Educational Governance Research 5

Michael Uljens
Rose M. Ylimaki *Editors*

Bridging Educational Leadership, Curriculum Theory and Didaktik

Non-affirmative Theory of Education

Educational Governance Research

Volume 5

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Foreword by William F. Pinar

In this remarkable volume Michael Uljens and Rose Ylimaki juxtapose leadership and curriculum, scholarship from and about Europe and North America, a collection acknowledging the past's presence in the present, pointing to futures few in either curriculum or leadership studies have plotted. In recasting the relations between school and society, Uljens and Ylimaki contest the terms of the neoliberal present as they invoke them: yes, education is preparing students for the existing world, but it does so by problematizing that world. That world is of course a globalized one, but here globalization is defined as tendencies toward standardization, quantification, and homogenization *but also* as localization and cosmopolitanism, what Uljens and Ylimaki term "globopolitanism." Accordingly, they encourage us to attend to the interplay among curriculum, teaching, and leadership at various levels: the global, the national, the institutional. Educational leadership is also a curriculum work, and, given their reciprocal relationship, research becomes reconstructive.

While I concentrate on clarification rather than comparison as a methodology for studying across and within national cultures and histories – even the same curriculum concepts reverberate differently in different locales – the Uljens-Ylimaki conception of education as "summoning" the Other seems congruent: in being summoned the leader or educator or researcher is also being provoked to reflect over his or her positioning and relationship. Such a calling is clear when Uljens and Ylimaki cast education as "the cultivation of discernment with the help of reason." Like erudite and engaged teachers, educational leaders "summon" others – including the public, Uljens and Ylimaki suggest – "in reflective self-activity (*Bildsamkeit*) in order for them to transcend what is given." Transcendence can follow, even accompany, clarification of the given.

In a secular sense what is given is fundamentally historical; it requires historical scholarship to clarify, composing intellectual histories that intersect with present circumstances. Only from within nations and regions and locales – in complicated conversation with colleagues worldwide – can educators and leaders clarify together what "collective belonging and coherence" might mean. Even if democratically determined, such ongoing ever renegotiated internationalism requires, it seems to me, "becoming historical" so that the "outside" – including institutional, disciplinary,

and (on the level of the state) legal arrangements – supports "a unified whole with spaces that allow for recognition of individual difference and freedom (autonomy)." In France that "unified whole" might be the state's enforcement of laicity, structurally not entirely different from Canada's enforcement of a multinational, multicultural state that, at least to some critics, threatens a tyrannical conformity.

In reaction, as Uljens and Ylimaki note, intensifying "pluralization" is also underway, a term referencing phenomena as varied as political polarization in the USA, in the UK, and across Europe, in the civil war in Syria. They also associate "pluralization" with "economic specialization" – they cite regulation and deregulation, so-called creative destruction – and these terms remind us that worldwide shifts in social formation and political movement are multileveled, often uncoordinated and unpredictable.

When academic study is undertaken with "double openness," Uljens and Ylimaki suggest, the researcher as well as the educator is engaged in dialogical encounter with oneself and others, with past and present, the local and the global. Due to the scale of such engagement, curriculum work and educational leadership are, as Uljens and Ylimaki remind, "human personal practices." So conceived, "curriculum making is educational leadership." Now often impersonalized and inhuman as scores substituting for actual children and educators, our professional calling as curriculum-leadership specialists calls upon us to study curriculum and leadership's enactment as it becomes (dis)embedded within locales, in its relations to larger social formations and political movements.

In such study, can Common Core be conceived as a compensatory contradiction of what sometimes seems intensifying social disintegration and political polarization in the USA? The very concept of Common Core – evocative of curriculum designs 100 years earlier – seems out of sync not only with the present but with the future of curriculum, at least as Williamson (2013) envisions it. In his chilling portrait, pluralization and economic specialization are elevated to somewhat superstructural elements of curriculum and leadership, Steve Jobs style.

In contrast to that soft authoritarianism decentralized as compulsory "collaboration," Uljens and Ylimaki affirm "comparative dialogue," supplemented by cosmopolitan ideals and realities, reconstructed by recursive returns to intellectual histories (and specifically classical theories of education) juxtaposed with present circumstances. As Aoki (2005 [1995]) appreciated, such sites of generative tension can encourage curriculum in a new key, what Uljens and Ylimaki foresee in "new research studies and fields" that could produce "a coherent language for policymakers, preparation programs, school development programs and practitioners." This is a vision at once theoretical and empirical, pedagogical and political, considering both policy and practice, a scale of aspiration one can only admire. That scale is shown too in their multiplying of the canonical curriculum question – what knowledge is of most worth? – into three: "Three questions rise above all: what are we going to live for (culture), what are we going to live of (economy), and how are we going to decide about these challenges (democracy)?" These questions specify the challenges humanity faces.

As such, they might serve as organizing centers of the K-12 school curriculum, a curriculum focused less on academic vocationalism and standardized test-taking than on these fundamental questions of human life. It is a life, one hardly needs reminding, embedded in a biosphere being destroyed before our eyes by greed and power, themselves transhistorical, transcultural phenomena that could also serve as organizing centers for multidisciplinary academic study. From such study might emerge "conceptual and practical answers concerning citizenship" – answers that address, with cultural, political, and historical specificity, the fundamental questions concerning the future of life on earth. Such study could comprise a cosmopolitan education in our time.

By emphasizing intellectual histories as well as present circumstances, Uljens and Ylimaki remind us (in my terms) that the path forward is not in front of us, but in back. Grounded in history, they wonder to what extent fundamental concepts of education can be reconstructed in response to the world-historical situation today. In so doing, they aspire to "contribute with a reconstruction of fundamental tensions, issues and features of modern educational thought." This is the multileveled labor of internationalization and reconceptualization, labor that leads one to return to the relation between education and democracy, a move echoing the 100-year anniversary of Dewey's effort to do so.

The reconstruction of civil society – not only in the West – is just as crucial as it was in Dewey's time: social media and information technologies intensify those aforementioned movements of greed and profit-seeking. Feeling the emergency of "now," Uljens and Ylimaki assert that "curricula specify what education should be aiming at and they specify what cultural contents should be selected in order to reach these aims." Surely curricula can address "aims," but any promise to reach them risks reinscribing instrumental rationality, itself cause and consequence of the present crisis of sustainability. Becoming historical through academic study seems professional promise enough.

As did Huebner, Uljens and Ylimaki speak of "educational influence." For me the question of educational influence is necessarily a retrospective judgment: whether or not one was influenced, by whom and what, when, and to what effect. Emphasizing influence at the outset risks reinscribing instrumentalism encoded in objectives – objectives to be assessed by quantitative outcomes. While there can be no predictable relation among curriculum, leadership, and democracy, surely the first two might mediate as they support the study of conflicting, even contradictory, currents within civil society: secularism and spiritualism, market economies and socialism, electronic media, and embodied educational experience.

Despite the confidence of the so-called learning sciences – and the neurology and pharmacology on which they sometimes rely – the relation between teaching and learning cannot be specified from the outset, only in retrospect, rendered as professional and personal judgments. The concept of "human personal practices" is here no warmed-over discredited humanism. Instead it invites, as Uljens and Ylimaki acknowledge, curriculum and leadership "pointed beyond the particularity of the

nation-state - towards spatial universalism and temporal eternity," expansive sites of generative tension encouraging educational experience. You are entering one now.

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Foreword by Carolyn M. Shields

This book provides a stimulating opening for a thoughtful dialogue about the relationships among the concept of Didaktik, best known in Europe, the traditional North American understandings of curriculum theory, and thinking about educational leadership. It introduces important and foundational historical and philosophical concepts; it identifies tensions, disagreements, and false steps; and it profers some tentative solutions to some of the greatest challenges of our times. There is no doubt that the ideas espoused and the questions posed here offer ways to move the field of education away from the rational, technical, and scientific approaches that have framed much policy and discourse to date and have the potential to engage scholars and researchers for years to come.

Uljens and Ylimaki pose three organizing questions which, they believe, reflect the core tasks of education: what are we going to live for (culture), what are we going to live of (economy), and how are we going to decide about these challenges (democracy)? They indicate that the educator's role is to mediate between the culture and the individual's developing awareness of his or her potential and freedom as a cultural and political being. And they argue for a non-affirmative approach that does not violate the freedom of the individual learner.

To provide conceptual clarity, they clearly state that

> For the purposes of our project, we begin with a classical approach and define curriculum practice as the process of formulating aims and selecting contents and defining methods, including the methods or pedagogical experiences through which content is enacted.

This debate is also reflective of the questions posed by Reyes-Guerra and Bogotch (2011) who argue that "the field of educational leadership needs to profoundly embrace the teachings of curriculum theorists" (p. 137) and assert:

> Our argument is unequivocal: unless and until we can refocus on the learners' needs in context, we will remain captive inside the political apparatus of external state and institutional authorities […]. Using curriculum theory/inquiry teachings to develop educational leadership programs, we can educate school leaders grounded in transformative leadership theory and practice, and affirm the values and processes of the American educational leadership profession on democracy. (p. 139)

Uljens and Ylimaki have, of course, affirmed the need for a democratic focus as well, thus articulating one point of agreement among the authors, despite the many tensions and debates found in this volume. Uljens and Ylimaki maintain that they "defend a so-called non-affirmative position with respect to norms." They go on to explain that this means that existing knowledge, values, or ideals are definitely taken seriously but not affirmed. Affirmation in their view denies the possibility of critical reflection, confirming a present situation in a "rather uncritical fashion." Yet, one could argue that a non-affirmative position is one which simply does not explicitly recognize and identify implicit norms. Having a norm or end goal in mind – whether democracy, individual freedom, or an open dialogue – opens up what Pinar calls "complicated conversations" still without advocating a specific path or determining a detailed set of steps to attain the goal.

Despite their previous assertion that democracy is an appropriate criterion to guide our responses to their three questions – how to decide about the challenges related to what we are going to live for, and of – Uljens and Ylimaki critique educational leadership theories as being "trapped either in an empiricist or descriptive approach or in a prescriptive and normative approach." Here, I think, is one of the challenges posed by their argument. Using the phrases "prescriptive and normative" or "normative prescription," as though the two were inextricably and permanently linked, seems to me to be erroneous.

Whether one is approaching education from the Kantian transcendental philosophy of freedom, from concept of collective nationhood, or from Heller's (1999) self-reflective consciousness of modernity itself, one's approach both arises from particular social and political contexts and is deeply embedded in the values (albeit often implicit) of those contexts. Thus, given that human existence is always embedded in a context, and given that contexts are deeply imbued with implicit or explicit values, it is difficult to overcome the fact that all theories or approaches are, in some way, normative. If one is identifying the "aims or content" of education, there will be at least an implicit sense of what is either "standard" or "ideal" in order to develop the student's understanding of his or her freedom (another value). If one believes that the goal of education is to enable a citizen "to participate in common tasks of the society, culture, politics, and economy," this undoubtedly comprises the standard for which content and pedagogy will be selected.

To be sure, there is no prescription in the above thinking, no sense of specific injunction, despite the fact that in recent years, under many regimes, authority and accountability have demanded conformity or prescription. Indeed, it might be argued that norms and prescriptions are of different natures and are both qualitatively and quantitatively distinct, in that norms relate to values and goals while prescriptions refer to rules and injunctions.

Moreover, not only might one argue that education *is* normative in the sense that, whether the valued end is freedom, equity, democracy, or something else, it expresses a desired norm, but that it *should* be normative. Giroux (2004), for example, when discussing critical pedagogy, stated that

> its normative nature does not offer guarantees as much as it recognizes that its own position is grounded in modes of authority, values, and ethical considerations that must be constantly debated in terms of the ways in which it both opens up and closes down democratic relations, values, and identities. (p. 36)

Being normative does not offer guarantees, but recognition of a starting position for a debate – the very activity in which Uljens and Ylimaki invite us to participate. Indeed, it seems to me that the central question is not whether the theory is normative, but whether, instead of being uncritically accepting of the status quo, it opens up debates about "relations, values, and identities" in such a way as to be non-prescriptive. Reyes-Guerra and Bogotch (2011) asked us to consider how we might "rewrite the field and profession of educational leadership as if curriculum theory/inquiry were a leadership skill" (p. 138). In their response, they asserted that "both the purpose and process questions [of education] turn on the values and goals of democracy." Similarly Shields (2012) grounds her discussion of transformative leadership in concepts shared with curriculum inquiry – democracy, globalization, and dialogue. These and many other scholars thus come down on the side of a normative but not prescriptive argument, as they embed the concept of education itself in the norm of democracy, without identifying a list of rules or injunctions about how to attain it. Because Uljens and Ylimaki seem to be in fundamental agreement with Shields and Reyes-Guerra and Bogotch that education must be grounded in a concept of democracy, one might question whether they are really arguing for a "non-affirmative" approach. At the very least, one might wonder about the meaning and value of a non-affirmative approach.

At the same time, being non-prescriptive is an essential aspect of education if we are not to produce robots or widgets, but independent individuals, capable of innovative thinking and of challenging the status quo in order to build a better future (yes, another normative concept, but also without a clear prescriptive path for its attainment). This certainly requires, as Uljens and Ylimaki have done, opening up the dialogue and creating space in which various perspectives may be heard and paths taken to make sense of the selected curriculum materials on one's journey to individual freedom.

The European understanding of Didaktik is concerned with selection of the content to be taught as well as its "relation to the *aims* of teaching." Teaching and education, the editors state, "is about dealing with how to live out our responsibility to support the student's stepwise development toward an independent cultural being and citizen able to participate in common tasks of the society, culture, politics, and economy." When discussing mainstream leadership studies and trends, they assert that they find "little attention" to "education theory and its interests in school-society relationships." Yet, when they describe the interpretive paradigm, they acknowledge that "an organization approach to organizations focuses on social life," and when they discuss educational leadership scholarship from a critical theory background, they describe it as "an approach to leadership grounded in a critical consciousness about power, privilege, and social inequities." These more recent approaches to leadership most certainly include discussions of pedagogy and curriculum especially as they pertain to the education of students who generally come

from groups in society that tend to be marginalized. Hence, to bring together the concepts of Didaktik, curriculum inquiry, and educational leadership, it may be useful to pay more attention to recent and more critical theories that recognize the importance of the social and political context and that help to counteract the pervasive influence of the earlier more rational, technical, and scientific paradigms of educational leadership.

Some of the more technical educational leadership literature has sometimes attempted to draw sharp distinctions (falsely in my opinion) between leadership and management, with the latter representing the more routine functions that promote the efficient operation of an organization and the former requiring more proactivity and vision. Regardless of the emphasis, educational organizations must focus on functions of teaching and learning, and hence, educational leaders must be informed, at least in part, by conceptions of Didaktik and curriculum. And, as Uljens and Ylimaki argue, it is important to make the connections among policies, aims, curriculum, Didaktik, and leadership explicit in order for the theoretical grounding to be open to the dialogue and debate that is the foundation of a robust system of education.

Following their discussion of curriculum/Didaktik and educational leadership, Uljens and Ylimaki turn their attention to a universal and increasing cosmopolitanism, the third element of their discussion. Here they ask, “How do we explain curriculum making and educational leadership relations within and between nation states?” After describing some universal driving forces – a globalized economy, technology, and neoliberal politics – they go on to ask, “Do we, for example, imagine our theories being of universal validity over time and cultures or do we see them as regionally limited?” Is it possible, they ask, to have a universal theory of education or do we have to choose between the particular and the universal? These questions raise again the issue of whether a quest for a grand theory, responding to all times and contexts, is possible or even desirable. Perhaps a focus on guiding questions that may be answered in different ways in different contexts would be more appropriate. Yet regardless of the approach, the invitation to dialogue is central; the “dynamic” approach that emphasizes comparison of similarities and differences within and between levels from classrooms to transnational levels amidst the current globalization moment is necessary if we are to understand the ways in which education plays out, demanding not only individual freedom, but the freedom of local communities and nation states to choose their own way.

In their conclusion, Uljens and Ylimaki state that autonomy is “the highest objective of education.” Indeed, it is the autonomy of the other authors in the book to forge their own paths, to agree or disagree with the editors, and to propose alternative responses to the questions of the relationships among educational leadership, Didaktik, and curriculum theory, which comprises the strength of this volume. Among the provocative ideas to be found here, Knapp and Hopmann suggest that increased attention to organizational perspectives of neo-institutionalism might contribute positively to an understanding of school leadership. Biesta posits that a language of education always needs to pay attention to questions of *content*, *purpose*, and *relationship*, hence arguing for a broader view of education than simply

that of teaching and learning. Only then, he argues, can we overcome the current equation of learning with test scores and recognize that

> education is always about the transmission and acquisition of some content (knowledge, skills, dispositions), but always also 'connects' students to particular traditions and ways of doing and being and, in addition, has an impact on their formation as a person.

His argument connects directly to that of Uljens and Ylimaki in that he asks for an integrative approach to thinking about education – one that does not separate curriculum from the aims and goals of educational leadership. Yet, neither does he call for a non-affirmative approach.

From different continents and different traditions, there is often agreement about some aspects of the conversation. Bogotch, Schoorman, and Reyes-Guerra situate the questions in a specific context, and provide a "tentative US framework," thus implicitly responding to the question of whether a theory may be universal in its application, given the various traditions from which education arises. They agree that "curriculum inquiry demands that participants have the freedom to be creative and innovative," and, at the same time, they argue the need for *conscientization*, for a recognition of injustice, and for dialogue. Huber, Tulowitzki, and Hameyer also emphasize the need for more attention to be paid to the interplay between educational leadership and curriculum theories, arguing that we need to see leadership "as a means to reach pedagogical goals and focus on education principles and not on bureaucratic ones." Sivesind and Wahlström take the argument farther, and while they argue the importance of taking both fields into consideration, they assert that it is also important to do so with "a reflexivity of how reform and research are intertwined."

As can be seen, as I refer to only a few snippets from the disparate chapters in the book, the dialogue here between leadership and curriculum theorists is rich and far-ranging. Yet, there is general agreement that the fields can benefit from a recognition of their mutual interdependence and from greater awareness of theories that help us to respond to the three questions Uljens and Ylimaki pose at the outset.

My intent here was to respond to the invitation and summons of Uljens and Ylimaki to reflect on possible responses to the dilemmas presented and the questions posed here, and to raise some questions and present some possible alternative ways of thinking, as a way of adding to the dialogue. If these reflections and the readers' careful considerations of the thoughtful chapters contained here prompt others to do the same, the book will have fulfilled the purposes of bringing the fields together in dialogue, if not in agreement. And this, after all, is the nature of freedom, autonomy, and inquiry.

Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan Carolyn M. Shields

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Foreword by Tomas Englund

In their bold, rich, and very ambitious compilation of contributions trying to combine theories and studies on curriculum, Didaktik, and educational leadership into an integrated educational theory framework, Michael Uljens and Rose Ylimaki raise many fruitful questions and perspectives. Their explicit starting point is that "curriculum making is educational leadership" because, in the construction and implementation processes of curriculum, there is "educational leadership at multiple levels from classroom to transnational levels." Starting from a nonhierarchical and a non-affirmative position, they come close to a pragmatic tradition and give cosmopolitanism a central role.

The first chapter by the editors, Uljens and Ylimaki, presents a common general framework bringing the two disparate fields of curriculum theory and leadership studies together along with critical understandings from discursive institutionalism. Following an introductory framing of the book in Part I, Uljens and Ylimaki, then, expand the focus of the volume in four additional subsections: (1) curriculum theory vs Didaktik – USA and Europe, building partly upon the transatlantic project *Didaktik meets Curriculum* from the 1990s; (2) societal and policy context; (3) leadership, Didaktik, and curriculum; and (4) discursive and multilevel perspectives. The volume is then finalized in a conclusion by the editors.

This theory-building project to fuse curriculum theory and leadership studies is remarkable in its perspective and attempt, going beyond earlier theoretical developments made within curriculum theory – namely, the reconceptualist movement, the new sociology of education and studies presented in the *Didaktik meets Curriculum* project – in which leadership studies received very limited attention. This also means that the critical and conflictual perspectives of these theories and their follow-up theoreticians, analyzing curriculum as a political problem exposed for social struggles as in historical and educational policy studies of curriculum, have had no obvious place in leadership studies. Could these curriculum theorists and followers open up for leadership studies with critical and conflictual perspectives? It does not seem probable because the new accountability and testing environment of education may not give room for critical perspectives that challenge the narrow, organizational management language.

Could leadership scholars engage in broader general education, critical education, curriculum, and policy studies in ways that challenge the dominant policy agenda? Jorunn Moller, a prominent Norwegian researcher on educational leadership, told us recently in her keynote at the ECER conference in Dublin in August 2016, based upon many years of experiences from the project ISSPP, known as the "International Successful School Principalship Project," that educational leadership in educational research needs to be complemented and informed by theory and research which focuses on recent changes in the political economy that have influenced education severely. She writes, "Although the reports briefly mention that education policies need to be aligned with other government policies, such as housing and welfare, to ensure student success, recommendations are mainly connected to improvement *within* organizations." She exemplifies saying that the discourse is mainly connected to the framework of increasing excellence in literacy and numeracy and is based on data from international large-scale student assessment. Moller argues that we, as researchers, have a responsibility to challenge this discourse in which this current policy agenda for equity is embedded.

She also stresses that the language we have adopted in education for the last decades may erode a broader discussion about education for citizenship and social justice over the long term: "One of the main tensions seems to be between discourses of competition and privatisation, which underpin new public management and discourses rooted in socially democratic ideologies, linked to notions of equity, participation and comprehensive education. We need to know more about the conditions which sustain education as public good, and it is urgent that we manage to initiate productive dialogues with practitioners and politicians about knowledge claims grounded in rigorous research". She concludes: "To lead education beyond the agenda of 'what works' we need different approaches to research, including critical studies addressing the power structures." But it is exactly this kind of perspective that studies of leadership are lacking.

How does this volume answer these kinds of challenges? In the next section, the one on historical societal-policy context, the four authors all stress the ongoing instrumentalization in this age of new public management and measurement with the implication of psychologization of education to learning.

A central part of the compilation of chapters aiming at bridging Didaktik/curriculum theory and leadership studies is the next section. We find here five chapters written by groups of authors, a total of 16 authors involved. Of course, there are, in this section, many different starting points for dealing with the relationship between curriculum theory and leadership studies, and the analyses also start from very different contexts.

The last two chapters of this section represent two different versions developed within a follow-up of the reconceptualization of curriculum movement, historically separated from each other for decades, one more macro and structurally oriented and the other more psychological. What we can see here, as in many of the other chapters and in educational research of today in general, is how the new educational policy language infiltrates the analyses and forces educational researchers to make

use of a top-down perspective of goal achievement, learning outcomes, assessments, testing, and so on.

As formulated in one of the contributions in the last section, “educational leadership has in general focused on organizational conditions and expectations for managing and leading activities; in parallel, curriculum theories have offered insights into substantial societal problems that must be addressed in school and society.” Is the future solution as developed in this chapter, to link curriculum theory to organizational theory, discursive institutionalism and educational leadership policy and research? Maybe, but the attempt to fuse curriculum theory and leadership studies will also have different implications in different contexts. Even though the possibilities of each nation-state are limited and profoundly changed by the globalization movement, there are still different preconditions in different countries.

To summarize, there is also a rather weak but anyway all-pervading and constant theme based in pragmatism (Dewey and Habermas) regarding the need to develop a deliberative stance in many of the contributions (e.g., the editors, Moos). There is also the recurring theme of cosmopolitanism, also presented in the introduction and referred to later in many of the chapters. These perspectives on pragmatism and cosmopolitanism could have been further developed. What might also have strengthened a book with this level of ambition would have been to go deeper into the ongoing changes that create new conditions for education, such as the increased parentocracy of schooling, the parental right to educational authority, legitimizing school choice, and the dissolution of public education.

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