

This is an electronic reprint of the original article. This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

The Why, Where, How and What of Curriculum Leadership: A Non-affirmative Approach.

Uljens, Michael

Published in:

Leadership in educational contexts in Finland: Theoretical and empirical perspectives

DOI:

[10.1007/978-3-031-37604-7_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-37604-7_9)

Published: 01/01/2023

Document Version

Final published version

[Link to publication](#)

Please cite the original version:

Uljens, M. (2023). The Why, Where, How and What of Curriculum Leadership: A Non-affirmative Approach. In R. Ahtiainen, E. Hanhimäki, J. Leinonen, M. Risku, & A.-S. Smeds-Nylund (Eds.), *Leadership in educational contexts in Finland: Theoretical and empirical perspectives* (pp. 179-197). (Educational Governance Research; Vol. 23). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-37604-7_9

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Chapter 9

The Why, Where, How and What of Curriculum Leadership: A Non-affirmative Approach



Michael Uljens

Abstract The movement from a social-democratic welfare state towards a neoliberal competition state since the 1990s in Europe required a multi-level perspective to understand the dynamics within and relations between macro-level educational governance and micro-level educational leadership. The chapter starts with critiquing initiatives to handle this multi-level nature of leadership. First, the limit of universalist multi-level models is that they are educationally unarticulated, while particularist approaches are typically specialised on either curriculum or leadership of teaching. Second, instrumental and normative approaches in turn are problematic in education for a political democracy. To overcome these dilemmas, the chapter argues that curriculum leadership theory needs to explain (a) the societal task of education (the *why* and *where* of educational leadership), (b) the pedagogical nature of leadership interactions (the *how* of educational leadership) and (c) the object led or the teaching-studying-learning process (the *what* of educational leadership). To this end, this chapter outlines how Bildung-centred non-affirmative education theory (NAT) offers fruitful concepts for approaching the pedagogical dimensions of educational leaders' curriculum work.

Keywords Non-affirmative education theory · Curriculum leadership · Educational leadership

Introduction

There seems to be an increasing international agreement that both educational leadership and curriculum leadership have a need for further theorising of their purpose (Alvesson, 2019; Burgess & Newton, 2015; Niesche, 2017; Wang, 2018). Also, in Nordic and Finnish educational leadership research, there are many indications of a

M. Uljens (✉)

Faculty of Education and Welfare Studies, Åbo Akademi University, Vaasa, Finland
e-mail: michael.uljens@abo.fi

© The Author(s) 2024

R. Ahtiainen et al. (eds.), *Leadership in Educational Contexts in Finland*,
Educational Governance Research 23,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-37604-7_9

179

redirection in this matter. For example, in her critique of the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP, Day, 2005), Møller (2017) observed: ‘The design does not allow for critical analysis of the wider power structure. A societal perspective is as important as the organizational one’ (p. 381). Another indication of a redefinition of Finnish educational leadership research became visible when Tian and Risku (2018) argued: ‘Even though enacting curriculum reforms inherently incorporates leadership elements, very few studies have so far connected these two types of research’. Tian and Risku (2018) favoured adopting a non-affirmative education theory combined with distributed leadership to study such a curricular enactment. In turn, Smeds-Nylund (2019), in her study of Finnish municipal educational leadership, saw opportunities to combine non-affirmative education theory with discursive institutionalism, as developed by Vivien Schmidt (2008). This chapter intends to contribute to theoretical development of the field by addressing four issues: the context, aim, form and object of educational leadership. These correspond to the where, why, how and what dimensions of leadership activity. The chapter argues that the best way to systemically address these dimensions is to ground educational leadership in education theory.

Due to the different usages of central terms, a couple of preliminary definitions are necessary. In this chapter, the expression *educational leadership* refers to any type of activity, on any level, that is present in the leadership, management, administration and governance of schooling promoting human learning. *Curriculum leadership* is a narrower concept. In this chapter, curriculum leadership covers primarily leadership related to aims, contents and methods of *schooling*, which are all central notions in the curriculum as intended, practiced and experienced. Selection of aims and contents, at different levels, is typically a core activity in governing any public school system. Curriculum leadership also covers the initiation, development, implementation and evaluation of various educational measures. *Pedagogical leadership*, in turn, refers to those activities by which any leader, group of leaders or a governing body intends to influence other’s opportunities to learn, professional development or to influence the development of the operational culture in schools.

A first point of departure in this chapter is that when we accept educational leadership and governance as a culturally, historically, politically and economically embedded phenomenon, it requires contextual approach. In addition, given that curriculum work, educational assessment, educational policy, resource allocation, teaching practices, leadership and governance form a complex web, it does not suffice to theorise curriculum leadership as an isolated phenomenon at some specific level of the education system. Rather, we need to develop a multi-level, historical and processual view of educational leadership (Uljens & Nyman, 2013; Uljens et al., 2016; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017; Elo & Uljens, 2022).

Critiquing the theoretical foundations of educational leadership research, Elo and Uljens (2022) argued that while accepting the need to approach educational leadership in a systemic manner, they criticised previous multi-level approaches to educational leadership for offering universal or generic theories, valid for any societal multi-level activity, ‘thereby losing a necessary conceptual sensitivity for leadership of *educational* institutions’. That said, contextual awareness is by no means

absent in much traditional educational leadership research (e.g. Fullan, 2005; Gunter et al., 2016; Shields, 2012), but how context is handled is problematic. A crucial aspect of the leadership context relates to the *aim* of educational leadership and schooling or its *why* dimension. Some positions represent relatively naïve interpretations regarding the the aim of leadership. Naïve positions are often content with describing how different layers of contexts are embedded in each other, like Russian dolls. It is not unusual to refer to, e.g. Bronfenbrenner's systems theory in these cases. A second group of theories advocate counterhegemonic position of power, which typically takes a strong stand in promoting an alternative curricular and educational ideal for schools (Shields, 2012). A third group of theories are descriptive-functionalist approaches that view leadership instrumentally. Such positions emphasise often the improvement of existing practice according to external policies (for an overview, see Uljens et al., 2016; Gunter & Ribbins, 2003). Compared with these, this chapter argues for a fourth position based on non-affirmative education theory (NAT). This position accepts the systemic multi-layered nature of educational leadership, but is not satisfied with describing these layers. Rather this position argues that an educational leadership theory should *explain the nature of the dynamics* between and within these layers.

The NAT position advocated here also accepts the constructive role educational research and leadership should have regarding practice. The role of educational leadership research is thus not only to describe the world but also to contribute to its development. However, NAT maintains that in contributing to educational reform, educational leadership research should avoid reducing itself into the mere service of external interests. Regarding the third position mentioned above, that is the counterhegemonic, critical-transformative approach, NAT shares the view that all theories in social and educational science are always value-laden, but NAT does not aim to convey a given set of strong ideological, political or religious values, or to replace such a set with some other predefined way of thinking. More about this later on.

A second point of departure in this chapter is to take seriously the what-dimension of educational leadership. The what-dimension of leadership refers to the object led. In educational and curriculum leadership, this object is primarily teaching- studying and learning but on upper levels the object is rather leadership and governance. Emphasising the what-dimension of leadership also acknowledges that educational leadership of and in schools is different from educational leadership in other parts of working life. In other words, the aims and methods of leadership are always related to what is lead and where this activity occurs. This necessary connection between the what, how and why of leadership still accepts that there are generic content- and context transcending features of leadership. Yet, it is sad to see how often educational leadership research in schools seldom explain how it perceives of its object, the teaching-studying-learning practice. The omitting of this object is even more surprising given that both European Didaktik and Anglophone curriculum theory have extensively explored the object of school leadership – the aims, contents and methods of teaching.

However, the problem exists also in the opposite direction. Traditionally, curriculum theory and research in Didaktik seldom pay attention to leadership,

management and governance involved in the initiation, implementation, development and evaluation of curricula.

In contrast to the above approaches, this chapter argues that although we may identify generic qualities featuring leadership in various contexts, the object of leadership as it is constituted in schools cannot be overlooked. For this reason, a dialogue between educational leadership research and curriculum theory/Didaktik is important, as I have argued elsewhere (Uljens, 2015; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017).

A third question to address in elevating the conceptual ambitions of educational leadership research has to do with how we see the *pedagogical or educative dimensions* of educational leadership activity itself. Educational leadership certainly differs from teachers' teaching, but does it mean that educational leadership activity lacks educational or pedagogical qualities? Or, perhaps all leadership of any professionals always feature a pedagogical quality to its core, as it partly aims to support professional and organisational development? If we accept that educational leadership includes a pedagogical dimension in addition to dealing with economy, law, communication, transportation, health care, etc., then an educational leadership theory must provide an idea of how these pedagogical qualities may be conceptualised.

In addressing the pedagogical dimensions of curriculum leadership in this chapter, we ask: how do we conceptually explain the kind of activity that educational leaders at different levels are involved in when they support the professional development of followers and when leaders contribute to school development or when they translate education authorities' initiatives, in order to implement new curriculum policies? Such direct and mediational leadership activities are here considered as pedagogical activities. Creating direction, creating conditions for change and influencing others' activities aiming for learning are core tasks in educational leadership. Hence, we need a *theory of education* for explaining the *pedagogical qualities* of educational leadership and curriculum leadership. Accepting that curriculum leadership ultimately is leadership of schools' pedagogical work and that curriculum leadership itself operates through pedagogical measures means that although organisation theory, sociology, psychology, ethics and politics highlight certain aspects of educational leadership, none of them are sufficient enough to form an essential theoretical base.

To conclude, this chapter argues that curriculum leadership is understood better if it is related to (a) the societal context and task of education (the *where* and *why* of educational leadership), (b) the pedagogical quality of leadership interactions at different organisational levels (the *how* of educational leadership) and (c) the object led or the schoolwork (the *what* of educational leadership).

Given the above developments, a major argument of this chapter is to ground curriculum leadership research in education theory. The simple reason for such an initiative is that education theory is arguably capable of dealing with the expectations mentioned above regarding the why, how and what of educational leadership. First, a theory of education offers us a language for exploring the societal aims of education. These aims communicate how education relates or should relate to other

forms of societal practice, such as politics, economy and culture. Education leaders create direction in relation to these aims. Second, a theory of education offers us a language for clarifying how curriculum leadership pedagogically may influence others' learning, including professional development. And, if curriculum leadership significantly operates through pedagogical influencing, then a leadership theory must explain the nature of this influencing. It is not enough to just claim that leadership aims at *influencing learning*. While many structural and rationalist models of educational leadership picture its elements, they stay silent regarding the dynamic relation *between* these elements. Yet, explaining this dynamic is one of the major ways to explain the pedagogical qualities of leadership. Third, a theory of education offers us tools for understanding teaching, studying and learning, which are practices that education leaders lead (Uljens, 1997, 2023).

Different education theories deal with the above questions differently, and sometimes only in very limited fashions. In explaining how education theory may frame the where, why, how and what of curriculum leadership, this chapter is grounded in the research programme of critical Bildung theoretical non-affirmative theory of education (NAT) (e.g. Benner, 2015, 2023; Uljens, 2023; Elo & Uljens, 2022; Sundqvist et al., 2021; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017; Sivesind & Wahlström, 2017).

In the following section, I first describe those contemporary societal changes that have made it obvious that educational leadership, curriculum theory and Didaktik need to be treated in relation to each other. By this cultural-historical contextualisation I argue why these societal developments have made a multilevel approach even more necessary today, and why we need to develop a theoretical language that coherently connects curriculum work, didaktik and educational leadership. We may succeed in this by grounding educational leadership research in education theory.

In the third section of this chapter, I return to the proposal of how to deal with curriculum work as a form of educational leadership with the help of non-affirmative education theory.

Contextual Challenges Requiring Us to Bridge Curriculum Theory and Education Leadership

The movement from a social-democratic welfare state towards a neoliberal competition state since the 1990s in Europe and globally created new forms of dynamics within and between macro-level educational governance and micro-level educational leadership. The shift made it clear that system-level changes have profound consequences for education professionals. Neoliberal education policies promoting competition have influenced education professionals' self-concept (Pettersson et al., 2017). Teachers were made accountable for the students' results, while they previously were accountable for aims and methods, not results. This increased principals and teachers' workload and is today a heated topic regarding the teaching profession, also in Finland (Uljens et al., 2016). Performance- and

achievement-centred curriculum policies increase stress amongst pupils and students in ways not seen before. Reduced well-being amongst students has become a major issue.

A part of the changes is visible in how the curricular aims are being redesigned. An instrumentalist view of knowledge under influence of a post-industrial economy has become more prominent in many countries. The ideal of the individual as a productive but flexible actor in economy is visible in competency-based curriculum policy (Gervais, 2016; Moos & Wubbels, 2018). Competency-oriented curricula often emphasises performativity and qualification for labour market in terms of generic competencies. Such a change in policy challenges a classic Bildung-centred approach to human growth. Bildung emphasises reflective identity, multidimensional personality development, moral reasoning and political citizenship (Klafki, 1995; Hopmann, 2015; Von Oettingen, 2016). One of the cornerstones of this modern idea of Bildung is the notion of autonomy (*Mündigkeit*) as the highest objective of education, that is, discerning thought and action regarding issues of both knowledge and values. In other words, neoliberal policy challenges a longstanding European idea of Bildung-centred education. These observations are important to have in mind when we continue reflecting differences in research paradigms on school leadership. After all, the expansion of leadership research the past decades has evolved as part and parcel with the establishment of the neoliberal education paradigm.

This movement and related discourses are truly international, but they take different forms in various countries (Paraskeva & Steinberg, 2016; Uljens & Rajakaltio, 2017). In different parts of the world, we find various types of deregulation and decentralisation processes along with privatisation, as well as (re)centralisation of political, curricular and organisational power (Gunter et al., 2016). In their analysis of educational policies, Moos and Wubbels (2018) identified two contemporary but dissimilar educational discourses, namely one representing a democratic Bildung discourse typical in Europe and the other representing an outcomes-oriented discourse, typical in the Anglophone world. The Anglophone tradition has located more decision-making power to the school level in combination with a culture of free parental choice which made school leadership early on a central issue. This is visible in extensive activity in organisations like the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA) in the United States. In many European countries, where more curricular power is located to the national level, school leadership appeared much later. In many countries, anything reminding of principal education has been totally absent until the past decade. However, for more than 20 years we have also witnessed a harmonisation across countries with centralisation of curricular issues in traditionally decentralised polities and with decentralisation occurring in previously very centralised administrations (Gundem & Hopmann, 1998; Uljens, 1997).

Figure 9.1 presents general model that summarises this transition the past five decades. The model in Fig. 9.1 is based on school didactic theory (Uljens, 1997, 2023). Reading Fig. 9.1 from the left side to the right, makes visible the transition

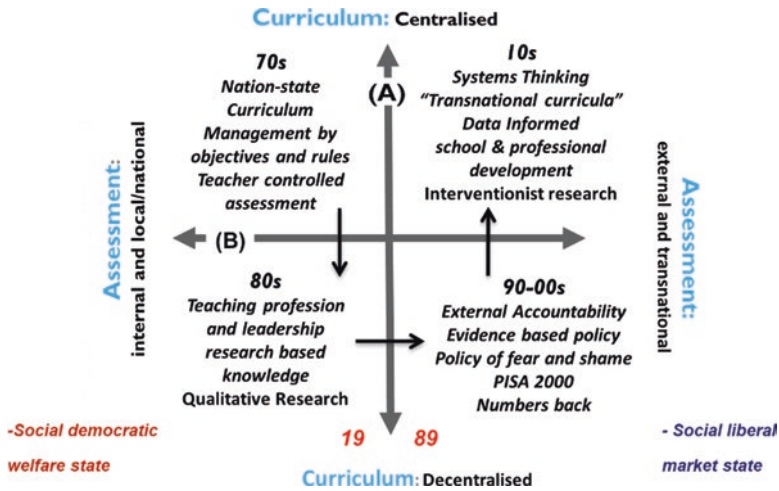


Fig. 9.1 Five decades (1970–2020) of reforming curriculum and assessment practices, related to the transition from a social-democratic welfare state to a neoliberal market state (following Uljens & Nyman, 2013; Uljens & Rajakaltio, 2017)

from the *social-democratic welfare state* approach to curriculum and assessment in Europe (old public administration, OPA), to a neoliberal competition-oriented policy in the *social liberal market state* (new public management, NPM). Figure 9.1 then identifies four different policy positions with respect to (a) curriculum making as something centrally or locally governed and (b) by viewing assessment as something internally controlled by the school and teachers or something externally regulated, whereby teachers were transformed from subjects carrying out evaluation to the objects for evaluation. These two dimensions describe developments in many countries regarding their educational policies during the past five decades (1970–2020) (Uljens, 2023).

To conclude this section of the chapter, the re-structuring of educational administration that began in the 1990s, by moving from one bureaucracy to another, from government to governance (Tiihonen, 2004), turned the attention towards understanding educational leadership as a broader, systemic multilevel project that very much centred around curriculum making and the evaluation of education (Fig. 9.1). The challenges that follow from this: first, how we should treat educational leadership (curriculum work and assessment), occurring at different levels, in a *conceptually coherent* way? Second, can we do that without falling into the trap of neither (a) instrumentalising educational leadership in the service of external interests and (b) without viewing educational leadership as an ideologically loaded activity that reduces the possibilities to educate for a self-determined praxis in a democratic society with an open future?

Dilemmas with Universalist and Particularist Approaches to Multi-level Educational Leadership

A core issue that unites education leadership and curriculum work is that of creating direction. Both of these practices embrace complicated multi-level translation processes through which external interests and policies transform into school practices. There is substantial international agreement amongst both practitioners and researchers that this process is complex and that it includes several levels and actors operating in networks. A researcher's challenge is how to connect these various levels *conceptually*, especially given the relative freedom featuring each level. Because we know that it is more than easy to produce a *descriptive* model or figure with levels and circles included in larger ones, but more difficult to *explain* the dynamics between the elements of such models. To be able to clarify how non-affirmative education theory explains how these levels and activities within them are connected and operate, we begin by identifying two mainstream strategies for connecting these levels. I call them *the universalist* and *the particularist* approach.

Several positions represent a *universal approach* to understanding the transformation of societal interests into pedagogical practice, mediated by curriculum policies and many other mechanisms. These universal approaches include actor-network theory (ANT) (Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005), discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008), and refraction (Goodson and Rudd, 2012), but also Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, Yrjö Engeström's cultural-historical activity theory and Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development belong here.

The strength of these approaches is that they offer a coherent language for analysing the dynamics within and across levels. But this strength is also their weakness. The reason why they are called *universal* is that they offer the very *same* language for understanding policy translation in *any* societal practice – education, health -care, communication, traffic, taxation, legal system or city planning. From an educational perspective, this universal character is also their weakness. Due to their universality, they lack an idea of education (Fig. 9.2).

The *particularist* way of understanding transformation of societal interests into pedagogical practice argues for a multi-disciplinary approach. Depending on which level we focus, curriculum reform work is best studied with different level-specific theories and disciplines – policy analysis, governance research, educational leadership studies, organisational theory, and research on teaching and learning. By combining results from these different levels, the whole system is described, the argument runs. Yet, in practice, we seldom see such cross-disciplinary research initiatives, combining, for example, classroom and leadership research. If we abandon these approaches, we need to come up with a third alternative. We will return to the answer provided by non-affirmative theory to this dilemma.

	Universalist approaches Valid for <i>any</i> societal <i>context</i> , thereby losing sight of education	Particularist approaches Valid for <i>education</i> , but only for <i>separate</i> levels – teaching, leadership or policy
Reproductionist - Consensus theories - Functionalist oriented - Analytic / descriptive approaches - Discursive approaches	V. Schmidt – Discursive institutionalism N. Luhmann – Systems theory B. Latour – Actor Network Theory G. Steiner-Khamsi – Policy borrowing Y. Engeström – Cultural-historical Activity Theory U. Bronfenrenner – Ecological systems theory	R. Tyler – Instructional design P. Heimann & O. Schulz – Berlin Model of Didaktik L. Shulman – Pedagogical Content Knowledge F. Marton – Phenomenography U. P. Lundgren – Curriculum theory C. Day – Successful leadership M. Fullan – Systems leadership
Critical and emancipatory transformation - Conflict theories - Normative approaches	I. Goodson – Refraction S. Ball – Policy enactment – power decentered in discursive policy cycle I. Wallerstein – World systems theory P. McLaren – Critical curriculum theory	C. Shields – Transformative leadership W. Klafki – Critical-constructive Didaktik W. Carr & S. Kemmis - Action research P. Freire - Social Justice Pedagogy

Fig. 9.2 Universalist and particularist approaches in social theory, curriculum, Didaktik and educational leadership, explaining the multi-level character of how societal interests transform into pedagogical practice in the light of reproduction-oriented and critical transformation-oriented ideals

Dilemmas with Instrumental and Normative Transformativist Positions

The second dividing line in Fig. 9.1 was that between viewing educational leadership either as a reproductionist and instrumental or as normative-transformativist activity.

According to both instrumental models and normative-transformativist (sometimes identified as utopian or emancipatory approaches), what education aims at is often predetermined. Instrumental models are in themselves more or less value neutral. They subordinate themselves either to the conservative reproduction of existing cultural and other practices or to the implementation of values and ideals for future, as efficiently as possible. In the instrumental view, the task for education is to fulfil external ideals as efficiently as possible. These external ideals may stem from economy, religion, cultural practices, politics or from somewhere else. This fulfilment occurs either as education as socialisation into something already existing or as education that intends to change society according to some external ideals. In both cases, the instrumentality of the positions in this first category sees itself in the

service of values external to the models per se. In some rationalist and instrumental models, issues of normativity and values are not even visible.

In contrast to instrumental approaches to educational leadership, explicitly normative models are transformative in character. The ideals that such normative models promote do not, however, stem from interests external to education, like from politics, economy or religion, but from the theories themselves. In this case, normative models are counterhegemonic given the context in which they operate. Normative-transformative models view educational *practice* as an instrument for changing society by the help of education, but in this case the ideals do not come from somewhere else but are shared by the theories themselves. These positions often equate politics and education, unable to identify the difference between their function and character as societal practices.

The dilemma with both of these positions, the instrumental and the normative, when taking them seriously, is that they run the risk of turning the *practice* of education, curriculum work and teaching into a technological and instrumental activity. These educational leadership models operate as a part of peculiar translational discourse between educational ideology and educational practice. From a democracy perspective, instrumentalist-oriented approaches are problematic as they do not necessarily even raise questions about the norms and aims of education, but are satisfied with promoting given aims, regardless of what they represent or where they stem from. These models are democratically problematic as they do not expect teaching or leadership practice to engage in value questions. To oversee a critical deliberation of value questions in educational leadership and in teaching reduces the students' possibilities to learn to reflect critically. Learning critical thinking in any field of knowledge require dialogical, participatory and deliberative dialogues that do not affirm the world as it presents itself. To learn to reflect critically means to form an own well-grounded opinion which in turn is crucial in both democracy and anywhere in societal life.

The alternative, or counterhegemonic, normative-transformative leadership approaches are also problematic from a democracy perspective, but for different reasons. Normative models tend to take the liberty to decide by themselves which values education should promote. These models are then indeed conscious about the question of aims, but they do not problematise the values they represent themselves. Rather, the promoted values are used to criticise existing hegemony. The new, replacing values are then implemented through the education process. Such education draws attention to critically think about existing societal values and practices, but narrows down the space for students' forming of an own opinion. Such normative approaches are typical, for example, in religious schools or strongly ideological school systems. Normative approaches of this kind run the obvious risk of replacing an existing ideology with another one.

Both of these positions are utterly problematic from the perspective of political democracy. Democratic polities will have serious difficulties viewing education either as socialisation to something existing or as part of a brute and narrow normative-idealist transformation of society following ideals that are not even established by a political process. As these positions are problematic, we face the

problem of arguing for a third option beyond these. In the next section, I describe the answer provided by non-affirmative education theory to this topic and to the dilemma described in the previous section.

The Non-affirmative Approach to Educational Leadership as Curriculum Work

To overcome (a) the problems with universalist and particularist positions and (b) problems with instrumental and normative-transformative approaches, this chapter argues that curriculum leadership theory need to develop a different view of (a) the societal task of education (the *where* and *why* of educational leadership), (b) the pedagogical nature of leadership interactions within and between different organisational levels (the *how* of educational leadership) and (c) include an idea of the object led or the teaching-studying-learning process (the *what* of educational leadership). To this end, this chapter outlines how Bildung-centred *non-affirmative education theory* (NAT) offers a language for how educational actors at different levels collaborate to initiate, implement, enact and develop curricula that promote human growth in a broader meaning. In order to provide a conceptual answer on how non-affirmative education theory defines *educational leadership as curriculum work* or *curriculum leadership*, we begin by stating that multi-level reasoning in educational leadership and governance include two related but distinct questions or tasks that we discussed earlier.

This first question is how some leadership *theory* explains political regulation of public education, given that one aim of education in democracies is to prepare for participation in future political life (the *where* and *why* of pedagogical leadership). Thus, a dilemma to handle for education leadership theory is to what extent and how education for future active, self-reflecting and self-determined citizenship should be politically regulated and how independent schools should be to form the future of the society.

The second question is related to the first, yet distinct. It asks how we explain the nature of teachers and education leaders' pedagogical interaction with students and colleagues. In other words, as education leaders at different levels influence others *pedagogically*, we need to explain what we mean by *pedagogical* or *educative* qualities of leadership and teaching (the *how* of educational leadership). A related issue has to do with the *what* of educational leadership. As leadership is always leadership of *something*, and this something happens to be teaching, studying and learning, educational leadership has a special twist to it. In a school context, it is about pedagogical leadership of teachers' pedagogical activities in relation to the students' studying activity. Also on other levels of the education system, education leaders operate by pedagogically influencing others by creating learning opportunities, directly or indirectly. Given this, educational leadership theory needs to explain how it defines a pedagogical process, as this process is present in terms of the *how*

of educational leadership activity itself, and it is present as the object or as the *what* of educational leadership.

The Why of Educational Leadership: A Non-hierarchical View of the Relation Between Education and Politics

Regarding the why question, dealing with how non-affirmative theory of education (NAT) explains political regulation of education, NAT assumes that education and politics, as two forms of societal practices, relate to each other in a *non-hierarchical* way. This is a simple statement, but it has dramatic implications. In such a view, politics is viewed to direct and regulate education, albeit in a way that educated subjects will become able to step in and contribute to a reformulation of a future political agenda for the society. Education is thus not totally sub-ordinate to politics, which would reduce education to an instrumental activity. The idea in non-affirmative theory is therefore that in modern and late-modern democracies, politics by itself accepts to operate with a permanent open question as its companion: to what extent and how strong should policies steer education practice? A conclusive answer cannot be formulated because if politics tries to decide strictly in advance how a future generation should think and act, then paradoxically, this would endanger the future of the democratic state. That is, democratic states need to educate their citizens *for* democracy, and the condition for this is to accept education as a critical institution in the society.

Let us look at the non-hierarchical relation between politics and education from a pedagogical perspective. According to non-affirmative theory, a hierarchical reasoning that subordinates education to politics would reduce pedagogical reflection and practice to an efficiency problem, namely how efficiently given educational aims can be reached by educational efforts. Again, viewing education as hierarchically super-ordinate to politics would mean that the field of education alone would define towards what kind of future the world should be moved. In contrast to the previous positions, NAT argues in favour of a third position. It reminds us that education and politics do not have to be super- or subordinate to each other. Consequently, NAT identifies curricular ideals in a democracy as resulting from a public dialogue involving politics, cultural reflection and professionals' opinions. NAT reminds us that a teacher must *recognise* existing interests, policies, ideologies, utopias and cultural practices but should not be asked to *affirm* them. Not to affirm various pre-defined interests means to not pass them on to the next generation without making these interests into objects of critical reflection in pedagogical deliberative practice with students. According to NAT, citizenship education for democracy can therefore not be about the socialisation of youth into a given form of democracy but must include critical reflection of historical, existing and possible future versions of democracy. In this sense, NAT locates itself beyond the reproductionist and beyond the normative-transformative paradigms. Yet, it is a critical position.

The What and How of Educational Leadership

The universalist and the particularist approaches to handling the multilevel character of educational leadership and curriculum work were previously criticised. The dilemma with universalist models was that these offers one and the same conceptual system for understanding policy implementation and changes in the operational culture for *any* societal practice. In this respect, these models are educationally and pedagogically blind, unable to name and identify the unique features of education as a societal practice in a democracy. Given that these theories lack a language of education, they come to treat pedagogical dilemmas in a superficial way. To be relevant for educational analysis, they at least need to be supplemented by education theory.

The strength with the particularist approaches was they indeed do contain elaborate conceptualisations of both curriculum policy making, educational leadership and teaching. The dilemma with these approaches is that they represent disparate terminologies that typically oversee or neglect research and theory at levels beyond those represented by themselves. For example, mainstream educational leadership lacks a language on teaching, while Didaktik, for example, does not pay attention to educational leadership issues.

Building on Dietrich Benner's general education theory (Benner, 1991, 2015, 2023), I argue that non-affirmative theory of education theory provides us with conceptual distinctions that allow us to relate these levels coherently to each other (Uljens, 2015, 2023; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017; Elo & Uljens, 2022). This is since the pedagogical dimensions of leadership activity at each level may be described with the same idea or principle. I demonstrate this in the following section.

Non-affirmative General Pedagogy

Dietrich Benner's approach to non-affirmative theory distinguishes between two *constitutive principles* that help to clarify pedagogical interaction and two *regulative principles* that clarify the relation between education and society (Fig. 9.3).

Principle 4 in Fig. 9.3 explains that different societal practices stand in a non-hierarchical relation to each other. This was discussed before. The second regulative principle, Principle 3, asks how curriculum work and educational leadership operate in transforming societal interests to pedagogical work. This principle reminds that the transformation of societal interests should allow educational degrees of freedom for individual schools and teachers not to violate students' necessary agency in the learning process. The more teachers are expected to affirm given policies, the less room there is for critical and student-centered pedagogical treatment of teaching contents.

	Constitutive principles	Regulative principles
A Theories of education (Erziehung) (2:3)	(2) Summoning to self-activity	(3) Pedagogical transformation of societal influences and requirements
B Theories of Bildung (1:4)	(1) <i>Bildsamkeit</i> (<i>Bildsamkeit</i>) as attunement (<i>Bestimmtheit</i>) of humans to receptive and spontaneous corporeity, freedom, historicity and linguisticity	(4) Non-hierarchical order of cultural and societal practices
C Theories of educational institutions and their reform (1/2:3/4)		

Fig. 9.3 Two constitutive and two regulative principles organising four basic concepts as related to theory of education and theory of Bildung (Erziehungs- und Bildungstheorien) (Benner, 2023)

Principle 2 defines what pedagogical activity, or teaching as summoning of self-activity, is about, but it does so in relation to notion of *Bildsamkeit* described as Principle 1. In short, Principle 2 indicates that pedagogical activity is about recognising the learner not only as an indeterminate Other, but also her reality, potentiality and interests, yet *summoning* or inviting the learner as a self-active subject, to engage in activities that create a reflective distance to the learner's previous experiences. As noted earlier, *affirmative* teaching either aims at conservative transmission and reproduction of existing orders or at transformative change, led by some predefined educational ideal. In contrast, *non-affirmative* pedagogical activity views education as operating in an emancipatory fashion, embracing the idea of negative freedom, i.e. teaching as promoting learner's freedom *from* something, yet without intention to get the learner to unreflectively adopt some other predefined way of relating to the world, without own processing.

The 'modern' interpretation of teaching as *summoning* the Other to self-activity refers indirectly to political and moral liberalism of the eighteenth century, as advocated, amongst others, by John Locke. The dilemma that liberalism raised for education pointed at two different interpretations of how pedagogical influencing was possible. On the one hand, if the subject indeed was originally free and self-active, the question was if pedagogical *influencing* was possible at all? Instead, the learner could, in her capacity of being originally free, decide to what extent external activity indeed influences her. On the other hand, also another interpretation of this original freedom is possible. Of indeed the subject is radically open and indeterminate, then education perhaps could mould the student according to its own interests. A third option, advocated by non-affirmative education, makes use of the principles of

summoning to self-activity and *Bildsamkeit*. These were advocated by Johann Gottlob Fichte and Johann Friedrich Herbart in the early nineteenth century. They offered the means to find a path beyond viewing education either as something omnipotent or education as totally powerless. These two principles make up an argument that views education as something necessary, without disregarding the learner's constitutive role. Differently expressed, these principles make education not only possible but also demonstrate its necessity. On the one hand, although subjected to a world that the human being was unable to escape, education was made possible by human *anthropological* freedom. Accordingly, the individual's future is not determined by eternal sin, social status or genetically. On the other hand, education was necessary for the individual's becoming a *culturally* autonomous and self-determined subject, sharing culture with others but with capacity to move beyond it. Although education for these reasons was necessary, it could still not determine the subject, due to the subject's anthropologically given freedom. In this way, the subject was dependent of education, but the possibilities to influence the subject were in turn dependent on the learner's capacity to learn and her own activity – *Bildsamkeit*. Herbart's central contribution was thus to introduce the idea of *pedagogical causality* to overcome the antinomy between freedom and coercion, between the causality of nature and the causality of freedom. The concepts *Bildsamkeit* and *summons to self-activity* thus received a bridging function for Herbart (Siljander, 2008, 74-76).

To conclude, the principle of *Bildsamkeit*, including the idea of human plasticity or capacity to change, makes possible pedagogical influencing as summoning the individual to self-activity. On the one hand, as *Bildsamkeit* is relational, in that the individual always reaches out towards the world, educational influences form a part of this external world that the learner experiences. Thus, the *Bildsamkeit* concept allows education to operate as an influence regarding the individual, yet not if external influences determine the subject. On the other hand, it accepts humans as originally self-active, yet not assuming the individual as capable by itself to acquire conceptual knowledge by mere participation in social life. In a modern complex world, everyday practice is insufficient for reaching the 'invisible' conceptual knowledge which helps to explain observations.

Through pedagogical actions from the leader's or teacher's side, together with the learner's activity, a *transitional space of Bildung* is established. This *pedagogical space* is a temporary construction, a space that depends on the engagement of the subjects involved. This experiential or virtual space is a space in which the learner experiences being recognised (seen, acknowledged, worth being addressed) but also challenged, being involved in shared working on a topic. This space offers the subject an opportunity to make her experiences an object of reflection and thereby perhaps exceed herself.

Finally, in this context, the notion of *recognition* includes the educator's acceptance of the individual's right to work out a reflected own will. If the establishment of the individual's self-image is dependent on social interaction with others, and if the ability to discerning and critical, autonomous thinking are recognised as an individual right, then pedagogical activity appears as a response to the moral demand that arises from recognising these particular rights (Fichte, 2000).

Pedagogical influencing of this kind is arguably present in educational leadership as it is in teaching. In this way, the principles of summoning self-activity and *Bildsamkeit* as engagement in learning activity are valid for describing both the *how* of educational leadership as its *what* aspect, namely the teaching-studying-learning process.

Conclusion

This chapter started out by claiming that the movement from a social-democratic welfare state towards a neoliberal competition state since the 1990s in Europe, step-wise resulted in a need for a multi-level perspective to understand the dynamics between macro-level educational governance and micro-level educational leadership. In this chapter, I first argued that some existing schools of thought are unproductive to solve the multi-level dilemma. The limit of so-called universalist multi-level models was that they are educationally unarticulated. The same approaches are offered for the analysis of any societal practice. Then, in turn, the dilemma with so-called particularist approaches was that they deal with the various levels by applying different theories for understanding different levels. Thus, policy analysis is typically applied for the broad nation-state and transnational analysis or the *why* of educational leadership. Separate educational leadership models are used to understand the *how* of educational leadership at the school level. Finally, instructional theory or *Didaktik* is used to understand the *what* of leadership. The dilemma emanating from this combinatory initiative is to connect all these positions, which, in practice, seldom or never occurs. Thus, a third option was announced as necessary for overcoming the limitations of these approaches.

Previous theoretical contributions were also criticised for how they relate education to other societal fields of practice such as politics, economy or culture. Instrumental approaches saw educational leadership as sub-ordinate to serving external ideals promoted by other societal practices, thereby turning educational leadership into instrumental-technical activity that does not raise questions of educational aims or values. Normative-transformative approaches again indeed did raise questions of aims and values but only in a counterhegemonic sense turning educational leadership into educational activism unable to see the difference between politics and education as societal practices. Both traditions of thought were considered to stand in conflict with democratic education and education for democracy. Thus, a third option was needed to overcome the limitations of these approaches.

To overcome the above troublesome alternatives in the educational leadership field, this chapter argued that for an alternative way of explaining (a) the societal task of education (the *why* and *where* of educational leadership), (b) the pedagogical nature of leadership interactions within and between different organisational levels (the *how* of educational leadership) and (c) the object led or the teaching-studying-learning process (the *what* of educational leadership). To this end, this chapter

outlined how non-affirmative education theory (NAT) offers us a language for how educational leaders at different levels collaborate to initiate, implement, enact and develop curricula. The proposal drew on Dietrich Benner's general pedagogy interpreting modern theory of education. The regulative and constitutive principles in this theory offer, in connection with the notion of recognition, a coherent language for theorising educational leadership.

When claiming that educational leadership based on NAT avoids viewing leadership as an instrumental activity and avoids viewing educational leadership as ideologically loaded activism, this does not mean that the non-affirmative position is value neutral. It is a value-laden position. There is a moral imperative inherent in this theory saying, for example, that leaders and teachers are not expected to simply affirm existing societal practices or future political or educational ideals. Such a behaviour would mean reducing education to an art or technique that aims to fulfil given, specified aims. Educational leadership and teaching would then turn into versions of technical instrumentalism. Yet, leaders and teachers in public school systems are, by law, also expected to follow the spirit of a curriculum and must recognise such interests. NAT therefore argues that teachers must *recognise* curricular aims and contents, but they should be hesitant in pedagogically *affirming* these aims and contents. To affirm them would mean not to problematise these aims and contents with students, thereby reducing education to transmitting given values and contents. This is how NAT explains the creation of pedagogical spaces both for colleagues and students. These pedagogical spaces feature critical reflection of what is, what is not and what might be. They represent an invitation for discerning thought and experimental practice.

References

- Alvesson, M. (2019). Waiting for Godot: Eight major problems in the odd field of leadership studies. *Leadership*, 15, 27–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715017736707>
- Benner, D. (1991). *Allgemeine Pädagogik*. Juventa.
- Benner, D. (2015). *Allgemeine Pädagogik* (8th ed.). Beltz Juventa.
- Benner, D. (2023). On affirmativity and non-affirmativity in the context of theories of education and Bildung. In M. Uljens (Ed.), *Non-affirmative theory of education and Bildung*. Springer.
- Burgess, D., & Newton, P. (Eds.). (2015). *Educational administration and leadership. Theoretical foundations*. Routledge.
- Czarniawska, B., & Sevón, G. (2005). Global ideas. How ideas, objects, and practices travel in the global economy.
- Day, C. (2005). Sustaining success in challenging contexts: Leadership in English schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 43(6), 573–583. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230510625674>
- Elo, J., & Uljens, M. (2022). Theorising pedagogical dimensions of higher education leadership – A non-affirmative approach. *Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00890-0>
- Fichte, J. G. (2000). Foundations of natural right. In F. Neuhouser (Ed.), M. Bauer, Trans. Cambridge University Press.
- Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership & sustainability: System thinkers in action*. Corwin Press.
- Gervais, J. (2016). The operational definition of competency-based education. *The Journal of Competency-Based Education*, 1(2), 98–106. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cbe2.1011>

- Goodson, I. F., & Rudd, T. (2012). Developing a concept of 'refraction': Exploring educational change and oppositional practice. *Educational Practice and Theory*, 34(1), 5–24. <https://doi.org/10.7459/EPT/34.1.02>
- Gundem, B. B., & Hopmann, S. (Eds.). (1998). *Didaktik and/or Curriculum. An international dialogue*. Peter Lang.
- Gunter, H., & Ribbins, P. (2003). Challenging orthodoxy in school leadership studies: Knowers, knowing and knowledge? *School Leadership & Management*, 23(2), 129–147.
- Gunter, H. M., Grimaldi, E., Hall, D., & Serpieri, R. (2016). *New public management and the reform of education: European lessons for policy and practice*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315735245>
- Hopmann, S. (2015). 'Didaktik meets curriculum' revisited. Historical encounters, systematic experience, empirical limits. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 2015(1), 27007. <https://doi.org/10.3402/nstep.v1.27007>
- Klafki, W. (1995). On the problem of teaching and learning contents from the standpoint of critical-constructive Didaktik. In S. Hopmann & K. Riquarts (Eds.), *Didaktik and/or curriculum* (pp. 187–200). IPN.
- Møller, J. (2017). Leading education beyond what works. *European Educational Research Journal*, 16(4), 375–385. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904117705487>
- Moos, L., & Wubbels, T. (2018). General education: Homogenised education for the globalized world? *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11618-018-0809-z>
- Niesche, R. (2017). Critical perspectives in educational leadership: A new 'theory turn'? *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 50(3), 145–158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2017.1395600>
- Paraskeva, J. M., & Steinberg, S. (Eds.). (2016). *Curriculum: Decanonizing the field*. Peter Lang.
- Pettersson, D., Popkewitz, T. S., & Lindblad, S. (2017). In the grey zone: Large-scale assessment-based activities betwixt and between policy, research and practice. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 3(1), 29–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2017.1316181>
- Schmidt, V. A. (2008). Discursive institutionalism: The explanatory power of ideas and discourse. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11, 303–326. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.060606.135342>
- Shields, C. M. (2012). *Transformative leadership in education: Equitable change in an uncertain and complex world*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203814406>
- Siljander, P. (2008). Educability and Bildung in J.F. Herbart's theory of education. In P. Siljander, A. Kivelä, & A. Sutinen (Eds.), *Theories of Bildung and growth. Connections and controversies between continental educational thinking and American pragmatism*. Sense Publishers.
- Sivesind, K., & Wahlström, N. (2017). Curriculum and leadership in transnational reform: A discursive-institutionalist approach. In M. Uljens & R. Ylimaki (Eds.), *Bridging educational leadership, curriculum theory and Didaktik – Non-Affirmative Theory of Education* (pp. 439–464). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58650-2_14
- Smeds-Nylund, A.-S. (2019). *Kommunalt utbildningsledarskap – att mediera mellan politik och medborgaropinion*. Åbo Akademi Press.
- Sundqvist, R., Smeds-Nylund, A.-S., & Uljens, M. (2021). Systemiskt och mångprofessionellt skolförbättringsarbete (Systemic and multiprofessional school development). In M. Uljens, & A.-S. Smeds-Nylund (red.), *Pedagogiskt ledarskap och skolutveckling (Educational leadership and school development)* (p. 335–361).
- Tian, M., & Risku, M. (2018). A distributed leadership perspective on the Finnish curriculum reform 2014. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 51(2), 229–244. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00220272.2018.1499806>
- Tiihonen, S. (2004). *From governing to governance*. Tampere University Press.
- Uljens, M. (1997). *School didactics and learning*. Psychology Press.
- Uljens, M. (2015). Curriculum work as educational leadership: Paradoxes and theoretical foundations. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 1(1), 22–30. <https://doi.org/10.3402/nstep.v1.27010>

Uljens, M. (2023). Non-affirmative theory of education: Problems, positionings and possibilities. In M. Uljens (Ed.), *Nonaffirmative theory of education and Bildung*. Springer Open Access.

Uljens, M., & Nyman, C. (2013). Educational leadership in Finland or building a nation with Bildung. In L. Moos (Ed.), *Transnational influences on values and practices in Nordic educational leadership: Is there a Nordic model?* (pp. 31–48). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6226-8_3

Uljens, M., & Rajakaltio, H. (2017). National curriculum development in Finland as distributed and non-affirmative educational leadership. In M. Uljens & R. Ylimaki (Eds.), *Bridging educational leadership, curriculum theory and Didaktik – Non-affirmative theory of education* (pp. 411–438). Springer. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-58650-2>

Uljens, M., & Ylimaki, R. (2017). Non-affirmative theory of education as a foundation for curriculum studies, Didaktik and educational leadership. In M. Uljens & R. Ylimaki (Eds.), *Bridging educational leadership, curriculum theory and Didaktik – Non-affirmative theory of education* (pp. 3–145). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58650-2_1

Uljens, M., Wolff, L.-A., & Frontini, S. (2016). Finland – NPM resistance or towards European neo-welfarism in education? In H. M. Gunter, E. Grimaldi, D. Hall, & R. Serpieri (Eds.), *New public management and the reform of education: European lessons for policy and practice* (pp. 39–52). Routledge.

von Oettingen, A. (2016). *Almen didaktik*. Munksgaard.

Wang, Y. (2018). The panorama of the last decade’s theoretical groundings of educational leadership research: A concept co-occurrence network analysis. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 54, 327–365. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X18761342>

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

