is set by other educational institutions, such as colleges, which define and formulate the preconditions for high school entrance. Characteristic of this model is that results and teaching are linked to the admission requirements, reducing the relevance of the planning discourse.

The *assessment model*, as in the previous model, does not present state control via curriculum or direct forms of content control. The model controls the teachers' work through standardised tests that are planned and provided by external educational agencies. The tests' requirements guide schools and teachers on what to teach. Consequently, the publication of the tests' results exposes teachers and schools to their negative or positive accomplishments.

Hopmann (1999) warns that these models cannot be found in their pure form, they must be seen in a Weberian paradigm of ideal types. In fact, these modes of curriculum control often overlap. In any case, they offer a general understanding of curriculum control that occurs in varied school contexts and different educational institutions. Within this understanding of curriculum control, two main models are outlined: a model with a curriculum focussing on the content of the lessons and a model without a defined curriculum by a governing actor focussing on the results of the lesson. Both models of curriculum control give different spaces for teacher autonomy and will be used to frame this study. These models do not strictly relate to the Norwegian context, but they are models of reference to study spaces for teacher autonomy in diverse contexts for curriculum control.

Teacher autonomy

Finally, each model leaves teachers' different spaces of autonomy for interpreting policy messages. To further investigate this at an empirical level, we are inspired by the analytical framework of Wermke and Salokangas (2021). Here, autonomy is understood as the teacher's capacity to make important decisions over the content and conditions of schoolwork and the governance or constraints that control such decisions (Ingersoll, 1996, 2003). Thus, the analysis draws on the aspects of decision making and control of teachers' professional work. To investigate teacher autonomy, we look at the levels of decision making over the interpretation of curriculum for planning in daily professional work and what may control such decisions in accordance with the research question.

The analytical device builds on the assumption that teacher autonomy is multidimensional and context dependent (Wermke and Salokangas, 2021). This means that different types of autonomy can be acquired through several dimensions and domains of teachers' professional work depending on school characteristics, such as a steering system. For instance, teachers can exercise autonomy in relation to the content of the lessons (classroom dimension), to the collegiality and school leadership (school dimension) and to the state and other actors in the school system (professional dimension). Moreover, teachers can develop autonomy through the domains of instructional planning and assessment (education), discipline and special needs (social), professional development

(development) and administrative tasks (administration). Although it is important to acknowledge the multidimensionality of teacher autonomy, to reduce complexity, we only zoom in on the dimensions and domains emphasising teachers' autonomy over curriculum interpretation for planning.

Therefore, relevant to our study is using the analytical framework to analyse teachers' abilities for deciding their work with planning at different relational and individual levels. Here, we understand dimensions more than levels where teachers operate, as in the classroom and school level. The classroom level allows for an analysis of the scope of action and context in which the teachers directly operate. The school level is considered the larger context in which teachers also operate in relation to other actors, such as colleagues, leadership, parents and so forth. These levels are seen in relation to the educational domain, which encases a rich spectrum of teaching activities and responsibilities. In other words, the educational domain shows the most important decisions over teachers' pedagogical work for planning, such as the content, method, material of instruction and end-of-term examinations (at classroom level). At the same time, teachers' interpretation work with school documents, such as the local curriculum, can be restricted or supported by school stakeholders (school level).

Method

Three different contexts

In the current article, we analyse teachers' interpretations of curriculum compared across three school contexts with different governing and educational profiles. The schools were selected through strategic sampling to establish the parameters for comparability in private and public schools, despite their different organisational and intrinsic governance structures. To explore different teachers' interpretations in different contexts, we have chosen schools based on different educational frameworks: a Waldorf school, an international baccalaureate school and a public school. The international baccalaureate's (IB) ideas of schooling are based on humanitarian values and global sustainable development (Hill, 2007). The Waldorf school values the spiritual understanding of human nature and different development of individuals and their needs through specific stages from infancy to adulthood (Dahlin, 2010). The Norwegian public school has been historically based on school-for-all principles, where everyone has equal possibilities, independent of background (social class, ethnicity, language, gender, etc.).

Despite the fact that the three schools have different ideologies and curricula, organisational equivalence bases are likely because these curricula must be framed in accordance with the national curriculum where student outcomes are clearly expressed through aims and learning goals according to the Norwegian Education Act and national regulations. Further, all the schools participate in international and national tests. Teachers were selected from the same level of lower secondary school. The equivalent level of instruction for lower secondary school in the IB schools is the 'Middle Year Programme' (MYP), which is offered from year 7 to 10 (ages 11–16).

Norwegian public schools have played a prominent role in the development of the country. These schools have been an important factor in nation-building, modernisation, welfare and community development (Imsen and Volckmar, 2014). Norwegian education policy has traditionally been based on a strong belief in the construction of structures and systems, the provision of inputs and definition of content and processes through regulations and national curricula (Prøitz, 2015b). However, the combined influence of several events, such as a national evaluation of the education reforms of the 1990s, average PISA results and changes in governments, opened for the reforms of the 2000s and the introduction of new mechanisms for ensuring that goals relating to student results, outcomes and accountability were fulfilled (Hatch, 2013).

Despite the educational changes affecting the educational systems in general, the Waldorf schools kept their basic educational principles outlined by Waldorf Steiner at the beginning of the 19th century. The Waldorf curriculum is based on 12 years of schooling with different developmental levels, each to be met with the appropriate educational method and environment. In Norway, the first Waldorf school, which was established in 1926, had extended freedom to reproduce Waldorf's pedagogical ideas for school practice; however, this freedom decreased considerably when the profile was approved for funding later in the 1970s (Stabel, 2016).

The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) designed a curriculum originally developed for mobile families and to facilitate transnational mobility. However, IBO recent expansion worldwide shows its intention to insert the national education markets (Resnik, 2012) with a curriculum that goes beyond the nation while schools are governed and operationalised within the nation (Doherty, 2009). The aim of the IB is representative of the mission and global philosophy of the IBO 'to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect' (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2014a: 12). In Norway, international schools (IB licenced) were subsidised from the beginning of the 21st century, but the first school registered by the IB organisation in Norway dates back to 1978. The IB curriculum has recently attracted political attention because schools offering the IB are seen to improve public schools through their competition (Dieudé, 2021).

The current study draws on semistructured interviews³ with 12 teachers. The interviews were conducted between 2017 and 2019 and supplemented with local documents produced at the different schools. The participants represent a combination of language and science teachers to cover potential differences in curriculum interpretation. The interviews⁴ cover a range of questions, such as the following: 'Can you tell me how do you work when preparing/planning your teaching? What decides/determines what topics you include in your teaching?' (see Appendix 1 for interview guide).

Our analysis draws finally to the different documents produced by national and international actors, which range from curriculum (such as the national KL06 curriculum) and guidelines to local school policy and instruction material (Cohen et al., 2011). 'Programme Standards and Practices', which is produced by the IBO, is relevant because it describes the MYP requirements for the implementation of the programme (IBO, 2014b). Another key document providing instructions to teachers and schools is the 'MYP: From Principles to Practices' (IBO, 2014a). The IB learner profile is also considered since it describes the school's philosophy, organisation, formal and informal curriculum. Among the key documents available for Waldorf schools is the document 'Overview—Ideas and Practice in Waldorf Education' (Mathisen, 2014), which presents the founding principles and practices of the Norwegian Waldorf curriculum and the Waldorf curriculum, which comprise an account of expected learning outcomes for the Waldorf schools.

Analytical approach

Inspired by Spillane and Anderson (2019), we developed macrocodes and subcodes. We see the macrocode as an overarching category of coding reflecting the theoretical assumption of curriculum control; therefore, macrocodes are identified through a deductive approach; the subcodes are a result of an inductive dialogical interpretive process requiring an exchange between the theory of teacher autonomy and data. A thematic analysis driven by the coded material highlights the similarities and differences within our data for teachers' interpretations of curriculum in their different governing and educational profiles.

Following Hopmann's models of curriculum control, we find it relevant to identify different power structures that are more apparent in the way they control the teachers' work. Hence, we

establish the *macrocode* describing curriculum control. The macrocode is associated with a specific mode for curriculum control and is the following: philanthropic model, licence model, examen-artium model and assessment model. The macrocodes provide contextual information about who controls the curriculum, what has been controlled and how, hence dealing with subquestion (a): What characterises the curriculum control of public and independent schools in Norway as defined in school policy documents?

Furthermore, the analysis of teacher autonomy is inspired by Wermke and Salokangas (2021); the interview data become the foundation for the subcodes. We only focus on the educational domain. The levels of decision making and control are operationalised to analyse how teachers experience their autonomy in planning and organising their teaching in the three schools, hence answering subquestion (b).

Analysis

Curriculum control

Different models of curriculum control in the three school contexts. For the individual school contexts, we can observe three different modes of curriculum control with characteristics that overlap the four models theorised by Hopmann (1999). In line with Hopmann (1999), the public school can be characterised by the philanthropic mode of curriculum control because it is regulated by a national curriculum prepared by government officials and amended by the government the public school. The national curriculum defines the competence goals that public school teachers must deliver by adapting their teaching to a heterogeneous classroom in a 'school-for-all' ideology. However, the curriculum also indicates the content to be taught and supplemental regulations and the guidelines define the standards for assessment. Similarly, the Waldorf school presents a model for curriculum control where the curriculum and its guidelines, as designed by the Norwegian Waldorf Federation, govern its educational profile by providing both the general aspects of Waldorf education and description of the expected outcomes for the subjects across the years of instruction. At the same time, both the public and the Waldorf curriculum can be characterised by the licence model, where teachers are given degrees of autonomy for choosing the pedagogical approach and methods of teaching. For instance, in Waldorf schools, through the core principal of adapted learning (Mathisen, 2014), teachers and schools can adapt the curriculum to the abilities and potential of each individual child. Public school teachers are also given this type of licence, though studies show how there is a shift towards a political will increasingly steering such professional licence (Mausethagen and Mølsted, 2015). Differently, the IB school profile is not bound by a formal written curriculum laid out by the IBO representatives because the curriculum is developed at the school level. The overarching goal of the educational profile is governed by the preparation and entry controls for the IB college. In other words, the preconditions to enter the Diploma Programme (DP), the IB college, characterise what governs the IB educational profile, hence resembling the examen-artium model. At the same time, the amount of learning material and instructions produced by the IBO that are available for international schools also indicates how to operationalise planning and organise assessment at the classroom level.

Similar model of curriculum control across the three school contexts. Building further on Hopmann's models, we find a more nuanced picture of how different and overlapping aspects of curriculum control are within varied school contexts. We understand these aspects to be related to the country context, the governing of the Norwegian education system and the international trends that influence Norwegian policy. In the Norwegian context of a highly regulated school sector, the

independent schools' curriculum must adhere to the legislation set by the state and educational authorities. For instance, in 2006, the Waldorf national curriculum had to be updated as a response to the Knowledge Promotion Reform, which emphasised the objectives of education in terms of learning outcomes. For the Waldorf education, this reform meant structural changes in the curriculum. In particular, it had to spell out the final competences and competence aims for each subject, and these had to be as equally good as the one in the core curriculum in Norwegian public schools (Stabel, 2016; Steinerskoleforbundet, 2015). The Norwegian Waldorf Federation collaborated with Norwegian educational authorities both to safeguard Waldorf pedagogy and be accepted as an alternative curriculum. For the first time, educational authorities required Waldorf education to specify the new curriculum framework, showing a shift from a focus on the process of learning to what competences students should achieve (Stabel, 2016). The Knowledge Promotion Reform of 2006 brought several changes to the Norwegian Waldorf educational system, including changes in the leadership structure, teaching competences and new focus on nationally induced assessments. Although the Waldorf curriculum was affected by the changes and regulations of the reform, the same policy demands did not apply to the international school. In fact, the requirements for international schools are less specific,⁵ and the curriculum is approved as long as it is 'in accordance with a relevant international curriculum', for example, IB (regulations attached to the Free School Act). In other words, the international curriculum is approved because it may already fulfil the policy demands of the Knowledge Promotion Reform. In addition, the globally undiscussed status of the international curriculum, which flexibility lends itself to easily adapting to national curricula and regulations, could also indicate curriculum approval (Resnik, 2012). State and educational authorities – by regulating both public and Waldorf curriculum through the same outcome-based educational approach – may lead to a stronger standardisation of the different profiles. This approach is more typical of the Anglo-Saxon tradition from which the international curriculum originates.

To sum up, all three schools, although of different profiles and varied contexts, refer to an underlying similar model that is outlined at the national discourse and programmatic level and that focusses on the results of teaching and learning. In the next section, we present how these modes of curriculum control are perceived by the teachers and whether they might provide different spaces for teacher autonomy in the varied school contexts.

Teacher autonomy

A very interesting finding is that the teachers across the varied school contexts seemed to perceive similar discretion for interpreting the curriculum in the planning of educational activities for the class. One important similarity is that the teachers, despite their different models of control, used the curriculum directly in their planning, which may limit their interpretation by leaving decision making and control to the programmatic level (the criteria for examination are the curriculum in the IB). In the public school, this level is represented by the state and in the Waldorf and IB schools by the representatives of the organisation. These different governance configurations have their own educational agencies that develop concrete goals that guide teachers' work in line with the preferred educational ideas and epistemology. In other words, teachers, while experiencing some forms of autonomy, for instance, in deciding some of the contents and how to present them in the classroom, seem to be controlled by the already defined goals set by the educational authorities. These goals appear in the form of the educational competences or assessment criteria. Within this similar autonomy for curriculum interpretation, there are however variations of how the curriculum and educational framework limits the teachers' autonomy.

Teacher autonomy in the Waldorf profile. At the classroom level, the Waldorf teachers' decision making for their teaching activities seemed to be confined within the framework provided by the Waldorf pedagogical tradition, which is supposed to be tailored around students' needs and development. This approach, which is in line with the licence model, implies that teachers get a considerable amount of professional autonomy to decide what is best for each child. The teachers had significant decision making in the choice of teaching material and methods; because they are not bound by textbooks, they can draw on a wide range of activities that often can be of an artistic nature. The teachers seemed to have even greater decision-making discretion when it comes to assessment; while working with formative assessments daily, they work autonomously over the design of class examinations. Even though in the lower secondary schools there are no grades until the last year (10th grade), following the principles of assessment for learning, Waldorf teachers noted they regularly evaluate their students without a formal assessment process.

The individual workbook is one of the examples of the Waldorf school's ideas about adapting their planning to the students' individual development. The individual workbook functions as a substitute for the subject textbook and is the result of the handwritten notes and elaboration of the learning content that students get through the main lesson periods. As a teacher described, the main purpose of the Waldorf pedagogy is that teachers present the subject matter to the class in the 'main lesson' through in-depth experiences and then 'the approach is such that they will take the academic work and process it at home, and sleep on it overnight'. The visual quality of the workbook has as much importance as the language; both characteristics are a source of assessment. This structuring of teaching is based on the traditional key factors that form Waldorf pedagogical didactics and ideas on learning. At the same time, the Waldorf teachers claimed that within this pedagogical tradition, they have significant decision making in the choice of content when they work with the curriculum. A teacher described being able to modify the subject framework depending on aspects related to students and society to give space and draw into global issues:

We have a framework to which I relate to (for planning). But I can move in and out of that framework (. . .) now we have this climate change action with Greta Thunberg. And the students in the eighth grade have an awakening, some of them will strike (. . .), and then, I have to include that (climate change) in my planning. I didn't know that this autumn when I planned this period.

However, this autonomy is important because it fulfils the goals of adaptive learning and of 'linking the curriculum to events that happen in the contemporary society', which are the main goals of the Waldorf tradition.

At the school level, teachers' decision making is manifested in weekly meetings for discussing teaching activities and responsibilities, such as the planning of their local subject matter plan for the next year. Different sources of control of teacher work may be represented by parents, national exams and, to some extent, the county governor. Parents in the school may have a twofold role; while they are highly involved in the school's welfare, they also may come with high demands regarding the teachers' schoolwork. Finally, even if the nationally defined learning outcomes do not prescribe or direct teachers how these goals should be attained, all schools participate in the Norwegian national test⁶ despite the two independent schools following a different framework. Although the national test does not affect the work with planning, teachers' autonomy for interpreting the curriculum is controlled by students' performance on national tests. County governors⁷ may come into play when there are important and sensitive matters between the parents and school.

Teacher autonomy in the IB profile. When describing their work, the IB school teachers emphasise that instructional planning must be integrated with their criterion-related assessment system and

directly connected to the aims and objectives of each subject. Within this assessment system, teachers are directed on how to use the criteria to design appropriate tasks and monitor student performance. An IB teacher exemplified how the working with planning is based on this assessment system: 'I know the finishing point which is their criteria for assessment and then I work (plan) backwards from that'. More explicitly, another teacher from the international school described how the assessment system guides the unit and the organisation of the teaching:

The whole unit is led by that end assessment.(. . .)So, assessment kind of leads, it is quite clear, yes, it's quite good to have that as end game.

These criteria are very visible and constantly discussed with students, for instance, at the beginning of every unit, as one teacher noted: 'This unit is working towards criteria A) analysing and B) organising and that's what I am looking at'.

Further, the teachers' choices of method are related to the IB-specific approach; thus, the teaching methods used need to ensure the interplay of enquiry, action and reflection guiding the learning experience. This approach and the IB framework condition teachers' autonomy for planning but leaves teachers also discretion to design their own learning enquiry and learning experiences throughout:

The MYP programme is prescriptive to a point, so there are ideas that need to be covered. . . but it's really just an idea so there is not really a guide as to as much depth you need to go into, so it's very open, and so, as long as you are posing questions and making students think about that topic, the content is not prescribed.

Teachers' work with planning at the classroom level is strictly linked with the IB requirements for curriculum development; however, teachers within the limits of the framework also experience degrees of decision making over the teaching contents and methods.

At the school level, collaborative planning is an important standard and practice of the IB programmes that must be implemented by the IB schools and that requires the participation of all the teachers (IBO, 2014b). This means that the teachers are required to work together in collaboratively planning teams, which happen in a variety of ways (after school, tabled time, etc.) throughout the year. These meetings are usually led by the curriculum coordinator, who must facilitate and direct the teacher to follow the IB requirements. In these meetings, the teachers reflect, discuss and share their opinions and experiences on curriculum development and classroom practices; however, these meetings are run by the curriculum coordinator, who decides what teachers must collaborate on, limiting teachers' decision making. Collaboration also happens digitally through an online platform called 'ManageBac', IB software used both as a curriculum planning tool and for documenting student performance. Parents have direct access to the platform and are given an account of their children's formative and summative assessment data, homework and basic information about what is being studied during the school year. This planning software can be seen as a two-fold instrument, giving the opportunity to support and control teachers' professional practices. Another form of control is exemplified by the competencies established by the Udir for the fifth year of the MYP (the Norwegian VG1). The MYP fifth year is meant to prepare students for entry into the DP or further studies within the Norwegian school system. Ultimately, the teachers must consider the competencies for the first year of upper secondary school (VG1) as criteria for what they offer in the MYP. As in the Waldorf school, teachers' autonomy in interpreting the curriculum is controlled by students' performance on national and international tests. Even if the international benchmarks set by IBO do not prescribe or direct teachers on how these goals should be attained, IB schools participate in the Norwegian national test and are monitored through these exams.

Teacher autonomy in the public school. Much like the independent schools, teachers' autonomy for planning in the public school was also expressed within the boundaries set by the national curriculum. Public school teachers' framework, however, is not based on a pedagogical tradition. The public teachers referred to relying directly on the competence aims that come from the subject frame. At the same time, they expressed the desire to use their experience and self-knowledge (courses) to plan different activities that concretely support and facilitate student learning. For instance, one teacher noted the understanding of challenging scientific concepts:

I know through experience which areas within the various topics in the curriculum can be challenging. So, you try to work concretely, whether it is illustrations, simulation or exercises, which I know are good for their understanding of the topic. And also, conceptual understanding, that you do not just read the definition of a term but actually apply that concept, that you associate action with theory. In natural science, I prefer, like Dewey says, 'learning by doing'.

This approach is not determined by a prescribed pedagogical framework; teachers in public schools have apparently an extended autonomy to follow different learning theories and methods. However, this discretion makes them rely on the competence aims and, to some extent, can be bound to the textbook for their instructional planning. This use of the policy framework seems to provide teachers legitimation for their work with their selection of content, activities and assessment: 'They get an awareness [students, the authors] that there is some [the policy, the authors] who thinks something about what is important and it is not just me that thinks that'. Public school teachers' pedagogical decision making is also expressed by their choice of sources of inspiration for their teaching as the other schools' contexts. For instance, they do not get as IB teachers, already structured learning materials and instructions for planning. These varied sources of inspiration can come from digital platforms or textbook. However, again, the teachers are very clear that what guides the lessons is the policy framework: 'The classes should not be dictated by the textbook, it is the competence aims and the purpose of the subject which is the matter at hand here'.

The use of a textbook seems to be important for teachers because it allows them to focus on the diverse population of the public comprehensive school (*felleskole*). For instance, one teacher emphasised the importance of the textbook for students who have not been living in Norway for a long time, especially because Norwegian language and science are often difficult subjects for these students. Similar to the IB school, teachers in the public school needed to allocate time for collaborative planning both across subject grade, grade groups and school levels. Planning within the subject grade group tended to occur currently throughout the year, supporting the operationalisation of the national curriculum, but these meetings are dedicated discussing assessment. The teachers would plan similar assessment tasks and develop assessment criteria, too; however, the planning of teaching happened individually. Moreover, some teachers described using audio-visuals to provide feedback on students' work, indicating that the teachers were autonomous regarding deciding what assessment works best for their classroom. Collegial decision making is usually considered positive for the development of professional practices; however, it is important to understand whether these practices are actually ensuring teachers' decision making or represent just another space to discuss top-down pedagogical content to be implemented in the school.

In the public school, parents are not a source of external control. Just in one teacher's account, when describing the challenges of grading teamwork, were parents the focus on the fairness of grades. However, performance in national tests works as an external control of teachers' work for planning teaching. Public schools are also bound to the national examination system finalising students' 10th grade. Although the teachers in the two independent schools claimed that the assessments do not affect their work with planning, the public school teachers instead emphasised how the Norwegian national exams are an integral part of their work: 'We know that the national exams

come eventually and so it is natural that there is focus on talking about learning strategies directed to that'. This similar form of control through assessments, which is introduced in the varied school contexts, affects teachers' work differently.

Discussion

Varied school contexts framed by a common pedagogical idea

As the analysis indicates, we can find distinctive characteristics determining the different contexts for curriculum control which conditions teachers' autonomy in different ways. However, because of the specific Norwegian context of high state control along with the influence of international trends in education, we also find similar aspects in how the curriculum control takes form in different schools' contexts. In particular, we observe how the teachers in the three schools relate to an outcome-based education governance regime valid in Norway, characterised by competence aims and monitoring of results. The educational regime since 2006 shift implemented both in the Norwegian public school and independent schools⁸ have apparently led to an increased standardization of the curriculum structure of the different school contexts, drawing on varying pedagogical ideas. Independent schools that did not have an outcome-based approach have had closer follow-up by educational authorities to fulfil the new policy framework, as we could see for our Waldorf school example. The analysis indicates a shift towards a new institutionalised and programmatic pedagogical idea initiated by the national policy framework, one focussing on the outcomes and assessment of teaching and learning; this shift can be understood as constructing a common pedagogical base for all schools and teachers rather than creating a basis for a diversified educational provision.

This somewhat contradicts the education policy legitimising the liberalisation of private school policies in Norway based on the logic that increased diversity and freedom of choice can increase the quality of education. Yet the regime shift towards stronger standardisation in private and public schools questions the basis of this logic, which can have an indirect impact on parents' real opportunity to exercise their right to choose (Sivesind and Trøtteberg, 2017). At the same time, in the current study, the parents in the two independent schools seemed to show greater influence over teachers' work than in public schools, pointing to higher control over the educational service which is an important aspect of active citizenship. To better understand this type of influence, further research is needed on the nature of parents who send their children to independent schools. Research shows that in the Norwegian context parents with higher education tend to use private education to a higher extent than other parents (Lauglo, 2009). However, there is no overall tendency for students in private schools to have wealthier parents (Lauglo, 2009). One implication of this study may be the need to further investigate different parents' view on education to better explore their willingness to question and challenge what teachers do.

Nevertheless, the Norwegian case represents an example for the European context, where a highly regulated education system, through curriculum control, can restrict the role of marketisation and private actors and their educational offers. Tensions within schools arise when spaces for diversity in practice become too limited and the regulated system has increasingly been based on a stronger logic of accountability. This might have led to varying consequences. On the one hand, it may appear that certain independent schools are in danger of losing their long tradition pedagogical ideas, such in the case of our Waldorf school. On the other hand, regulation and restriction of diversity has been seen by both teachers in public and independent schools as

something rather positive. This is in line with research that show how an autonomy restriction can enable teachers to deal with the complexity and risks of teachers professional work. Wermke and Salokangas (2021) call this an autonomy paradox where restrictions have a positive impact on teachers' work.

Autonomy in different school contexts-restrictions and varying degrees of interpretation

The analysis shows varying teacher autonomy for deciding on classroom content, methods and materials. At first, the independent school teachers appeared to have extended autonomy, while public school teachers seemed more guided by the national policy framework. Nevertheless, independent school teachers' autonomy can also be considered as restricted, but more so by their independent school's framework and the ideas of learning from it. Still, the independent school teachers perceived and stated more explicitly as having extensive autonomy in their work with planning than the public school teachers. This perception of autonomy seems to be explained by the high commitment to their schools' framework and to their professional community. The didactic background and explicit educational frameworks support the teachers in their planning by allowing self-determined decision making based on principles and rules (Wermke et al., 2018).

In more detail, when we relate the findings of curriculum control with teacher autonomy, it is possible to identify aspects of consistency and differences. The Waldorf school gives teachers pedagogical freedom and freedom of method (Hopmann, 1999). However, the teachers' autonomy is formed within the Waldorf didactics model, leaving the licensing with guidance, contradicting the traditional freedom associated with this profile. Teachers are licenced to do the 'right thing' according the Waldorf model. The IB school without a top-down formal curriculum can work with flexibility as long as it ultimately leads towards the preconditions of the DP. Not having a fully developed curriculum could make teachers' autonomous work for planning more complex (Wermke et al., 2018); however, the teachers are largely supported by the assessment system made of objectives and criteria, along with the additional planning tools. At the same time, in the international school context, teachers' autonomy is affected by the accountability logic of the assessment system and restrictive format of the planning platforms. There is consistency here between the programmatic-level intentions of pursuing 'world class standards' and the responsibility that teachers carry to reach them (Hopmann, 1999). The public school curriculum control, which is categorised as the philanthropic model, seems to be followed by loosening (Hopmann, 1999). In fact, despite teachers' reliance on the national policy framework, teachers' autonomy in the public school seems to be formed within their professional experience and competences.

Curriculum control, teacher autonomy, risks and responsibilities within a marketised democratic education

Our study shows that the basic ideological profile of the schools' context is affected by the outcome-based educational system and that most variations seem to remain in the teacher's choice of method and content. At the same time, a highly regulated system can restrict the private actor and market-oriented approaches in the education sector that impact the fundamentals of public schooling. Further, the educational space wherein the expectations and premises for teachers' autonomy lie are increasingly conditioned by different actors and instruments. These, in turn, can also be understood as a positive support for teachers to deal with the complexity and risks of professional work, by coping with the contingencies in education. However, this comes at the price that the

educational spaces become more controlled, and these multiple policy messages are directly used and transferred into the teaching practice. With the rise of populist regimes worldwide and across Europe, it is important to further debate how these spaces can safeguard issues of democracy, citizenship and accessibility of education and the role of autonomous teachers.

Finally, if every school profile is framed alike, what happens to the policy purpose of creating alternative schools? The core ideas may diminish, and what remains are primarily the teachers' working methods, which seem to be, paradoxically, more open in the public school. At the same time, the current study shows how public and private schools are regulated by various types of curriculum control and autonomy. What are the consequences when what is supposed to provide diversity through alternative school profiles are all aligned across the same basic pedagogical idea? What constitutes the alternative then, and can this development be considered an unintended consequence of national policy decision making? Instead of diversity to choose from, students and their parents get more of the same.

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ORCID iDs

Alessandra Dieudé  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0301-7468>

Tine S Prøitz  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7500-3132>

Notes

1. Pupils in private schools in Norway more than doubled (+120%) from 2002 to 2018 (Statistics Norway, 2019a). As of 2019 there are a total of 261 independent schools with 27,027 pupils, and 2538 public schools with 609,223 pupils (the primary and lower secondary school) (Statistics Norway, 2019b). In Norway, the financial support and approval of private schools is highly regulated through restrictive legislation.
2. Private schooling plays out differently according to the context and depends on the socio-historical configurations of the country.
3. The interviews were audio-recorded after receiving participant consent and transcribed verbatim. The study has been approved by the Norwegian Data Protection Service (NSD), and all participants and data have been treated in accordance with the guidelines of the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH).
4. The interview guide is an adapted version of the interview guide developed and used in a larger project (author).
5. This does not mean that international schools are not supervised by the Norwegian government officials. There can be, for instance, the supervision of aspects as the content subject in the Norwegian language or civic education.
6. Conducted in the fifth, eighth and tenth grades.

7. The county governor provides supervision and handles appeals in accordance with the Education Act and the Independent Schools Act. <https://www.statsforvalteren.no/en/portal/Nursery-schools-and-education/>
8. Also, other pedagogical oriented independent schools such as Montessori school.

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Author biographies

Alessandra Dieudé is currently a PhD candidate at the Department of Educational Science, University College South-Eastern Norway. Her research interest are within the fields of Education Policy, Education Privatization and Comparative Education.

Tine S Prøitz is professor at the Department of Business, History and Social Sciences, University of South-Eastern Norway. Her research interest are within the fields of education policy and reform, the policy-practice nexus, learning outcomes and teacher education.

Appendix I

Extract of interview guide

30.05.17

General on school work:

Can you tell me about your work here as a teacher?

Subject, class, main teacher, other responsibilities?

How long have you worked here?

What is your professional and educational background?

Earlier experiences as teachers? Public schools?

Have you taken any further education, courses, academic updates lately?

Teaching planning:

Can you tell me how do you work when preparing/planning your teaching?

Design of activities directed to criteria, descriptor (expand/share doc)

When do you plan your teaching?

What decides/determines what topics you include in your teaching? To what extent are they similar with your colleagues that teach the same grade?

How freely do you stand in teaching planning?

What determines the methods you use in teaching?

Where do you usually get inspiration when planning your teaching?

Have you any examples?

What plans and documents do you use in teaching planning as a teacher?

Are these common to you and your colleagues?

Assessment practices:

How do you work with assessment?

How do you work when you evaluate the students in your subject area?

What forms of assessment do you think are best suited to your teaching and why?

I read you have conferences here at school. What is that?

What is the purpose?

Positive and negative aspects?

Are you satisfied with the way you work (when it comes to planning and assessment)?

Are there other ways you would like to do things (in terms of planning and assessment)?

Use of documents and national guidelines:

Which guiding documents are the most central for your work as a teacher?

How would you say you relate to the curriculum in your work as a teacher/in the planning of teaching?

Is it often you discuss the learning outcomes with the students? How do you do this? Can you give an example of a time you've worked this way?