Curriculum History and Planning: Theoretical Framework and Some Guidelines of Its Development in Estonia, 1987–1996

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Introduction[1]

The reform of the national school curriculum in Estonia began after the Teacher's Congress in 1987 and ended in 1996 when the government approved the document. The reform was carried out in the context of thoroughgoing and dramatic historical changes that deeply affected the whole Estonian society. The aim of the paper is to position the example of Estonian curricular development into a broader international, theoretical, and historical context. Some similarities and differences of curriculum history in Great Britain and Latvia are also discussed.

Key words: *curriculum, curriculum theory, curriculum history, teachers, Estonia, Soviet education*

Estonia is a country which experienced many different rulers and has repeatedly fought for its existence. The state's geopolitical situation attracted Germans, Swedish, Danish, Polish and Russian conquerors. The Liberation War of 1918–1920 resulted in two decades of independence (1920–1940). After the Second World War, Estonia faced a period of the further Soviet occupation, followed by a period of transition which started in 1985 with *Perestroika* and ended with the proclamation of independence in 20 August 1991.

Prior to World War II, Estonia was an independent country with its own national school curriculum. After World War II, Estonia came under the Soviet rule which led to the imposition of the Soviet school curriculum up to 1991. A profound modification of the curriculum from 1987 until 1996, the move towards adapting to independent political life was one of the innovations in Estonia in order to challenge the Soviet heritage. It was the period of the first curriculum development; the second one lasted from

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1996 till 2002 and the third from 2002 till 2010.

Here, an effort will be made to employ some of the most recent and advanced theoretical discourses in studying the history of education. So, the aim of this theoretical analysis is to position the example of the Estonian curricular development into a broader international, theoretical and historical context. Thus, the main research question is: what theoretical framework characterizes the process of the Estonian curriculum planning from the Soviet times to the first national version of 1996?

The Estonian experience is interesting because it indicates that /…/ "the curriculum reform is successful when there is support from both educationalists of all kinds, and the general public can also be mobilized, using the strategy and tactics especially developed for implementing this process" (Ruus & Sarv, 2000, p. 141).

In my opinion, knowing and researching history is an important part of the development of any society as we always can learn from historical events. It is also topical in Estonia where there is a widespread discussion of the National Curriculum approved in 2010. The genealogy of the curriculum design and exploring its theoretical framework provides us with a better understanding of the social and political complexities of curriculum making. It can also offer useful insights, particularly at the extreme turning points of history, as to the complex ways a curriculum is constructed and negotiated. And finally, employing some of the most recent and advanced discourses in curriculum theory/history allows to intellectually map the discursive shifts leading to the first official 1996 national school curriculum. The period of the first National Curriculum planning after restoring the independence of Estonia is interesting also because during the same period the UK Parliament approved its 1988 Education Act and its central feature, the National Curriculum. For England, it is also important as it is preparing for the new National Curriculum in 2014 which raises many discussions today as well.

Literature review

Curriculum history and its development and theory have been overviewed by several authors. The renowned US researcher and educationist of Estonian origin Professor Hilda Taba (1962), Stephen Hazlett (1979), and Joseph Schwab (1978) can be considered as classical representatives of the field. Wide publications by Ivor Goodson, William Doll, Thomas Popkewitz, Michael Apple, William Pinar, Elliot Eisner, and Bernadette Baker certainly shape the field. Michael Apple, Ivor Goodson, and William Pinar belonged to different schools over time, Eisner has represented the view of curriculum as an aesthetic text (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 581–589) and Apple as a political text (ibid., p. 252–259). Goodson has also contributed to the approach to the curriculum as an autobiographical text (ibid., p. 563–564) researching teachers' lives (Goodson, 2003, 1992b).

Gary McCulloch has devoted one chapter to the field in his book "The Struggle for the History of Education" (2011, p. 83–87). To my mind my mind, the book as a whole can be envisaged as a scientific historical approach to the history of education as an academic discipline. John White's recent work (2011) is also very important, mostly because of its ambitious retrospect which starts from the 16th century.

The Estonian experience in curriculum planning and my analysis will be put in the frame of the British–American curricular tradition and the article of Ivor Goodson where he manifests the curriculum as a social construction explained in his essay "On Curriculum Form" (1992), which review the state of sociological knowledge with reviews regard to the curriculum. This theory is just one but quite developed part of curriculum theory. Goodson's works have also linked three elements of curriculum study: its theory, history, and planning.

Curriculum theory began to develop in the USA after publishing John F. Bobbit's book "The Curriculum" (1918) and Werrett W. Charters' book "Curriculum Construction" (1923). Ralph W. Tyler, sometimes referred to as the father of the Curriculum movement (e.g., Print, 1993, p. 64), and Hilda Taba were influenced a lot by these works; thus, Tyler's Rationale from his book "Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction" (1949) cannot be forgotten. For example, Jarkko Vilkkilä admits that "from the point of view of curriculum history, the Tyler Rationale can be seen /…/ as the *locus classicus* of defining education in terms of instrumentality and social efficiency with behavioristic educational psychology as a disciplinary rationale for organizing education" (Vilkkilä, 2011, p. 41). Taba's "The Dynamics of Education" (1932) is also an influential book.

Issues: the case of curriculum history, its theory and studies in general

It is interesting to see how widely or how far we can go with curriculum history and curriculum thinking or with the history of education. Plato founded the Academy (*Akademia*) and Aristotle the Lyceum (*Lykeion*). These historical moments bring us back to the beginning of modern society where people had to deal with the curriculum, teaching or learning. And if thinking about the question which entitles Herbert Spencer's essay of 1860: "*What knowledge is of most worth*?" – what William Pinar calls "curriculum's key or its traditional or fundamental question animated by ethics, history, and politics" (Pinar, 2011; see also Pinar et al., 1995, p. 101). Galileo Galilei "advocated a scientific / experimental method founded on the use of the telescope" while the Roman Church "advocated a philosophical / theological method founded on interpreting the writings of Aristotle" (Doll, 1998, p. 299). Descartes believed in *ratio*. Rationality has been "re-emphasized [in] curriculum theory (Tyler's 'rational curriculum planning')" (Jenkins, 1975, p. 18–19, original emphasis). Comenius's didactic method (one instructor teaching students during the lesson) has survived until nowadays and remained the same, "simple and universal" (Doll, 2005, p. 30). John White also claims that

> [Comenius] shared his mentor's interest both in ordering knowledge on an encyclopedic scale – in his own case via notion of „pansophism" – and in efficient, sometimes mechanized, ways of transmitting this knowledge, in his case not only to older students but also to young children (White, 2011, p. 28).

What I have said above demonstrates us the extent, deep-seatedness and depth of curricular thinking. Stephen Hazlett when summarizing his two reasons of the judgment says that "it may be argued that a sense of history has shaped and guided the curriculum to a considerable extent" (Hazlett, 1979, p. 129).

Why is it significant to overview curriculum development historically? "Why have there not been more historical studies of curriculum making?" – asked Stephen Hazlett in the end of the 70s (Hazlett, 1979, p. 131). Ivor Goodson goes even further; he says that in a longer time perspective "we may provide a reconceptualization of the mode of curriculum study that will allow us to connect specific acts of social construction to wider social impulses" (Goodson, 1992a, p. 67), and "historical studies should seek to establish the "gradual" and "continuous" nature of curriculum change and do so in ways which examine negotiation and action" (Goodson, 1985, p. 345, original emphasis). Michael Apple writes in his famous book "Ideology and Curriculum" (2004) that "only by seeing how the curriculum field often served the rather conservative interests of homogeneity and social control, can we begin to see how it functions today" (p. 76). According to Hilda Taba (1999), "it is the task of progressive curriculum planning to extract from our heritage of knowledge, ideas, and thought" (p. 259). This reflects the idea of William Pinar who has stated:

> "Scholars are acutely aware that curriculum work occurs in time, in history, and this self-consciousness regarding the historicity of curriculum work, theoretical or institutional, has helped support the increasing interest in historical studies of curriculum" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 42–43).

Finally, another scholar, Albert V. Kelly, has said almost the same: "Curriculum and the arrangements for its implementation must be viewed in the general context of the historical development" (Kelly, 1994, p. 22).

But what about curriculum history as a science in general? Curriculum history started to evolve in the 1960s in the USA. As Barry Franklin (2009) puts it,

> "although curriculum history has become a worldwide scholarly endeavor, it emerged first as a distinct and clearly identified field of study in the USA in the late 1960s and has developed more fully in that national setting than in many others" (p. 295).

The reason for that was the launch of the Soviet Sputnik in 1957. The USA started to change its educational system as it felt to be behind the Soviet Union in space exploration. "The history of the school curriculum began to attract broad attention in England in the 1970s in response to the complexities of curriculum reform and the insights of the "new" sociology of knowledge" (McCulloch, 2011, p. 83, original emphasis).

According to Barry Franklin,

> "the task of curriculum history is to explore changes over time in the knowledge and ideas that comprise the curriculum and to identify their impact on the social construction of educational events. It is the lineage of these curricular changes that, according to Popkewitz, constitutes the historic regulative or controlling role of the curriculum" (Franklin, 1999, p. 473; see also Popkewitz, 1997).

Bernadette Baker has stated that

> "in defining the field of curriculum history both Musgrave's and McCulloch's perceptions have led to a differential positioning, description and hence understanding of how "curriculum history" came to be. For Musgrave, it was primarily through struggles over definitions of curriculum and definitions of history and how different players combined and utilized them to generate a field which appeared as it did in 1988" (Baker, 1996, p. 110, original emphasis).

In the end of 1980s, "it was doubtful whether curriculum history would be al-

lowed to develop as a rival to more established and respectable approaches to educational, sociological, and historical study"; it also fell "victim to territorial disputes and unresolved debates about the nature and contributions of education, history and social sciences" (ibid., p. 85, 97). For example, Martin Lawn asked in his book review: "How can curriculum history overcome its ignorance of the lived experience and work of teachers in the past?" (Lawn, 1986, p. 226; see also McCulloch, 2011, p. 85). This gap was filled much later by already mentioned Ivor Goodson's studies of 1992b, 2003, also 1996 (with Andy Hargreaves) and 2008. Here, my duty is to research in the same way Estonian teachers' opinions considering the contemporary curriculum history of Estonia.

Issues: social geography and theory

I am arguing that the Estonian case can be put in the frame of social constructivist theory which implies that changes in society would necessarily be reflected in curriculum planning because of "the tension between: social efficiency, child-centeredness, and social reconstruction" (Hendry, 2011, p. 172). The main idea of the theory is also the view that curriculum is vulnerable to changes in society, especially in the system of schooling, the same as Stephen Hazlett considered much earlier: "The commonplace premise is that the school curriculum is, or should be, responsive to the society and its movements, trends, "needs", and aspirations" (Hazlett, 1979, p. 129, original emphasis). According to David Hamilton (1990), in the 20th century "curriculum theory has become less about the selection, structuring and ordering of school curricula, more about mechanisms to monitor curriculum practice and keep it on target'" (p. 44, original emphasis). As it can be said about education in general it "not only reflects and adjusts to society; once formed, it turns back upon it and acts upon it" (Bailyn, 1960, p. 48).

And finally, Gary McCulloch (1987) has written:

> "In general, we may say that curriculum historians interpret the curriculum as a social and political construct, and curriculum processes as inherently historical. It might be concluded also that curriculum history is most likely to remain established as an area of academic interest in those places where it makes efforts to be accepted not only as an approach to the study of the curriculum, but also as an integral part of social history (pp. 314, 318).

I think that Estonia is such a country.

The notion (or concept) of Social Construction is important not only in the area of curriculum studies, but more generally in sociology of education and social sciences. More broadly, Estonia has tried, and is still trying, to employ as many elements as possible of the Western British–American curricular thinking and tradition. Certainly it is not as simple as it seems, as in the Soviet curricula there were reflected numerous German Bildung / Didaktik influences. One challenge was, and remains to be, to move forward with models of the idealized Western curriculum theory and practice without relying on Soviet influences. Another challenge is how to develop the curriculum and consider the context that produced it: what was / is the cultural, social, and political context that contributed to the "new" Estonian narratives of personal and national identities?

There remain also some paradoxical similarities between neo-liberalism and

socialist tenets; "/.../ ironically, the neoliberal and original Marxist positions share the same basic assumptions /.../" (Beck, 1999, p. 22). Now, in the neoliberal guises, the same, often hated but culturally familiar Soviet practices of surveillance, monitoring, and assessment can occur. For example:

> "Lenin never produced a comprehensive historical analysis of the Russian Revolution as such: his views on its causality must be reconstructed from a scatter of occasional articles and speeches during and after the event, which never found a point of integration (Anderson, 1980, pp. 77–78).

Based on this, the final question emerges: How can we balance the challenges of reclaiming the new independence without reproducing the Soviet mentality that helped for get rid of it?

Social change or conflict and its linkage with curriculum have often been emphasized. That is why for Ivor Goodson "social conflict within the subject is central to understanding the subject itself (and hence relations among subjects)" because "the continuing dominance of the competitive academic curriculum is the result of a continuing contest within school subjects" (Goodson, 1992a, p. 67). Thus, exploring social change in curriculum history is very important. For Brian Simon, the leading historian of education in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century, it is "a crucial issue to which historical study can, and should, make a direct contribution is that of the relation between educational and social change" (Simon, 1994, p. 9; see also McCulloch et al., 2007, p. 406). At the level of state, the curriculum has often been seen as an intervention into the school's life as Denis Lawton suggested already in 1978: "if the state says that education is compulsory, then it has some responsibility to give some guidance in what should be included [in the curriculum]" (p. 53). However, at the level of schooling, curriculum development can be seen more in terms of "ideology, power, and economic resources" (Apple, 2004, p. 47), along with the "relationship between educational, social, and political change" (Simon, 1985, p. 22).

Social and political change and all other reforms in the former Soviet Union happened in a tightened or compressed form during only six years (1985–1991). Distinctive features of the Estonian model of general education became more visible with the nascent space for that liberalization, shaped by these crucial geo-political developments in the former USSR of the late 1980s. Both Innovation (a.k.a. *Perestroika*), introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev, and one of its policies called Openness (a.k.a. *Glasnost*) attempted in replacing "the old system by political pluralism":

> "this development could not fail to have serious political, social and economic repercussions. The originally tempered plans for liberalisation of the existing system were replaced by demands for autonomy or the outright independence of the different nations and nationalities. It became obvious that the old Soviet Union could not be preserved" (Tomiak, 1992, p. 33).

Jagdish Gundara specifies quite rightly that

> "the collapse of the Soviet Union was partly the result of the way in which Russians dominated the languages and cultures of the other nationalities and republics after Stalin. It has led to a narrow nationalistic and linguistic reaction within a number of ex-Soviet and Baltic States" (Gundara, 2005, p. 244).

Ivor Goodson claims that

> "the most interesting points for [historical] inquiry /.../ are when the different layers of historical time coincide; for it is at such point that inclination towards /.../ change and reform are strongest. [These] can be seen in key moments of educational history and change" (Goodson, 2004, p. 17).

I think that this assertion corresponds well to the situation in the USSR and in Estonia. We may provide a reconceptualization of *Perestroika* and its reforms.

A few words about the Soviet learning programs. According to Edgar Krull and Rain Mikser (2010),

> "the long isolation from Western educational thought meant that many ideas and concepts relevant for curriculum development, like aim-oriented learning ideology, changes in understanding the nature of learning and teaching, and many other innovative educational ideas remained unknown to Estonian educators for decades" (p. 44).

Curriculum and social sciences in general were in the service of the Communist Party and ideology:

> "Until 1987, the Estonian educational system, including the curriculum, was an example of the extremely centralized and politicized educational policy of the Soviet Union. Soviet state curricula were based on two foundations:
> 1. Political ideology developed from vulgarized Marxism, the main goal of which was to ensure the supremacy of the communist party. This was hypocritically justified by the view that the party was the only legitimate representative of the proletariat as "the historically prominent class" and "the new historical unity of men", i.e. the denationalized Soviet people.
> 2. Knowledge based on the natural sciences and economic goals also aspired towards the growth of the military strength of the Soviet Union (Ruus & Sarv, 2000, pp. 141–142, original emphasis).

The Soviet teaching programs of the history of Estonia in 1945–1988 were really ideological documents with a Soviet style statement of ideological principles and a learning plan. Ideology and ideas have certain rules and issues, and the Soviet Union used these for its own purposes. Because originally "ideas are properly called ideological when they can be shown to conceal or to resolve in an idealistic or imaginary way the problematic character of social life" (Perspectives, 1981, p. 28).

But the Baltic countries had their own hidden curriculum in teaching. It was characterized by "changing of learning material (abbreviation, excluding of some problems and events or interpret them in its useful way of thinking), by nonverbal expression (mimics, gestures), by ignoring of forbidden (using national symbolics in dressing, our own school uniform), etc." (Nagel, 2006, p. 152). Also, "Estonian educators and teachers, understanding that the authorities did not tolerate any refusal of teaching the communist ideology, became used to including in their instructional subjects and educational addresses ideological slogans of which the overwhelming majority of them really did not believe" (Krull & Trasberg, 2006, p. 3). Although Estonians already had certain autonomy to teach and learn in Estonian and use Estonian textbooks thanks to the efforts of negotiations between our Minister of Education Ferdinand Eisen and Moscow, it was just the collapse of the Soviet system that overtly abolished Soviet traces in the framework of the Estonian school curriculum.

> "Due to the traditions of the Estonian school and pedagogical staff and efforts of creative

> intellectuals and educational leaders (first and foremost the Minister of Education Ferdinand Eisen) it was possible to save the local and national special characteristics. /.../ During the era of Stalinism as well as during the new Stalinist pressure of the late 1970s, Estonian literature and language remained one of the most central subjects, the education in mother tongue was considered the natural right of Estonians both by parents and students (Sirk, 2005, p. 252).

"Curriculum presage", the notion coined by the Australian curriculum scholar Murray Print, is "an effective commencement point in any curriculum development" (Print, 1993, p. 25). The Teachers' Congress of Estonia in 1987 was the starting point. I think events are extremely important, and right conclusions have to be made from the ideas of these kinds of events, and these ideas have to be led into appropriate directions of common good. Second, there is the phase of institutionalization in curriculum change (Print, 1993, p. 231). In Estonia, the institutions which dealt with curriculum design were the Pedagogical Research Institute and later the Curriculum Laboratory of Tallinn Pedagogical University and the Center of Educational Planning of Estonia. In the 1960s and early 1970s, there was a rise of "curriculum studies" as an approach to educational studies in the UK as well as in the US. So, in the UK context Gary McCulloch has found that

> "this area was stimulated by the development of curriculum initiatives and especially the activities of the new Schools Council for the Curriculum and Examinations, which were expected to transform the character of the school curriculum. Curriculum Studies was a means of evaluating the success of these new initiatives and of understanding them in their broader context" (McCulloch, 2002, pp. 108–110).

For Murray Print, curriculum planning is the "process of implementing and evaluating learning opportunities intended to produce desired changes in learners". He also states that developing has to be preceded by conceptualization "through the process of planning and incorporating a curriculum design /…/" (Print, 1993, p. 23). Another Australian, Professor Colin Marsh sees the same stages but adds resource materials planning and their review (Marsh, 1986, p. 89). Both teachers and experts have to be involved in the process; the best way is to organize them into working groups. Now, in Estonia the idea has started that representatives of parents should be involved as an advisory body.

According to Print, there are three phases: organization, development, and then application (Print, 1993, p. 84). But in Estonia it went differently: the Estonian Teachers' Association was restored only as late as in 1991. So, the curriculum planners decided to divide teams by subjects (physics, language teachers, history teachers) but not by organizational distinctness as usual. In Estonia, the National Curriculum comprises the general part (introduction) with pupils' key competences and cross-curricular subjects. But Latvia went another way: it modified only subject syllabi and composed its own introduction much later.

Conclusion

The Estonian curriculum reform during the period 1987–1996 was conducted in the conditions of liberalization induced by Gorbachev's *perestroika* in the USSR; the

independence was regained in 1991. For this period, characteristic is the demise of the communist ideology and the reorientation to Western and distinctive national values. To conclude, I have clearly demonstrated that there are different stages of the curriculum development in Estonia, which is an important process of the history of curriculum development in any state. The stages follow the patterns of British–American curricular thinking and have had a certain influence on Estonian curriculum development institutions and policy. It is very significant to research curriculum development from both the historical and theoretical perspectives. Knowing and writing about the Soviet period is important as well, and those who lived in that time, including myself, should definitely do that.

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MOKYMO PROGRAMOS ISTORIJA IR PLANAVIMAS: TEORINĖ KONSTRUKCIJA IR KAI KURIOS MOKYMO PROGRAMOS TOBULINIMO GAIRĖS ESTIJOJE 1987–1996 METAIS

Vadim Rouk

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnis skirtas teorinei ir istorinei mokymo programos (*curriculum*) analizei. Jame pristatomos pagrindinės šią temą gvildenančių Vakarų teoretikų pozicijos. Daugelis jų pabrėžia istorinę mokymo programos raidą. Pavyzdžiui, estų kilmės JAV mokslininkė Hilda Taba teigia, kad pagrindinis mokymo programos planavimo uždavinys – perimti ir įsisavinti svarbiausias paveldo žinias, idėjas, mintis. Tačiau tai tik viena teorinės mokymo programos analizės gija. Mokymo programų raidą galima nagrinėti ir valstybės, taip pat mokyklos lygmenimis. Mokymo programa gali būti vertinama kaip valstybės kišimasis į mokyklos gyvenimą. Mokyklos lygmeniu į mokymo programą taip pat galima žvelgti per ideologijos, valdžios, ekonominių išteklių prizmę, analizuojant ją švietimo, socialinių ir politinių pokyčių kontekste.

Straipsnyje parodoma, kad Vakaruose, konkrečiau JAV švietimo sistemos kaitos ir su tuo susijusios mokymo programos teorinės analizės poreikis labiausiai išryškėjo šeštajame XX a. dešimtmetyje, Sovietų Sąjungai ėmus pirmauti kosmoso „užkariavimo“ srityje. Sovietų Sąjungoje ir Rytų Europoje ypač akivaizdūs pokyčiai pastebimi „Perestroikos“ metu, kai vienas iš pagrindinių naujo „kurso į Vakarus“ uždavinių buvo švietimo sistemos reformavimas.

Straipsnyje ypatingas dėmesys skiriamas devintojo XX a. dešimtmečio pabaigoje Estijos švietimo sistemoje prasidėjusioms permainoms, mokymo programos kaitai. Iki 1987 m. Estijos švietimas buvo centralizuotos ir politizuotos Sovietų Sąjungos švietimo sistemos dalis, o mokymo programa ypač ideologizuota. Be to, sovietinėje mokymo programoje itin ženkli vokiškos didaktikos įtaka ir perėjimas prie britiško–amerikietiško *curriculum* tipo programos buvo gana sudėtingas procesas.

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