Firmly Bolted into the Air: Wishful Rationalism as a Discursive Basis for Educational Reforms

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The aim of this article is to promote a better understanding of the problematic relations between public reform discourse and the reality of schooling. The subject is the paradox of educational reforms: while superficially decisive, they seem, at the same time, to be deficient and insufficient. The article proposes that one explanation for this "vicious circle" of educational reform might be traced to the discursive dynamics of school reform rather than to the reforms themselves. The article is based on empirical findings and theoretical constructions developed in a Finnish study. Although the case is limited to a peripheral and small country, it may have more general implications. The analysis of changes in official Finnish school discourse since the late 1960's identifies four characteristic features: individualization, "disciplinization," goal rationalization, and decontextualization. These changes then constitute a curious intertwining of utopianism and rationalism, a "wishful rationalism," as a tacit discursive principle of the authoritarian approach to school reform. Reading official school discourse with this specific logic in mind seems to reveal something about the inner dynamics and paradoxes of educational reform.

During recent decades, reforms in public education have veered towards "steady work" (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988). One reform succeeds another at an increasingly hectic pace. A new, politically correct educational language may be substituted for an old one before field workers have learned the first. Even the eagerest reformers have noticed "considerable evidence that good teachers with moral purpose become victims of either cynicism or burnout" because of new demands, promises and wishes (Fullan, 1993, p. 54). The situation of a classroom teacher often resembles the famous "double bind" outlined by Gregory Bateson (1972) as a condition for schizophrenia: A person meets such contradictory and diffuse demands that he or she is no longer able to cope with them and becomes ill (cf. LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991).

It is strange that so few scholars have analyzed this compelling logic of educational reform (e.g., however, Greenman, 1994; Hunter, 1994; Popke-

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witz, 1988). Even fewer have questioned it (e.g., Meyer, 1986; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Two stances seem to dominate studies on educational reform: First there are those with the firm belief that we have finally found some theoretical foundations for real change in schools. A good example of these optimists is Michael Fullan, who states in his recent book *Change Forces*: "Development . . . has brought us to the beginning of a new phase which will represent a quantum leap—a paradigm breakthrough" (Fullan, 1993, p. vii). Second, there are alsocritics who refer to empirical evidence that optimism in school reform has been overestimated. Pedagogical ideas and theories seem to come and go, but teaching remains unchanged (e.g., Hoetker & Ahlbrandt, 1969; Leiwo, Kuusinen, Nykänen, & Pöyhönen, 1987; Sirotnik, 1983). This disappointment is crystallized in the title of a book written by Seymour B. Sarason (1991), *The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform.* Critics even see recent reforms as deficient and insufficient: something has always been lacking, according to them. What is common to both optimists and critics is, however, that once again, a new and more comprehensive reform is seen to be necessary.

The subject of this article is this paradox of educational reform: while it appears to be final and conclusive, it seems, at the same time, deficient and insufficient. I propose that one explanation for this vicious cycle may be traced to "discursive dynamics," to the specific ways we speak about school reform rather than to the reforms themselves. The article is based on empirical findings and theoretical constructions developed in a study of official Finnish school discourse from the 1860s to the 1990s (Simola, 1995). Although the case is limited to a peripheral and small country, I will argue for its more general importance. In what follows, I will first describe my approach and material. In the main part of the article, four discursive changes in official Finnish school discourse after World War II are identified. These changes then form the basis for a tacit discursive principle of school improvement that may shed light on the paradox of educational reform.

THE MATERIAL AND THE APPROACH

One might ask why somebody in the so-called international academic community should pay attention to empirical findings from such a seemingly peripheral country as Finland. Although space restrictions prevent detailed argument, I would like to claim that the Finnish case might be seen as an accelerated, compressed version of the global process of mass schooling (e.g., Meyer, Ramirez, & Soysal, 1992; Simola, 1993a). The Finnish comprehensive educational system was developed recently, but at the same time, very rapidly and systematically. Moreover, Finnish political culture is even morestatist than the cultures in other Nordic countries. As one reflec-

tion of this, the German "state ethics" and *étatiste* philosophy dominated the academic field until World War II, after which, Anglo-American influence took over, as it did in other Nordic countries. Given the evidence of new features of globalization in education discourse (Lundgren, 1990), it is reasonable to treat the Finnish case not only as an interesting and curious one for an international audience, but also as an example of a more general phenomenon.

This article concerns official educational discourse in Finland during the decades after World War II. The focal period is the 1970s, sometimes characterized as the "Golden Era of Educational Reforms".[1] Three important reforms were carried out. First, in the *Comprehensive School Reform* (1972–1977), the dual-track school system of eight-year compulsory schooling and parallel grammar school was replaced by the single, mixed-ability, comprehensive school, in which all pupils were schooled for nine years. Second, *Teacher Education Reform* was put into practice from 1973–1979, and it radically changed the training of primary school teachers (those who teach at the lower level, from Grades 1 to 6, in comprehensive school). Their training was removed from teacher-training colleges and small-town "teacher preparation seminaries" to new university faculties of education, established as part of the reform. It was raised to master's degree level in 1979. This dramatically raised the role of educational studies in teacher training, and education as an academic discipline expanded rapidly. All this was due at least in part to the third reform, the *General Syllabus and Degree Reform in Higher Education* (1977–1980), which abolished the bachelor's degree (that returned in 1994). Since 1977, all those wishing to become teachers have had to have a master's degree (Simola, 1993a; 1993b).

The discursive changes accompanying these reforms, both as their product and their producer, were no less dramatic. The comprehensive school presented itself as the "New School" and did its best to distinguish itself from the old elementary school. Similarly new teachers and educational scientists distanced themselves from their predecessors. It is not an exaggeration to say that a new official school discourse was created. This discourse, which materialized in the national curricula, governmental committee reports, and in legislative and administrative texts, is the subject of this article.

Educational reforms are not born by themselves; they are made. In Finland, governmental committees have been central instruments in planning and justifying them. According to a Finnish study, education:

> . . . has traditionally been an area in which government committees have played a particularly central role in the planning and preparation of government action and in drafting government policy for the sector

> as a whole. It is through the institution of the committee that education has been brought under strict governmental control, and the committee has become a vital instrument of educational policy as practiced by the state. (Hovi, Kivinen, & Rinne, 1989, p. 243)

The authority of the committees has been reflected in the fact that, in some cases, their proposals have become the official curriculum itself, both for compulsory education and teacher training. Reports have also been scientifically legitimized by the important role that educational scientists have attained in the committees, particularly since the late 1960s. The material in this study includes the national curriculum documents for elementary and comprehensive schooling from 1925, 1952, 1970, 1985, and 1994, as well as the committee texts on schooling and teacher education. The former were written as models for the national curriculum with more precise documents to be formulated at the local level: in 1925 and 1952 by the school, in 1970 and 1985 by the municipal authorities, and in 1994 again by the school.[2]

The committee and curricular texts are the serious, authoritative verbal acts of experts who speak as such and who thereby express the "official truth" on schooling. They are, to quote Michel Foucault (1972), discursive "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (p. 49). Although these verbal acts are the products of individuals, they have (especially when circulating as legal texts, as administrative orders, and as state documents) the appearance of anonymity. This kind of text has the guarantee of the state as the "geometrical locus of all perspectives", as "the holder of the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence" (Bourdieu 1990, p. 137). As such, it also has coercive force in relation to the reality of schooling.[3] My main focus, however, is not on the ideas, paradigms, or premises presented in intentional or explicit forms, but rather, on something from the ambiguous area between words and things; on conceptions that are often taken for granted or are self-evident. Thus, the approach of my study could be characterized as an "archaeological stance" or as a "history of truth" in the Foucauldian sense.[4]

THE INDIVIDUALIZED PUPIL

Before World War II, Finnish curricular and committee texts rarely mentioned pupils as individuals. It was not the individual, but a group of children who were to be educated. When a child or a pupil was spoken of in the singular, it was in the sense of the generalized individual. Although the benefits of mass schooling were mentioned, this type of education was principally legitimized by the needs of the society, the nation, and/or the fatherland. In 1946, the Elementary School Committee saw it as the task of

the elementary school to train workers; the task of the lower secondary (middle) school to train supervisors; and the task of the secondary school (gymnasium) to train managers (Committee Report [CR], 1946, p. 17). The aim was to educate pupils in the established religious and peasant way of life where—as a Finnish study phrased it—"work and faith are the central concepts of the curriculum, and home and fatherland, [its] solid ground" (Rinne, 1987, p. 109).

After World War II, the modern individual did emerge as the legitimating basis for compulsory schooling but was still clearly subordinated to the interests of society. The school was seen as a "miniature society" and a "working place for children" (Curriculum [CUR], 1952, p. 28). Life in school was to be molded into a completely educative training ground for civic rights and duties. These features were to be utilized to mold school life as totally educative. The main task of the school was to train "individuals for society" (CUR, 1952, pp. 13-14, 28).

Only since the late 1960s has the modern individual surpassed society as the primary, authorized targetfor schooling. The main ethos was found in the new promise to respond to individual learning needs and the individual qualities of each pupil. In the 1970 curriculum (CUR 1970), the focus of pedagogical problematization shifted from the number of pupils to the diversity of individual pupil personalities. Pedagogic expediency and flexibility became more important than the number of pupils. This way of speaking might be crystallized as a "family tutor illusion" (Simola, 1993b, p. 179), speaking as if the basic social relation in the school were one teacher to one pupil.

The focus of the teacher's work changed from molding the school life of a group of pupils and became an individual-centered task. Before the late 1960s, the need for individual observation was focused on pupils who were labelled as "behaviorally problematic," rather than on every pupil. Since the 1970s, however, teachers have been required to know every single pupil intimately—to "be aware of the study-related factors in the individual pupil's home environment," to know "the previous learning results, abilities, attitudes, expectations and the health of the pupil"—whether a primary school teacher with 20 pupils or as a subject teacher with 200 pupils (CUR, 1975, pp. 32–33).

The promise to respond to the diversity of pupils has culminated in the most recent texts, in which the individual-centered task of the teacher is reinforced by emphasizing the ethical character of the teacher's work. In the latest (1994) curriculum, the teacher is seen as a "counselor of learning," or a "designer of the learning environments" for individual learners. The school now carries the rhetoric of offering "individual study plans" or even "personal curricula," in accordance with the needs and abilities of pupils (CUR, 1994, pp. 10, 20).

According to L. W. Anderson (1994), attempts to individualize instruction in modern pedagogy can be traced to the work of Frederic Burk in San Francisco at the beginning of the twentieth century. The yearbook of the prestigious National Society for the Study of Education, published in 1925, was devoted entirely to individualized instruction. This pursuit has been at the heart of various famous reform programs, such as the Winnetka, Illinois, the Dalton, and the Decroly, ever since.

It is an interesting question, then, why progressive individualization—or the "family tutor illusion"—arrived in Finland so late. In Sweden, for example, it has been said that in the 1940s, the public school was no longer seen as being in the service of society, but rather of the individual (Broady, 1981). Key words, even in the Finnish progressive "New School" movement after the 1930s, were *Die Arbeitschule*, workbooks, and social education rather than "child-centered" individualism (Lahdes, 1961). The principle of individualizing teaching was not part of the Finnish pedagogical vocabulary before the 1960s (Lahdes, 1966). I have referred to two intertwined reasons for this elsewhere (Simola, 1995). First, the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society and subsequently to a post-industrial society began in Finland only after World War II, although its rapid growth among European countries was also exceptional. Second, the Finnish elementary school became the school for all children only in the late 1950s. Up to the 1940s, some twenty percent of urban pupils went to private schools, and only the comprehensive school reform in the 1970s universalized and systematized nine-year compulsory schooling as a normal part of the life-span of every citizen (Kivinen, 1988). It is fair to claim, therefore, that only the enrollment of children from the upper social strata in public schools made it necessary to internalize progressive, child-centered rhetoric as part of official Finnish school discourse.

THE "DISCIPLINIZED" TEACHER

The concept of the ideal teacher, incorporated explicitly and implicitly in official Finnish school discourse, also profoundly changed during the post-War decades. The basis of this shift was the professionalization of teaching. This expertise became more and more precisely determined by virtue of what was seen as essential to be offered to students in the course of teacher education. This historical process is here called "disciplinization."

Ever since ethics and psychology became differentiated from religion at the beginning of this century, the knowledge base of teaching, (i.e., educational studies,) has consisted of pedagogical, psychological, philosophical, societal, and practical studies. Until World War II, and in certain respects even until the 1960s, educational aims were formulated upon ethics and

the prerequisites of psychology. The task was to combine these two premises into practical teaching methods.[5] Educational studies in teacher education were ideological, in the sense that they were meant, first and foremost, to develop a teacher's devotion and consciousness of mission. Educational knowledge was, on the other hand, also expected to be practical and to provide a repertoire of teaching methods to be applied in various teaching situations. One may conclude that, until the mid 1960s, educational studies in teacher training were multiple, pragmatic and ideological, based on psychology and ethics and in all ways related to the needs of teaching practice as interpreted by the National Board of Education.

The turning point toward an academic determination was the 1967 Teacher Training Committee Report (CR, 1967). The model of the teacher as a well-educated handyman was replaced by the model of the science-legitimated expert. It was proposed in the 1969 report that responsibility for teacher education be wholly assigned to the universities, and the 1975 report suggested that the training be raised to the master's degree level. The intention was to transform teaching from "a haphazard activity into a rational one" through the *scientification* of teacher education (CR, 1975, p. 40). The new teacher was to become a "didactic thinker"[6] and "researcher into his/her work" (CR, 1967, p. 55; CR, 1975, pp. 40, 50, 54; CR, 1989, p. 65). The students of the 1990s would have to grind their way through educational studies five times as long as their predecessors did in the 1960s. The basis for the organization of educational studies for teacher trainees became educational sciences, including references to the sociology and philosophy of education, although the emphasis was on didactics and educational psychology.

The disciplinization of the teacher's education base culminated in the 1989 committee report (CR, 1989) where didactically oriented educational science appeared as the only source of "true" knowledge for teaching: the teacher's knowledge thus became synonymous with didactic knowledge. The report mentioned the multiplicity of teachers' work, but there was only one reference to educational psychology and none to sociology or the history of education. Philosophical elements were acknowledged as an emphasis on the ethical character of the teaching profession and as a request for a kind of educational ideology. This "disciplinization" could be characterized as "didacticization," where the pragmatic and ideological teacher's knowledge was replaced by didactics as the true "science of teaching."

It is no wonder that the way of speaking about field teachers in official school discourse has also changed dramatically in state educational discourse since the late 1960s. According to the 1952 committee (CUR, 1952, pp. 54, 60), Finnish elementary school teachers were "lively and willing to develop themselves in their work." The committee emphasized that the

role of the field teachers in school development was more consistent and, in a way, more important than the pedagogical upswings. It was proposed to establish an office at the National Board of Education with the objective of collecting and sharing the experiences of the field teachers in terms of the experiments carried out on their own initiative. Since the 1970s, field teachers have been seen as obstacles and objects rather than as innovators and subjects of reform. They have been referred to in lukewarm, if not openly critical, terms. The direction of the innovations and improvements has been monotonously top-down: only from academic educational science and centralized projects and experiments.[7]

I have so far concentrated on ruptures, but there also seems to be continuity in the disciplinizing dimension. It is a question of who is empowered to take the floor in the discursive field of teacher education. It is clear that it is mainly officials of the National Board of Education (later also from the Ministry of Education) and educational scientists (later didacticians) who have been able to speak authoritatively. Being a classroom teacher has never been a sufficient qualification for being invited to serve on a committee. From a total of 134 members of governmental teacher-training committees since the 1920s, only five might be categorized as field teachers (Simola, 1995, p. 208). Although a few professors of "subject disciplines"[8] have been members of some committees, knowledge of the subject matter has had no articulative power in outlining the "true" knowledge necessary for preservice teachers. Neither has there been an educational philosopher, sociologist, or historian on any committee.

How can the disciplinization of the teacher's knowledge outlined above be related to the more general tendencies in education? One evident connection is with the studies and theorizing on the professionalization of teaching. A constant theme in that discussion has been the constitution of a science-legitimated pedagogical knowledge base whereby teaching could be regarded more as classic professional work, like that of the physician, for example (Darling-Hammond, 1990). There are various critical voices questioning the self-evident blessing of professionalism (Avis, 1994; Burbules & Densmore, 1991; Noddings, 1990), but just a few focusing on the role of educational sciences and teacher educators themselves in this process (Popkewitz, 1994; Popkewitz & Simola, 1996). It was David Labaree (1992) who brought this issue into discussion when he claimed that those most eager to promote the professionalization of teaching are not the teachers themselves, nor even their unions, but the academic teacher-educators. He argued that the professionalization of teaching is first and foremost an extension of the efforts of teacher-educators to raise their professional status by developing a science of teaching based on a formal rationalist model. From this point of view, the Finnish solution to move all

teacher education to the Master's level might be unique in the world (Simola, Kivinen, & Rinne, 1997).

THE GOAL RATIONALIZED CURRICULUM

The change in the Finnish conception of the curriculum was already taking root in the 1950s, but did not materialize until the 1970s. Referring to Max Weber's (1947) well-known distinction between goal- and value-rational orientation[9], I have characterized this shift as "goal rationalization."[10]

In the first national curriculum of 1925 (CUR, 1925), the mission of the school was clearly seen as value rational. The absolute values of home, community, work, religion, and the fatherland directed all educational activity. References to goals, to the means of achieving them, and to the evaluation of the efficiency of such actions were very rare. The school completely embraced its mission to civilize the Finnish people. In fact, there was no intention to "develop" the school in the modern sense of the word, but rather to return it to the "original idea and spirit" outlined in 1861 by the "Founding Father" of Finnish elementary education, Uno Cygnaeus.

The 1952 curriculum (CUR, 1952) was an intermediate phase that represented a clear step from value rationalism towards goal rationalism. The text emphasised the importance of the goal consciousness of teachers, but this was for the purpose of unification, rather than for efficacy. The goals were still essentially ethical, and one can find very few formulations of goals for learning. It was explicitly stated that setting general goals would contradict the compulsory character of the school: "The main task of the teacher is to direct the studies of the pupils rather than to check their outcomes" (p. 32). This notion of educational action in the 1952 curriculum may be characterized as being increasingly goal-rational, but far from complete.

It was the 1970 (CUR, 1970) curriculum that introduced a completely goal-rational discourse. The general values and purposes of the school were to be operationalized into parts of the hierarchical system of goals. The goals were to be the basis for choosing teaching methods, materials, organization, and equipment. It was also explicitly required that measurable and exact objectives for pupils' behavior would be deduced from the general aims (pp. 20–23). In principle, it was considered possible to measure exactly whether or not the school had achieved its goals in as much as the technical instruments for that purpose had been developed. However, this ideal of exact goal-setting was never realized in other parts of the curriculum. The goals were indeed formulated, but not uniformly or systematically. They rarely concerned learning, but rather teaching. The 1985 curriculum (CUR, 1985) did not formulate exact goals either, although it declared that "steering by the goals" was to be at the core of the national control of schooling (p. 7).

The current 1994 curriculum (CUR, 1994) explicitly declares the abandonment of "the goal-oriented learning ideology" (p. 10). Ironically, it recognizes, formally at least, the 1970 ideal of a uniform "goal system," set in terms of individual pupil learning. While the 130-year history of the Finnish curriculum up to 1994 was a continuum of more and more sophisticated and exact articulation of what was to be taught by the teacher, the 1994 curriculum effected a dramatic rupture of this continuity. The contents have been absorbed into abstract and general notions, while the goals take center stage, stating uniformly and systematically what the individual pupil should learn. It is fair to say that the 1994 curriculum—or more precisely the national "framework curriculum"—is composed virtually of goals and the assessment of their achievement.[11]

It is no wonder, then, that the "goal consciousness," the internalization of the official goals, became the essence of the ideal teacher during the reform of the 1970s. The concept of the teacher as a "model citizen" has been vital in official discourse. Since the duty of the primary school teacher was to guarantee that every citizen achieve the proper level of decent manners, behavior, and habits, the teachers themselves were carefully recruited according to the same principles. The civilizing mission formed the core of the occupational ethos. In the 1970 curriculum, goal consciousness popped up as a central quality of the teacher in the new comprehensive school. In 1984, teachers' obligations "to pursue the attainment of goals stated for the comprehensive school" were written into the legislation (CUR, 1985, p. 59). Commitment to the goals thus represented the point at which the institutional belief in mass schooling intersected with the conviction about the power of the official curriculum as the main tool for the development of school practice.

How do these Finnish findings relate to international tendencies? In the Anglo-American discussion, goal rationalism in education may be crystallized in the well-known "Tyler Rationale" for curriculum construction (Tyler, 1950). According to this linear model, there are "four fundamental questions which must be answered in developing any curriculum or plan of instruction":

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?

2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?

3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?

4. How can we determine whether the purposes are being attained? (pp. 1–2)

Though heavily criticized over the years (see, e.g., Kliebard, 1975, 1995; Miettinen, 1990; Wise, 1976), the Tyler Rationale has maintained its posi-

tion, especially outside the purely academic field, as a paradigmatic notion according to which curricular planning must be started by formulating the goals. Once determined, the goals will guide the other curricular decisions on learning experience, organization, and evaluation. This might be seen as a rule of thumb created by the Tyler Rationale, regardless of whether Tyler himself would be pleased about it (see, e.g., Doyle, 1992; Hlebowitsh, 1992; Madaus & Stufflebeam, 1989). Its endurance is understandable because of the formal rationality inherent in all modern Western thinking and especially in societal practices known as "social engineering" (see, e.g., Toulmin, 1990).

In Finnish educational discourse, this kind of goal rationalism was seen first of all through the taxonomy of educational objectives and the Mastery Learning Strategies of Tyler's famous student, Benjamin S. Bloom (Miettinen, 1990, pp. 88–90). Its most lasting form, however, has been a diagram called the *basic model of instruction.* This has been presented since the 1970s in the classic form

goals—>organization of instruction—>learning—>evaluation and feedback

both in committee texts and in teacher education textbooks (see, e.g., CR, 1975, p. 44; Lahdes, 1986, p. 21; Lahdes, 1997, p. 14). The shift to the rhetoric of accountability and management by results in the 1990s merely meant a more developed version of the management by objectives (MBO) of the 1970s, as put by a Finnish specialist in management theory (Temmes, 1990).[12]

THE DECONTEXTUALIZED SCHOOL

The fourth change in official Finnish school discourse can be characterized as a certain kind of "decontextualization" of the school. By that I mean a discursive break where the socio-historical institutional context of teaching and learning in school vanished from official texts on education during the 1970s. This decontextualization, in a sense, made possible the individualization of the pupil, the *disciplinization* of the teacher and the goal rationalization of the curriculum. It is fair to claim that it was only through forgetting the mass character and compulsion of schooling that the promise to respond to the individual learning needs and capacities of every pupil could be considered. It was only through the exclusion of the everyday reality of schooling that individual-centered didactics could become the core of the teacher's professional knowledge. It was only through underestimating the institutional, historical, and cultural frames of schooling that the goal-rationalism could be seen as the omnipotent basis for educational reform.

The institutional context of teaching and learning in schools disappeared gradually from official school discourse after the late 1960s. This was largely realized in the following three ways: first, the school became a natural environment for children; second, learning in school appeared as a universal model for learning; and finally, certain institutional characteristics of schooling disappeared from official school discourse.

Let us start with the "naturalization" of the school. It has been said, and with reason, that it was only through the Finnish comprehensive school reform of the 1970s that a long-lasting system of basic education became institutionalized and was considered a natural part of the normal development of every citizen (Kivinen, 1988). No wonder, then, that before this, it was common to refer to the arbitrary character of the school, even in official texts. In the 1920s, the curriculum committee cited a rural teacher's lively narrative on the alienation of the school from the rural, agricultural spirit (CUR, 1925). In the 1950s, schooling was seen as a necessity for civilization, but also as "unnatural in its actual comprehensiveness starting as early as the age of seven" (CUR, 1952, p. 27). It was claimed that schooling, even at its best, "imposes on children a lot of strange things that will be resisted by the nature of the child" (ibid.). This confrontation between the "natural" child and "unnatural" schooling disappeared during the 1970s when the problem of unnaturalness changed into one of pedagogical expediency. The school became a natural environment for children. An example of this "naturalization" was the changed attitude towards the predictive power of school marks and reports. While in 1952, school marks were seen as lacking predictive power because of the one-sided character of school life itself, in the 1970 curriculum, the only problem was the insufficiently developed technical means of evaluation (CUR, 1952, p. 83; CUR, 1970, p. 161).

Second, there was an essential shift in the way learning was discussed. Before the 1970s, it was rare to mention *learning* in official school discourse, *teaching* being discussed instead. Moreover, references to learning in the 1925 and 1952 curricula nearly always dealt with learning basic skills and values. "School learning" was often explicitly mentioned, whereas the expression completely disappeared from curricular texts after 1970. Elementary learning was very rarely discussed in the 1970 curriculum, and high-level, advanced learning became a constant topic of discourse. The focus shifted to learning abstractions, learning based on internal motivation, creative learning, meaningful learning, and so on. Learning in school become a synonym for learning in general. Learning difficulties no longer referred only to learning difficulties in school, but also to learning difficulties in general, in any context. To conclude, learning in school became the model for learning—it became universalized as the only "real" learning (cf. Illich, 1986).

The third mode decontextualization was the concealment of certain peculiarities of schooling, especially its obligatory and mass character. One fundamental argument for compulsory schooling was to save children from the disastrous idleness brought about by the labour laws of the late nineteenth century, which limited the opportunities for children to work. This protective "storehouse function" of schooling remained an explicit and legitimate argument for lengthening compulsory schooling until the mid-1960s, when problems of discipline and behaviour among idle fourteen- to fifteen-year-olds were cited (CR, 1966). The compulsory character of the school was still a moral reasoning issue in 1970, but no hint of it can be found in official texts after 1975. The mandatory nature of the comprehensive school seemed to become irrelevant in state educational discourse. The mass character of the school was also explicitly articulated before the late 1960s. In fact, it was then seen as a necessary precondition for social education: the school was to be a miniature society and work place for children. Such a function could be realized only in a social context where there were many persons, and thus a one-to-one relationship between the pupil and the teacher was the exception rather than the rule.

The disappearance of the teaching and learning institutional context culminated in the latest major documents for teacher education (CR, 1989) and for the comprehensive school (CUR, 1994). A distanced reader might imagine the main forms of studying to be individual or small-group teaching. The classroom would no longer seem to exist, and the basic social unit would not be a teaching group or a class, but the school, envisioned in the 1994 curriculum as "a versatile learning centre that provides flexible and high-quality educational services" to the "learners" (CUR, 1994, p. 10). The institutional context, determined by certain historical, societal, and cultural processes, has almost completely disappeared. As an example, the most important innovations affecting all teaching and learning in schools—the marketization of the comprehensive school and the introduction of a centralized national evaluation system—are not even mentioned in the 1994 curriculum.

I claimed above that it was, indeed, decontextualization that paved the way for individualization, disciplinization and goal rationalization in official Finnish school discourse. Let me illustrate this with a few examples.

Consider, first, the historical shift in the teacher's work from the group to the individual pupil. The strong Herbartian tradition in Finnish teacher training was phased out in 1944 through the introduction of a new textbook of didactics for elementary-school teacher training written by Matti Koskenniem (1944), a leading academic figure in Finnish education throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Koskenniemi's textbook was based on the social psychology of the classroom, and was permeated by the ethos of

social education. The school context with its historically formed, compulsory, and mass character was explicitly present and was tuned in to mold the institutional life of a group of future citizens. This was clearly written in the 1952 curriculum (CUR, 1952), for which the general secretary was Koskenniemi himself. After 1970, social psychology as a discipline completely disappeared from teacher-education curricula. Classroom management as a topic was moved from theoretical studies to teaching practice, and there has been no sign of contradiction between the pursuit of the individual treatment of pupils and the evident mass character of the school. Much attention was given to learning difficulties, but the teachers' unavoidable incapacity to attend to the problems of individual pupils in a full classroom was never mentioned as one of the underlying reasons. Although the vast majority of primary schools in Finland are small and rural, with fewer than three teachers, their specific pedagogical problems were almost completely neglected in teacher education documents (see, Simola, in press).

My second example concerns an explicit conceptual model where decontextualization is crystallised in curricular thinking. This *determinant model for education and the curriculum* appeared in official texts for the first time in 1968 (CR, 1968, p. 8), and has been implicitly present without criticism ever since. It is presented in a textbook for didactics (Lahdes, 1977, pp. 21–28; 1986, pp. 37–41; 1997, pp. 21–23) that has had a monopoly position in teacher education since the 1970s.[13] The model seeks explicitly "to cover the whole of the teacher's duties." It emphasizes that the task of the teacher "must be realized in the general framework" described by three determinants in the model. First, "the pupil" determinant consists of "singular, unique, and individual pupils" who are the objects of education but, at the same time, interact with their teacher and classmates. Second, "the branches of knowledge" determinant refers to "that knowledge and skill to be transmitted through education to the next generation." Finally, "society" is, on the one hand, the macro-level context of the teaching/learning process, because "the instruction always happens at a certain moment in a certain society within certain historical, social, and economic circumstances." On the other hand, "society" is also a personified actor who "pays the costs of education, answers for the administration of the schools and proposes general goals for the comprehensive school in particular" (CR, 1975, pp. 43–44).

While framing and focusing Finnish educational discourse, the determinant model effectively excludes alternative ways of thinking, speaking, and acting. To capitalize on Bourdieu's (1977, pp. 167–169) concept of *doxa*, one may say that the model draws the line between the "universe of discourse or argument" and the "universe of [the] undiscussed [or] undis-

puted," between a field of doxa and a field of opinion. At the same time, it constitutes this way of speaking as authoritative expert discourse. As far as a decontextualization is concerned, neither the school nor the classroom as micro-level environment of teaching and learning is of interest here. Neither is seen as essential or meaningful in serious discussions of schooling or teacher training. Furthermore, it is not only the micro- but also the macro-level schooling context that becomes irrelevant because of the *naïve* social functionalism of the model. Society is reduced, on the one hand, to the benevolent and well-intentioned actor and, on the other, to the backdrop in front of which football, as well as Shakespeare, might be played.

As my last example, I would like to mention the curious pedagogical construction that I have characterized elsewhere (Simola, 1998) as "school-free pedagogy." I have shown that, in official Finnish school discourse, it is possible to reconstruct a kind of abstract and universalistic, non-historical, and decontextualised academic discipline of how the teacher *should* teach and how the pupil *should* learn in school—as if it were not school. Schooling as an institution for historically formed, obligatory mass education has tended to be dismissed as uninteresting. The everyday activities of teaching and learning in school, the sociocultural system of time, space, and rituals—"the grammar of schooling" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995)—appears to be out of focus or even absent when improvements in teaching and learning are being planned and propagated. Perhaps this is why an extensive national evaluation report of educational sciences by the Academy of Finland characterised an essential part of Finnish didactic research as studies which are often "*for* school teaching" but not, however, concerned "with teaching and learning *in* school" (Educational Research in Finland, 1990, p. 56, emphasis added).

DISCURSIVE DYNAMICS OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM

A Swedish scholar, Gunilla Svingby (1979), has characterized the particular literature developed in Swedish school reforms after World War II as "curricular poetry." She proposed that this way of speaking often loses its connection with classroom reality and for that reason fails to promote challenges to existing educational practices. The "tacit discursive principle" of official Finnish school discourse which has been outlined in this article has much in common with Svingby's idea. Emphasizing its anonymous, rationalist, systematized, and science-legitimized character, I have, however, called it the "wishful rationalism," a kind of rationalism of hopes. This is basically because it has a "rational" as well as "poetic" dimension.

The concentration on the individual and the disregard for institutional frames identified earlier as tendencies in official Finnish school discourse

might be seen as curricular poetry. Surely this way of speaking is not peculiar to education but belongs to "a bizarre human tendency that assumes it is necessary to imagine an idealized state as an impetus for taking action," as Herbert Kliebard wrote (1995, p. 87). He also referred to John Dewey (1922), who noted more than seventy years ago:

> Men have constructed a strange dream-world when they have supposed that without a fixed ideal of a remote good to inspire them, they have no inducement to get relief from present troubles, no desire for liberation from what oppresses and for clearing up what confuses present action. (p. 282)

Modern reform discourse, however, is not only poetic, but also rational in the Weberian sense that understanding, motivation, and justification of action is based on its consequences. The particular processes of goal rationalization and disciplinization in official Finnish school discourse might be seen as that rationalism. What is ironic here is that this particular combination of utopianism and rationalism makes this discourse so "efficient." Dewey spoke about "impotent wishes" and "compensatory dreams" (p. 236), criticizing what he called "the doctrine of fixed ends":

> The doctrine of fixed ends not only diverts attention from examination of consequences and the intelligent creation of purpose, but, since means and ends are two ways of regarding the same actuality, it also renders men careless in their inspection of existing conditions. An aim not framed on the basis of a survey of those present conditions which are to be employed as means of its realization simply throws us back upon past habits. We then do not do what we intended to do but what we have got used to doing, or else we thrash about in a blind ineffectual way. The result is failure. (p. 232)

We may now read the Finnish version of the Tyler Rationale through the rationalism of hopes, through a kind of wishful rationalism of authoritative expert discourse on educational reform (see Figure 1).

According to this interpretation, the Finnish version of the Tyler Rationale appears to be a vicious circle of failure and a reform generator, regardless of what happens in classroom reality. By focusing on goals and means but neglecting the context of activity, this discursive formation leans on wishes as goals, and on school-free pedagogy as means.[14] This creates a kind of double bind. By concentrating on fixed but decontextualized goals in planning, school-free pedagogy in realization, and measured learning in results, a Tylerian will very obviously confront the need for new reform. The mission seemes to have failed. On the other hand, concentration on predetermined goals also means a tendency to ignore the outcome of reforms not

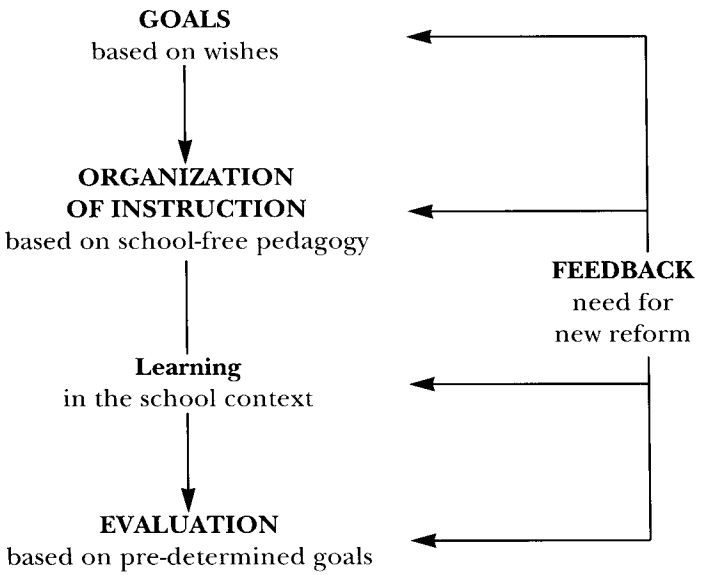

Figure 1: The vicious circle of educational reform discourse

directly linked to those goals. What might be lost is sensitivity to seizing on unintended and unexpected consequences—which might have positive as well as negative results—of carrying out reform at the classroom level. Ironically, reform may be doomed to failure even though there might be considerable success at the grass-roots level. And vice versa, the official results of reform may seem positive, even though unfavorable side-effects could result from the innovation.

This specific discursive formation is a curious intertwinement of utopianism and rationalism, of *credo* and *ratio*. It appears as a locus of symbolic struggle between the agents in the social field of education where reform discourse *per se* has become a symbolic capital in the Bourdieuan sense (cf. Jóhannesson, 1993). It constitutes the core of the professionalist construction of "self-created" problems that Randall Collins (1990) suggests is "the most important component for a theory of idealized occupational status groups" (pp. 20–21). It is not difficult to see how functional this wishful rationalism is for various interest groups in the field of education. By sweeping the institutional limitations of obligatory mass schooling under the carpet, it was possible to make the school seem omnipotent or advanced, fulfilling its tasks, and thus deserving continuous public faith (cf. Popkewitz, 1991, p. 216; Weick, 1976). Wishful rationalism has thus prevailed in making mass education, to borrow from John W. Meyer (1986, p. 358) "a religious base of modern society."

The above is an extremely simplistic way of describing such a complex and manifold social phenomenon as educational-reform discourse. One might say that the goals are never fully "decontextualized," because everyone setting them has been in school and therefore knows, at least subjectively, what is possible there and what is not. Moreover the pedagogical means will never be completely "school-free" because many educational experts have personal classroom experience as teachers. The critics may also use arguments put forward by those defending the Tyler Rationale: it does not determine a rigid framework but rather a general direction, motive, and justification for action where the people will act creatively, using their practical knowledge (cf. Kliebard, 1995, pp. 82–83). This might indeed be the way it works. Authoritative expert discourse in modern societies does *not* function mainly through censorship, limitation, and repression, but rather through positiveness and productivity, invitation, and induction. (See, Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 133–137; Foucault, 1980; Popkewitz, 1991). It is a calling rather than an order. Although the real effects of this calling on policy-making and schooling are empirical and therefore not within the scope of this article, I venture to assume that wishful rationalism as a discursive basis for educational reform seems to have been supporting visionary, utopian, and religious-like thinking on schooling rather than encouraging realistic, analytic, and reflective thinking. To put it simply and briefly, historical and sociological amnesia in terms of schooling seems to have fostered formal credibility and consistency in educational reform but at the same time, its remoteness from the classroom reality.

CONCLUSIONS

I have attempted to outline the change in official Finnish school discourse since the late 1960s. Four new features were outlined. First, the mission of the school turned away from molding the school life of a group of pupils. The school became committed to responding to the individual learning needs and abilities of every pupil. This process has been called individualization here. Second, the knowledge-base of teaching has changed. The multiple, pragmatic and ideological combination of ethical, psychological, pedagogical, historical and content knowledge determined by the Finnish National Board of Education has been replaced by the new conception, wherein didactically-oriented educational science forms the knowledge-base for teachers' work. I have called this the "disciplinization" of the teaching knowledge. The third shift concerned the rational orientation of discourse: the former "value-rational orientation" has changed to goal rationalization, whereby predetermined goals have become the basis of all educational procedures. Finally, one more change was needed to make

individualization, disciplinization, and goal rationalization possible and credible. I have called this the decontextualization process, during which the socio-historically formed institutional context of teaching and learning in school vanished from official Finnish texts on education during the 1970s.

The first two dimensions—individualization and disciplinization—could be seen as forming the utopian part of the discourse, while the latter two—goal rationalization and decontextualization—comprise its rational part. It could be said that these four dimensions describe *what* one must say in order to be taken as a serious speaker in the state-guaranteed discursive field of education. As a tacit principle of discourse, wishful rationalism represents an attempt to determine *how* one has to speak to be considered an authoritative expert in the field. As such, this principle constitutes a genuine "truth discourse" which appears self-evident, is taken for granted, and has its effects on what is seen as interesting, important, and essential in thinking, discussing, and planning and implementing educational reforms.

Reading reform discourse with this wishful rationalism in mind seems to reveal something about the inner dynamics of science-legitimated and state-guaranteed expert discourse in which the educational reforms appear to be final and decisive but, at the same time, deficient and insufficient. Distaste for a serious analysis of educational reality and the urge to create ambitious aims tend to convert visions into impotent wishes and rationality into narrow-minded technicism. What otherwise could constitute a fruitful dialectic cycle between *credo* and *ratio* turns out to be a vicious circle in which the failure of one innovation is followed by a different innovation, rather than by reflection on the reasons for the failure of the first and efforts to revise it (Wilson & Davis, 1994). To add to its manifold potential effects, the rationalism of hopes may seduce us into forgetting that our historical experience reveals that the focus of school reforms should actually be on "how schools change reforms" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, pp. 60-84) rather than on the converse.

Generalizing the above conclusions beyond the Finnish case would naturally be a grave mistake—indeed, even decontextualizing the wishful rationalism. It is an empirical question, and so is the answer.[15] We might, however, remind ourselves of a classic proposal made by C. Wright Mills (1959). Scrutinizing an extreme case may sometimes make certain general features more transparent. There is also every reason to assume that we may speak about a kind of "world culture of mass education," with striking similarities in institutional, organizational, legitimational, and ontological features (e.g. Meyer, Kamens, & Benevot, 1992; Meyer, Ramirez, & Soysal, 1992). Therefore it is hard to believe that bolting the educational reforms firmly into the air is just a Finnish disease.

I am grateful to the Finnish poet, Pentti Saaritsa, for the expression in the title and to Sakari Heikkinen for its moulding. A number of people have reacted to various versions of this article and have challenged me on a number of issues. I wish to express my gratitude to them: Risto Eräsaari, Tuula Gordon, Sakari Heikkinen, David Labaree, Elina Lahelma, Sverker Lindblad António Nóvoa, Tom Popkewitz, and Miguel Rereyra. I would also like to thank the editor and the anonymous reviewers of the Teachers College Record *for their more than valuable coments. Last, but not least, I would like to thank Joan Nordlund for magnificent assistance with the English. Earlier drafts of this article were presented at the Conference of the Comparative Educational Society in Europe, Athens, October 1996, and at the Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society, Mexico City, March 1997.*

Notes

1 The 1970s was a period in Finland when belief in the omnipotence of central planning was at its height, not only in education policy, but also in public policy in general (cf., e.g., Antikainen, 1990; Torstendahl, 1991).

2 In accordance with the Finnish state-centered and centralized administrative tradition, national curricula have been very comprehensively documented, in volumes ranging from 300 to 700 pages. The exception was the 1994 curriculum which was only 111 pages. The 1952 curriculum was ambitiously defined as "a series of those experiences that the pupil meets in his or her school work" (Curriculum [CUR], 1952, p. 40). The definition of the 1970 curriculum was even more comprehensive. It must consist of "the explanations of all the most important measures and procedures by which the school pursues the aims that are imposed for education . . . the curriculum includes all those learning experiences that the pupils have under the guidance of the school, also outside the classrooms" (CUR, 1970, p. 56). The same conceptions were also valid for teacher-training curricular documents. The committee reports of 1922, 1945, 1947, 1952, 1960, 1965, 1968, and 1975 veered, in fact, towards the model curricula for teacher training.

3 Further citing Bourdieu (1990), the official discourse accomplishes three important functions: "First, it performs a diagnostic; that is, an act of cognition which enforces recognition and which, quite often, tends to affirm what a person or a thing is and what it is universally for every possible person. . . . In the second place, the administrative discourse, via directives, orders, prescriptions, and so forth, says what people have to do, given what they are. Third, it says what people really have done, as in authorized accounts, such as police reports. In each case, it imposes a point of view, that of the institution, by way, especially, of questionnaires, official forms and the like. This point of view is set up as a legitimate point of view, as a point of view which everyone has to recognize at least within the limits of a given society" (p. 136).

4 See, for a more detailed methodological discussion, Simola, 1995; Simola, Heikkinen & Silvonen, 1998; and Heikkinen, Silvonen & Simola, in press.

5 Finnish pedagogical history is strongly flavored with so-called Herbartianism. The pedagogy founded by the famous Swiss philosopher Johan Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841) began to flourish in Finland only at the end of the nineteenth century, by which time it was mostly unused in the rest of Europe. The Herbartian tradition in Finnish teacher training was phased out only after World War II, but its influence remained in classroom teaching until much later.

6 The term *didactics* is a very problematic one in English. It is used here in the meaning recognized in the educational literature of Germany and the Nordic countries where it closely approaches the general concept of pedagogy. Kansanen (1995) states that "in U.K. as well as in U.S. frameworks for education, the sub-area of didactics seems to be lacking. . .

Much of its content belongs to educational psychology" (p. 359). In Germany and the Nordic countries, didactic problems define an independent subdiscipline of education. The scope of didactics covers that of Anglo-American curriculum theory and educational psychology, also including much philosophical and theoretical thinking. (Ibid.) In Anglo-American literature, there are just a few texts concerning the relation between didactics and curriculum theory, (See articles on the German *Didaktik* tradition in the *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, vol. 27, issues 1 and 4 (1995).

7 See for negative connotations and direct criticism, e.g., CR, 1968, p. 50; CR, 1969, p. 43; CUR, 1970, pp. 52, 57, 120, 160–161, 165; CR, 1975, pp. 23, 32, 39, 82-83; CR, 1989, pp. 38, 46–47; CUR, 1994, pp. 3–4. The only exception was the Practising School Committee Report (CR, 1972, p. 23) that was exceptional also in another aspect: two of its members were field teachers. The centralized tradition has even resulted in "decentralization" being characterized in the Nordic countries as a "centralized decentralization" (Lander, 1991).

8 "Subject discipline" here means the subjects taught in the comprehensive school, i.e., mathematics, history, the mother tongue, etc.

9 It is fruitful to analyse this change by capitalising on Max Weber's (1947) classic formulation of two different rational orientations in social action (pp. 115–118). He made a distinction between *Zweckrationalität* and *Wertrationalität*. The first, often referred to as "instrumental rationality," is characterized by conscious reasoning in which action is viewed as a means to achieve particular ends and is oriented to anticipated and calculable consequences (Murphy, 1988, p. 199). The second mode of orientation, usually translated as "value-rationality," is characterized by a belief in the intrinsic value of the action, regardless of its consequences and is oriented to a conscious set of values (p. 199). In Weber's (1947) own words, an action is *zweckrational* when it is "rationally oriented to a system of discrete individual ends (. . .) [and] when the end, the means, and the secondary results are all rationally taken into account and weighed. This involves rational consideration of alternative means to the [particular] end, of the relations of [that] end to other prospective results of employment of any given means, and finally of the relative importance of different possible ends." According to Weber, *wertrational* action is based on "a conscious belief in the absolute value of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behaviour, entirely for its own sake and independently of any prospects of external success. . . . " (p. 117). Using this Weberian distinction, I will call the *zweckrational* orientation *goal-rational* and the *wertrational* orientation *value-rational*, thus emphasizing the distinctions between the conceptions of the ends-in-view of these two orientations. For goal rational orientation, the ends are thegoals to be reached. The goals not only give a direction for action—as do values in value-rational orientation—but their realization must also be evaluated. This implies the need to operationalize the ends, and also to change them into the means for further goals.

10 Choosing an English term here is very difficult. In educational literature, the terms *purpose, end* (or *end-in-view*), *aim, goal* and *objective* have conventionally been used. With the exception of purpose, the most abstract term, they are often used synonymously (e.g., Saylor & Alexander, 1966, p. 123). According to Robert I. Wise (1976), "Educationalists have seen fit, however, to maintain a technical distinction between aims and goals on the one hand and objectives on the other" (pp. 280–281). The distinction has been maintained with respect to the differences in level of specificity and span of time to which the terms refer.

I finally decided to use the term *goal* here for several reasons. First, it refers to a desirable consequence that is, in some reasonable sense, attainable and realistic, while the terms *end* and *aim* have the nuance of being something so general and long-term that they might give only a direction for action. Second, a *goal* refers to a more general and long-term consequence than an *objective*. Third, an *objective* does not fit here because it refers to specific cases in the behavioristic paradigm—the taxonomy of objectives by Benjamin S. Bloom and management by objectives (MBO)—which are only parts, though important ones, of some-

thing characterized here as goal-rationalization. Finally, a goal is a useful term here because of its "middle range," or intermediate character, at the levels of both specificity and span of time.

In the Finnish language, and the research material is naturally in Finnish, there is no problem. *Tavoite* in Finnish is a general term that may refer equally well to an end, an aim, and a goal, as well as to an objective. (See Kansanen & Uusikylä, 1982, pp. 33–38).

11 The centralized goal system has been replaced by a centralized assessment system, as ironically noted by Lundgren (1991, p. 62,): "What begins as a change in steering systems directed towards a distribution of policy making from the centre to the periphery turns out to be a strengthening of a central steering system."

12 This appeared beautifully in a speech by the head of the National Board of Education, an architect of the "Big Wave," the Finnish curriculum reform of 1994: "Genuine management by results in the educational sector has two prerequisites: first, a steering unit that states the goals and gives resources and, second, a level that creates the products and services, i.e., the schools" (Hirvi, 1991).

13 The author of the book, Emeritus Professor Erkki Lahdes, was one of the main architects of the reforms, both in the comprehensive school and in teacher education. He has been characterized as "the leading representative of educational scientists" in Finland by the influential Head of the Ministry of Education (Numminen, 1987, p. 257). While introducing this model, Lahdes referred to the determinants of curriculum planning presented by J. Galen Saylor and William M. Alexander (1966). However, it did not coincide very well with the model of Saylor and Alexander because they speak, on the one hand, about "the learners that attend the school and the social group that establishes the school for educative purposes" as "the two fundamental determinants of the educative process" (ibid., 123); and on the other hand, they refer to five "curriculum determinants . . . that constitute the basic considerations which guide curriculum planners": pupils, social values, structures and demands, the functions and aims of the school, the nature of knowledge and the process of learning (ibid., p. 7).

14 I am not claiming that goal-rationalism *per se* would exclude the context from consideration. Weber (1947) himself spoke about calculation of the behavior "of objects in the external situation and of other human individuals . . . as "conditions" or "means for successful attainment" (p. 115). We may, however, assume that the intellectual focus is very strongly on goals and means. According to Weber, one condition for goal-rational action is that "the end, the means, and the secondary results are all rationally taken into account and weighed" (Ibid., p. 117). The context of action is seen as secondary to the scrutiny of goals and means. It appears as given, taken for granted, and self-evident, as something natural and durable, something out of the sphere of influence of the actor.

15 I am currently working on a comparative project, "Rationalism of Hopes—A discursive basis of educational reforms?" It is being financed by the Academy of Finland and includes reform documents from Spain, Argentina, Germany, Sweden, Britain, and the United States as research material.

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