ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Understandings and attitudes regarding skill-based and competency-based cultures for learning: a comparative study of Norwegian and New Zealand teacher educators

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Abstract

This is a study of Norwegian and New Zealand teacher educators' attitudes and understandings of what constitutes learning in schools. Excerpts of curriculum differences between the countries were used as catalysts to gain insight into teacher educators' espoused theories regarding their understanding of learning, using examples of skill-based and competency-based perspectives on learning. This article describes reactions from Norwegian and New Zealand teacher educators when presented with examples of these two different educational cultures. The majority of both the Norwegian and the New Zealand teacher educators express a critical stance towards a skill-based perspective when asked about the matter. A concern regarding political pressure as an agent of change in educational systems was explicit in both countries. Norway appears to be politically governed top down to a greater degree than New Zealand, and this article examines whether the top-down governing of education can lead to discrepancies between formal curriculum, perceived curriculum, and operationalised curriculum. The findings indicate that such discrepancies exist among Norwegian teacher educators. The results show that inconsistencies of this nature could affect teacher educators' motivation for their profession and can be perceived to undermine the trust that practitioners have in their professional and pedagogical competencies. This article contributes to broadening the understanding of how the governing of education could affect practitioners at a time of political pressure and requirements for measurable results.

Keywords Curriculum differences · Political governing · Teacher education · Educational cultures · Skill-based · Competency-based

1 Introduction

Over time, there have been many different theories regarding how to understand learning, and there are still different paradigms that compete for definitions when it comes to what to emphasise when learning is to be understood (Sollied et al. 2017; Saari 2018). An example

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of different perspectives on learning is a skill-based focus and a competency-based focus. These two perspectives on learning can be exemplified by looking at excerpts from the Norwegian and New Zealand primary school curricula. Both curricula contain five-item bullet lists defining what is understood as basic and key prerequisites for learning. New Zealand has defined its bullet list as key competencies, described as 'capabilities people have, and need to develop, to live and learn today and in the future' (Ministry of Education [MoE] 2014). In the Norwegian curriculum, the basic skills are 'defined as basic to learning in school, work, and social life. These skills are basic in the sense that they are fundamental to learning in all subjects as well as a prerequisite for the pupil to show his/her competence and qualifications' (Ministry of Education and Research [MER] 2012). Even though the two lists are described as basic and fundamental for learning, the two countries have chosen to base these overarching sections of the curricula on quite different educational cultures. The New Zealand list contains a more holistic perspective, focusing on both inter- and intrapersonal competencies, while the Norwegian list contains a more technical skill-oriented perspective regarding performance.

Teachers start their formal professional lives as teacher students; it would therefore be interesting to investigate how Norwegian and New Zealand teacher educators relate to these two different perspectives on learning as they play a central role in developing teachers-to-be. This article presents a comparative study of teacher educators at UiT, the Arctic University of Norway (UiT), and the University of Waikato (UoW) and their responses and attitudes towards the two different perspectives. It is not a comparative study of Norwegian and New Zealand formal curricula, as the two excerpts will not do either of the two curricula justice as a whole. Norway and New Zealand are facing many similar challenges in education policy; both must educate student teachers in digital-rich environments (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2010), and they are comparable in terms of the similar structure of their educational systems. UoW is similar to UiT in number of students (UoW: 12,000 students; UiT: 15,800 students); they are both universities with a strong bicultural component as they both focus on indigenous cultures and people, and both universities value international collaborations and have multicultural student populations. This study examines whether there is a pattern to be found in how Norwegian and New Zealand teacher educators assess parts of their own educational culture and what attitudes are expressed when confronted with a different perspective.

1.1 The New Zealand curriculum

The New Zealand curriculum is a statement of official policy relating to teaching and learning in English-medium New Zealand schools. Its principal function, according to the MoE, is to set the direction for student learning and to provide guidance for schools as they design and review their own curricula. A parallel document, Te Marautanga o Aotearoa, serves the same function for Māori-medium schools. Although they come from different perspectives, both start with visions of young people who will develop the competencies they need for study, work, and lifelong learning and who will go on to realise their potential. Together, the two documents help schools give effect to the partnership that is at the core of the nation's founding document, Te Tiriti o Waitangi/ the Treaty of Waitangi (MoE 2017). The New Zealand curriculum sets the direction for teaching and learning in English-medium New Zealand schools; however, as stated by the MoE, it is a framework rather than a detailed plan. 'This means that while every school curriculum must be clearly aligned with the intent of this document, schools

have considerable flexibility in determining the details. In doing this, they can draw on a wide range of ideas, resources, and models' (MoE 2017). Schools are, according to the ministry, required to base their curricula on the principles of the New Zealand curriculum, to encourage and model its values, and to develop the key competencies at all year levels (MoE 2017).

1.2 The Norwegian curriculum

The Knowledge Promotion is the latest reform in 10-year compulsory schooling and in upper secondary education and training. It came into effect in 2006 and consists of the following three main documents: the core curriculum (den generelle delen av lærerplanen), the quality framework (læringsplakaten mm), and the subject curriculum (den fagspesifikke læreplanen). The core curriculum was retained from the reform in 1997 and holds a holistic perspective of the student (Directorate for Education and Training [DET] 2011a, b). The quality framework summarises and elaborates on the provisions in the Education Act and its regulations, including the National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education and Training, and must be considered in light of the legislation and regulations (DET 2011a). The subject curriculum addresses subject objectives, competence objectives, assessment, teaching hours, and basic skills. The basic skills are integrated into the competence objectives for each subject. Both the core curriculum and the quality framework cover the holistic perspective presented in the New Zealand key competencies, while the subject curriculum is based on the basic skills and defines what objectives should be covered during the school year.

1.3 Ongoing work with new curricula in Norway

The renewal of Knowledge Promotion is an ongoing task, which aims to give students more in-depth learning and better understanding. White Paper no. 28 (2015–2016; 'Fag—Fordypning—Forståelse. En fornyelse av Kunnskapsløftet') and Proposition to the Storting no. 19S (2016–2017) define the goals and framework for this work (MER 2017). The new curriculum is intended to be implemented in 2020. As part of this renewal process, an expert committee was appointed, often referred to as the Ludvigsen Committee (Ludvigsenutvalget). This committee was to assess the extent to which schools' content covers the skills students' need in their future social and working lives. As part of the Ludvigsen Committee's examination of the Norwegian curriculum, it contacted, among others, government authorities in New Zealand (NOU 2015). The committee's conclusion was clear: the future Norwegian curriculum should be based, to a greater degree, on a broader understanding of competencies. The committee recommended a limited focus on skills, instead building the curriculum on the following four areas of competence: subject-specific competence; competence in learning; competence in communicating, interacting, and participating; and competence in exploring and creating (NOU 2015). Despite this clear recommendation, the Norwegian DET continues to maintain the five basic skills in education (DET 2017). As described, there are different perspectives expressed in the Norwegian and New Zealand curricula. In the current study, these differences are exemplified by the Norwegian basic skills and the New Zealand key competencies (see Table 1).

Table 1 New Zealand key competencies and the Norwegian basic skills

New Zealand key competencies (MoE 2007, p. 12)	Norwegian basic skills (Directorate for Education and Training [DET] 2006)
Thinking	Oral skills
Using language, symbols, and texts	Reading
Managing self	Writing
Relating to others	Digital skills
Participating and contributing	Numeracy

2 Research question

What are Norwegian and New Zealand teacher educators' responses and attitudes towards skill-based and competency-based perspectives on learning?

3 Methodology: explanatory sequential design

3.1 The first phase: quantitative survey

This study is based on a mixed methods explanatory sequential design. This means that the results of one approach were necessary for planning the next (Johnson et al. 2007). A survey was initially conducted, with all teacher educators at both universities invited. Sixty-seven of the 80 teacher educators from UiT responded to the survey (a response rate of 83.75%); at UoW, 47 of 64 responded to the survey (a response rate of 73.44%). Teacher educators with less than 30% teaching were subsequently separated from the study, as we wanted to include teachers with comprehensive teaching experience unlike administration-oriented tasks. This results in 64 Norwegian and 44 New Zealand teacher educators ($N=108$).

This article is based on data from a bigger research project with an overarching focus on digital technology in education, which is related to the bigger debate concerning different perspectives on learning. The focus in this article is on the overarching different educational cultures. As part of a bigger project, the focus on digital technology in this article serves as the basis and structure for the methodological procedures. The survey aimed to assess the following three different constructs: the teacher educators' *level of digital competence*, *attitudes towards digital technology in education,* and *use of digital technology in educational contexts*. Relevant to this article are the two constructs concerning *digital competence* and *attitudes*, as they were central in selecting the participant for interviews. These two constructs were developed based on the theory of action (Argyris and Schön 1978), in which an analytical distinction was made between theory in use (digital competence) and espoused theory (attitudes towards digital technology).

The construct *digital competence* was operationalised using Tømte and Olsen (2013) and Lund et al. (2014) description of what it contains. In accordance with this, digital competence is understood to contain three aspects: pedagogic and didactic understanding, subject-specific understanding, and technological understanding. This notion of digital competence corresponds with the framework for teacher knowledge for technology integration

called technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK), where there are three main components of teachers' knowledge: content, pedagogy, and technology. The development of TPACK by teachers is according to Koehler and Mishra (2009) critical to effective teaching with technology.

The construct intended to map teacher educators' *attitudes* was based on the OECD report 'Connected Minds: Technology and Today's Learners' (2012). In that report, the field is characterised by a continuum from technology averse to technology positive. To encompass this range of attitudes, statements were prepared to cover the respondents' own motivations for using digital tools, their attitudes towards the position of digital tools in the public arena, and their attitudes towards the use of digital tools in teaching (see Madsen et al. 2018a).

Cronbach's alpha is often used to assess reliability when concepts are operationalised through a construct (Christophersen 2009). Alpha was computed for all constructs as a measure of internal consistency and an analysis of reliability. The Cronbach's alpha measures yielded an alpha value of 0.81 for digital competence and of 0.71 for professional attitude. This describes the extent to which the items in the construct measured the same concept (Madsen et al. 2018a). The acceptable alpha values are 0.70 or higher (Bryman and Cramer 2011). However, if the alpha is too high, it may suggest that some items are redundant as they are testing the same question, but in a different guise. Therefore, the recommended maximum alpha value is 0.90 (Tavakol and Dennick 2011). This evaluation of data reliability and internal consistency created a basis for the further use of the material. SPSS version 24 was used in relation to the quantitative analysis.

3.2 The second phase: strategically selecting the participants

In this article, the results from the survey serve as the basis for strategically selecting participants for qualitative interviews and offer the opportunity to conduct a maximum variation sampling (Creswell 2013). Digital technology is one of the skills defined in the Norwegian basic skills and was intended to serve as an area that could potentially result in different perspectives between the Norwegian and the New Zealand teacher educators due to different policy contexts.

The first step in strategically selecting interview participants was to ensure that all the participants had *high digital competence*, with the aim of gathering informed opinions regarding the use of technology in educational contexts. These participants are defined by a score higher than three in the scatterplot (vertical line in Figs. 1 and 2). It was essential, for this study, that the participants represent staff with the necessary digital skills as previous surveys of the gap between policy and practice have often concluded that differences were largely due to teachers' and teacher educators' lack of digital competence (Norgesuniversitetet 2015). The choice of interviewees who were digitally skilled substantiates the interviewees' attitudes towards digital technology in educational contexts. It is less likely that their attitudes towards this are based on assumptions.

The second step of the strategy was to select participants within this homogenous group based on maximum variation sampling. This is a purposeful selection of interview subjects with different perspectives on a phenomenon (Creswell 2013). *Attitudes towards digital technology* served as the category that resulted in differences within the group of digitally skilled teachers. As Creswell (2013) explains, the maximum variation sampling strategy requires the defining of a category that produces different responses to paint a varied picture of the participants. The category *attitudes towards digital technology* was used to
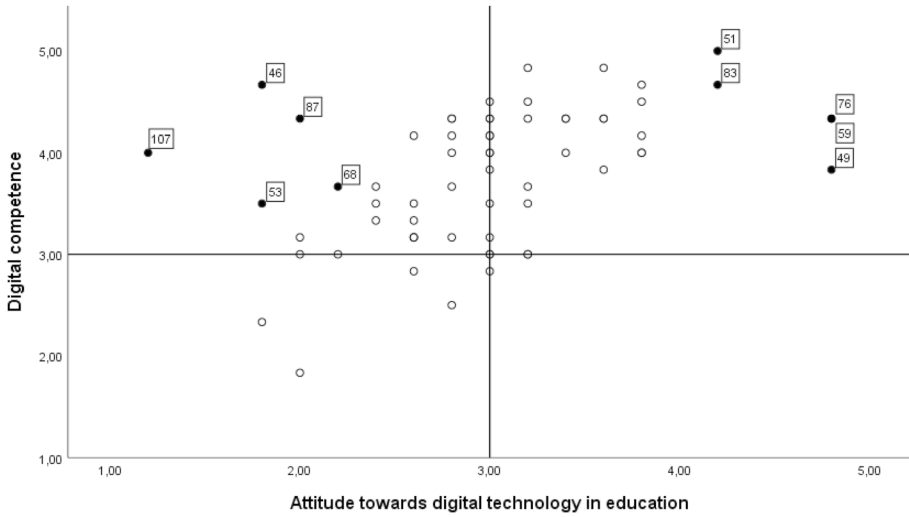
Fig. 1 Norwegian teacher educators. Black markings indicate selected participants for the interview (critical to the left and positive to the right)
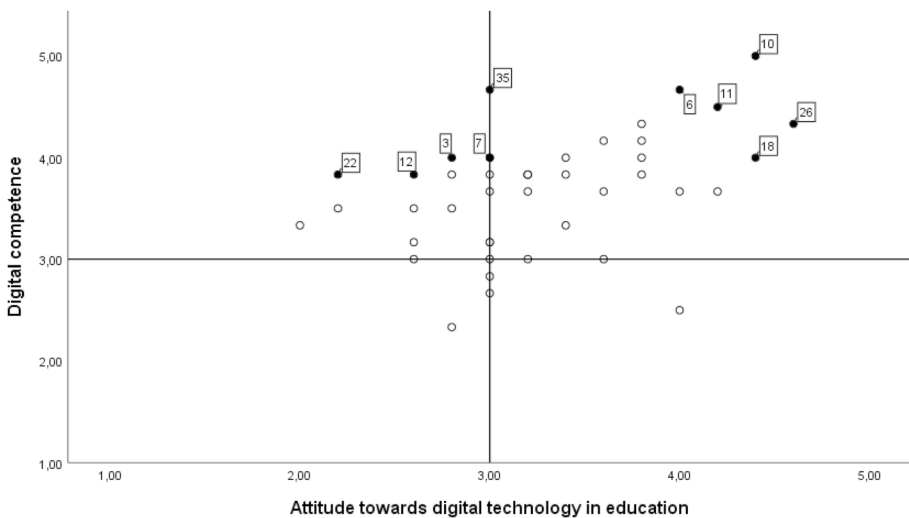

Fig. 2 New Zealand teacher educators. Black markings indicate selected participants for the interview (critical to the left and positive to the right)

select five participants who responded as more critical and five participants who responded as more positive towards digital technology, within each country. The selection was done by producing a scatterplot of the survey data using the constructs *digital competence* and *attitude towards digital technology* as axes. The score ranges from 1–5 according to the score from the survey. Means were computed for each of the participants within the two constructs. The participant is then positioned in the scatterplot based on these two scores. See Figs. 1 and 2, with the x-axis showing the range of attitudes (from 1 representing the

critical end of the scale to 5 representing the positive end of the scale). The y-axis is show-ing the range of digital competence (from 1 representing a lack of competence to 5 repre-senting high digital competence).

The black markings, with associated participant numbers, in the scatterplot represent the selected teacher educators within each country; the five more critical participants are positioned to the left in the scatterplot, and the five more positive participants are posi-tioned to the right in the scatterplot—resulting in a total of 20 qualitative interviews. This approach created two groups of informants at each university with different characteristics to provide different perspectives (Creswell 2013).

3.3 The third phase: conducting the interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to understand and elaborate upon the results from a qualitative perspective. In one section of the interview, the teacher educators were asked to interpret the differences between the basic skills and the key competencies (see Table 1). Both the Norwegian and New Zealand participants were also asked what their attitudes would be towards replacing their formal perspective on learning with the other country's perspective. One of the main goals of the interviews was to uncover how teacher educators understood these educational cultural differences and what their attitudes were regarding them. The interview guide included some predefined questions regarding these differences, but the opportunity was sought to include unforeseen contributions from the participants. The interviews were therefore not restricted to the predefined questions. The interview guides from the two countries were also slightly different as they had to be adjusted to each country's curriculum structure and other local educational conditions.

It is important to clarify that this is not a comparative study of the teacher educators' attitudes towards the two curricula as a whole, but rather a comparative study of the teacher educators' expressed values and beliefs. The interviews were based on small excerpts of the two curricula and are therefore not representative of the curricula as a whole; rather, the excerpts are used to represent two different educational cultures. The two lists cannot be directly compared as equal components from the two curricula as they are defined as skills and competencies and could possibly serve different purposes. Even so, the structural commonalities are evident, and this represents an interesting approach for an interview to investigate deeper differences in educational discourses. The two lists were, in other words, used as a starting point as measures to exemplify different perspectives on learning.

The transcribed interviews were subsequently analysed with the use of NVivo. The interview was conducted qualitatively, but the analysis drew on methods from both qualita-tive and quantitative traditions. The quantitative part of the analysis consisted of categoris-ing the participants' statements and quantifying how many of the participants expressed certain attitudes as well as which perspectives were devoted the most attention when reply-ing to questions. The qualitatively oriented analysis of the content was applied to under-stand the details and nuances behind the patterns found when quantifying statements. This approach contributed to understanding the reasons and rationales behind the patterns found across nations and groups. This process was a combination of an empirically driven approach and a theory-driven approach.

Following the interviews, the participants were presented with the scatterplot (Figs. 1 and 2), and their positions were pointed out to them. They were asked to comment on their position in relation to the other teacher educators in the scatterplot regarding their digital competence and attitude position. A few of the participants commented concerning minor

adjustments, while the majority identified with the results presented. This was done to get an indication as to whether my construct and the results were in line with the respondents' own interpretations of themselves regarding digital competence and attitudes. This was a validation of the survey as an instrument for measuring teacher educators' digital competence and attitudes. One must also take into account the uncertainty regarding translations from one language to another. The Norwegian survey, interview guide, and participant statements used in this article have been translated from Norwegian to English. It should therefore be noted that some elements may be lost in translation, and this may have influenced the results. There has, however, been an ongoing collaboration with New Zealand researchers throughout the research process, which has been very helpful regarding the important clarification of concepts and language-related nuances.

4 Theoretical perspectives

Qualitative data from the interviews are presented in this article and have been analysed using curriculum theory. The term *curriculum* calls for some elaboration; Goodlad et al. (1979) distinguished between the following five domains, which could also be described as five different logical levels, of curricula:

- *Ideological curricula,* referring to the ideological and political ideas and underlying values of a curriculum.
- *Formal curricula,* referring to a curriculum as a formal, officially sanctioned document.
- *Perceived curricula,* referring to how an actual curriculum is perceived, for instance, by parents, school management, teacher educators, and teachers.
- *Operational curricula,* referring to how a curriculum is implemented in daily teaching in classrooms.
- *Experienced curricula,* referring to how an actual curriculum is experienced by students.

Presenting these five different logical levels of curricula demonstrates the difficulty of deriving a single definition of the term curriculum. Goodlad et al. (1979) also claimed that there might be significant discrepancies between the different domains of curricula—school culture and teacher background may, for instance, influence what parts of a curriculum are understood to be essential. Resources and competence at the school level may also influence which parts of a curriculum are emphasised in teaching on a daily basis. Goodlad et al. (1979) pointed out that a common discourse across the domains is required to trace eventual unacceptable discrepancies between the curricula domains. This article is based on using formal curricula to discuss perceived curricula from the perspectives of Norwegian and New Zealand teacher educators when presented with different perspectives on learning. The insights into the two countries' ideological, formal, and perceived curricula could lead to understanding why there has consistently been discrepancies between adjoining levels in Norwegian schools and teacher education—the formal curricula and operational curricula (Norgesuniversitetet 2015; Egeberg et al. 2012; Egeberg et al. 2016; Wilhelmsen et al. 2009; Ørnes et al. 2011).

5 Results and discussion

5.1 Attitudes towards skill-based and competency-based perspectives on learning

5.1.1 Quantifying the attitudes relating to skill-based and competency-based perspectives

An unbalanced response towards the two perspectives was evident when conducting the interviews. This difference became prominent when establishing a rough overview of the data. The two categories 'critical to skill-based/positive to competency-based' and 'critical to competency-based/positive to skill-based' revealed an interesting pattern among the participants. In reviewing all relevant transcribed data that had been categorised as one of the two categories, it was found that 83.5% of the excerpts were statements either critical towards the skill-based perspective or positive towards the competency-based perspective. Only 16.5% of the excerpts were categorised as being critical towards the competency-based perspective or positive towards the skill-based perspective.

5.1.2 Quantifying the stances taken when asked about preferred perspective

Participants were asked what their attitudes would be towards replacing the list of basic skills with the list of key competencies and vice versa. Among the Norwegian participants, the majority expressed positivity towards replacing the basic skills with the key competencies. Two of the participants positioned themselves neutrally, viewing the competency-based and skill-based perspectives as different, but equally important. When asked why, they stated that their views were based on a rationale regarding what the students were to be measured and examined in.

When the New Zealand participants were asked the same question regarding a change, all but two were critical of a shift towards a skill-based perspective. One claimed that a combination of both would be the best alternative, and one argued that there are too many literacy problems among New Zealand adults. Thus, strengthening the focus on skill-based learning would improve the curricula as a whole. In contrast, the remaining eight New Zealand participants were explicitly critical of replacing the key competencies with the Norwegian basic skills (see Table 2 for an overview).

As given in Table 2, there is no clear pattern between the positive and the critically positioned teacher educators. The pattern comes across as consistent across national boarders. It seems that the values underpinning the two perspectives are part of a greater educational discourse that entails a deep value-based level. It also seems that the two cultures for learning are understood somewhat as a dichotomy. It was rarely expressed as a possible combination. The teacher educators tended to position themselves as positive towards the competency-based perspective on learning, and following critical towards the skill-based perspective. The way the majority expressed their views, it was evident that these two perspectives were understood as quite conflicting perspectives, almost mutually exclusive (Table 3).

Table 2 Overview of the distribution of attitudes based on the maximum variation sampling

Position in the matrix	Expressed attitude: positive towards competency-based/critical towards skill-based	Expressed attitude: positive towards skill-based/critical towards competency-based
Positive Norwegian participants	X	–
	X	X
	X	–
	X	–
	X	–
Critical Norwegian participants	X	–
	X	–
	X	X
	X	–
	X	–
Positive New Zealand participants	X	–
	X	–
	X	–
	–	X
	X	–
Critical New Zealand participants	X	X
	X	–
	X	–
	X	–
	X	–

Table 3 How different elements of the Norwegian curriculum are communicated at the level of theory in use and espoused theory

	Subject curriculum (skill-based)	Quality framework/core curriculum (competency-based)
As theory in use (operational curriculum)	Explicit	Explicit
As espoused theory (perceived curriculum)	Explicit	Often implicit

5.1.3 A qualitative analysis of the content

The results of the analysis from a qualitatively oriented perspective are discussed in this section and exemplified by a selection of participant statements. The New Zealand teacher educators expressed great pride in the values presented in their key competencies. A New Zealand teacher educator explained the values as being 'relational and the rich experience that, kind of, teach students something about how to apply ideas in life situations. That is probably a good aspect of this system'. Another explained:

> The NZ key competencies are more encompassing of the interpersonal skills required for effective participation in today's society and are therefore more forward-focused. The key competencies of *Thinking* and *Using language, symbols, and texts* include each of your basic skills, and then the other three, *Managing self, Relating to others,* and *Participating and contributing* indicate the need for our students to use or apply the basic skills in a broad range of contexts that will evolve throughout their lives. These key competencies indicate more explicitly the requirement for individuals to be problem solvers and collaborative participants in society.

A Norwegian teacher educator explained his reason for wanting a change by saying: 'Yes, because I feel that the five Norwegian [basic skills] are actually wrong. It is not what [education] is about, in my mind'. Another stated, 'Concerning education as a whole, much of the New Zealand perspective is more related to how I actually experience the Norwegian education system'. Norwegian teacher educators are experiencing discrepancies between their formal curriculum and their own convictions regarding education as well as how the curriculum is operationalised in practice.

5.2 Top-down governing on teacher attitudes

5.2.1 Political pressure

When the teacher educators were asked about why they believed there were differences between the countries, political pressure was a recurring topic. A New Zealand teacher educator explained:

> Anything that is new technology is associated with progress and positive. So, I think that the new things are kind of taken on uncritically, and I fear that ministries, policymakers are guilty of that. Not just ministers and policymakers, but I can see corporate entities are entering the education market. You know, sponsoring schools and giving computers. So, from this kind of context, the economic political pressures,

comes the consumer pressures, develops the idea… or this kind of contest produces the idea that 'oh, digital is wonderful'. So, we should take it on…

This pressure also makes teacher educators concerned for their students. A New Zealand teacher educator reflects on the possible consequences of focusing too much on skill-based learning:

I think it is political, I think it is a political goal that, you know… and again it's a concern… yes, we do want our students to be numerate and to be literate, but it's only half the brain, and it's at the expense of the majority of people who go through schools and come out feeling quite worthless.

Another elaborates on the matter:

I think we're seeing traits at the moment, globally, in wanting to have these particular skills. I would see it as very sad that we would kind of lose this holistic notion of learning and actually relating… and the skills which sit within [the New Zealand curriculum]. I think it is really important for the 21st century citizen, you know. I think it is a big concern, actually.

The concern was evident among the Norwegian participants as well. One explains:

I have been at lectures about the basic skills, and everything is being governed by big corporations, you know. They make tests and tools, and if you are not managing you can buy this and that… There is so much business in it,… and Norway has joined in. Why?

The majority of the New Zealand teacher educators were worried about a shift towards a more technical and instrumental focus, thereby losing their current high-level vision of citizenship. These worries were often founded in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings and other politically driven motives.

5.2.2 Concerns about a shift towards a skill-oriented curriculum

PISA assesses four dimensions of global competence: communication and relationship management; knowledge of and interest in global development, challenges, and trends; openness and flexibility; and emotional strength and resilience. Similar to PISA's dimensions of global competence, the National Education Association (2015) claims twenty-first-century skills are both subject-specific and universal, referring to the often used term *the four Cs*: critical thinking and problem-solving; communication; collaboration; and creativity and innovation. Though it seems to be a common understanding that these are important future competencies, it has been suggested that the school system in Norway often operates based on the need for instrumental skills. This foundation is also referred to as *the three Rs*—the basic elements of the primary school curriculum: reading, writing, and arithmetic (Elstad 2016). The three Rs are evident in what the Norwegian curriculum emphasises as the basic skills for learning (see Table 1), while the four Cs are harder to detect. In the New Zealand curriculum, global competencies—such as communication and relationship management; openness and flexibility; emotional strength and resilience; critical thinking; collaboration; and creativity and innovation—are more evident. One might argue that the New Zealand curriculum includes, to a greater degree, Biesta's (2016) notion of socialisation and subjectification, whereas Norway has a narrower focus on learning, based on qualifications. Even with PISA's four described dimensions of global competence, the testing of students creates political pressure towards

more skill-oriented curricula, making the New Zealand teacher educators concerned about the future development of education. The majority of the New Zealand teacher educators saw the Norwegian basic skills as being outdated. One stated:

> I would say, looking at the Norwegian skills, this is probably more the previous iteration of focus in New Zealand, where we had the skills focus. They all look very familiar to me, except, of course, the digital tools are more recent, but these are the basic skills that have been the bedrock of thinking about educational planning for a long time. I think there have been some positive moves, so I take a critical perspective on the basic skills. This [New Zealand competencies] fits the policy climate for today's education. To focus on wider skills, and the idea of social contribution, rather than cognitive learning as focus for education.

This was explained by another as follows:

> People need something else and a bit more, and what they identified as the something else and the bit more is mostly these relational skills. How you relate to other people. How you manage or organise yourself while you are doing that. The Norwegian seems to be still focused on those traditional skills, adding the digital tools.

The New Zealand teacher educators were, in general, not in agreement with the skill-based perspective expressed in the Norwegian basic skills, and they were worried about how their school system would be governed politically in the future. One explained:

> I could see that it's going back to these… you know, the basic skills, and I don't see this as progress. I think it's a big concern. Something we need to be very, very… especially with initial teacher education… we need to be very vocal about it. It's a major concern. But it's the government… it's the government who is pushing this, and yes… we need to be very aware of what is happening.

It would be the PISA rankings that would fuel the shift, one claimed. Why New Zealand has not already experienced this shift is explained by cultural differences. This is described by a New Zealand participant:

> Norway does well in PISA, and so Norway wants to keep its ranking high because their policy is really being driven by these big international assessments. Um… New Zealand teachers tend to be kind of independent thinkers and they wouldn't… they don't like that… New Zealand teachers don't like being told 'you have to do this because there is going to be some big examination', or whatever. It does not fit with our culture.

In line with these perceptions, Norwegian teacher educators said that they are related to the competency-based perspective, but they expressed a concern that it would not match what the students would be measured by. As one said: 'I believe the New Zealand perspective would result in a higher degree of coping for the students. There would be less measuring, which is a result of the PISA studies', or as another explained: 'I want more focus on in-depth knowledge, more focus on understanding. Not just technical skills'.

5.2.3 The role of the teacher

The two perspectives on education also affect the role of the teacher. One of the Norwegian teacher educators explained:

> I am frustrated by the Norwegian basic skills. I have gone from thinking '*okay, we have to do this'* to '*what? Why do we have to do this?'*. There are no pedagogical reasons. Nothing makes sense. We have been tricked. Changing to the New Zealand focus would mean letting the teachers be pedagogues and making choices based on what they actually know.

A New Zealand teacher educator claimed that 'the Norwegian one is a lot more constrained. So, I see this [key competencies] as providing the opportunity for teachers to be a lot more creative in how they adapt their programmes in the classroom'. An understanding among the teacher educators was that the focus on how learning is defined in the curricula would influence the role of the teacher and could limit their ability to make independent pedagogical reflections that influence their practices.

5.3 Competency-based perspectives in Norwegian formal curriculum

Both the Norwegian core curriculum and the quality framework cover the perspectives expressed in the New Zealand list of key competencies. It could therefore be legitimately claimed that comparing just the two excerpts paints an unjust picture of the differences between the educational cultures. To correct for this possible pitfall, the Norwegian participants were also explicitly asked about their attitudes towards, and use of, the quality framework and the core curriculum. One of the participants expressed having a somewhat vague knowledge of the quality framework, and the remaining teacher educators claimed to 'know of it'. Of all the participants, not one expressed a close and reflective attitude towards the framework, and only one replied that she had used the document explicitly in her own teaching. The remainder either did not use it at all or explained that the use is implicit or that it merely exists as a backdrop to their teaching.

Regarding the core curriculum, the pattern is somewhat similar. Only one claimed to use the core curriculum explicitly in teaching. The rest of the teacher educators explained that the core curriculum is not present in their teaching other than as a backdrop or implicit through their actions. 'It's there', as several teacher educators pointed out, but the teacher educators' main focus when teaching was stated to be the competence objectives, which may drive a more instrumental focus compared to the focus on the framework in documents such as the core curriculum and the quality framework.

6 Conclusion

Using Goodlad et al.'s (1979) conceptual framework, there appears to be a discrepancy between the Norwegian formal curriculum and the perceived curriculum. The core curriculum, with the overarching goals and basic principles for education, seems to be less emphasised by teacher educators than the set of basic skills. This raises questions because the same teacher educators express themselves critically towards the basic skills and request a more competency-based curriculum. If Norwegian teacher educators disagree with the instrumental approaches expressed in the basic skills, why do they often exclude the two documents that cover a competency-based approach when teaching teachers-to-be?

Furthermore, the interview responses led us to ask whether the set of basic skills described by some teachers is perceived as the actual core curriculum, as overarching goals for education. Could teacher educators' contra productively be contributing to

maintaining an unbalanced use of the curricula through their own unbalanced use of the core curriculum contra the subject curriculum? And if so, what are the contributing factors regarding the pressure to perceive the curricula as instrumental when the formal curricula in fact contain a range of values, including competency-based perspectives on learning?

Both the Norwegian and New Zealand teacher educators expressed a concern regarding the political pressure they are experiencing. The New Zealand teacher educators fear a potential political movement towards a more skill-based curriculum and assess the skill-based perspective as outdated. When asked to take a stance regarding the skill-based and competency-based perspective on learning, both the Norwegian and New Zealand teacher educators' attitudes towards this difference were surprisingly coherent despite the different affiliations and contexts. The teacher educators in this study generally seemed to agree on how these differences are understood and expressed similar attitudes and concerns regarding the matter.

Smith (1973, p. 198) describes a naive understanding of 'once a policy has been "made" by a government, the policy will be implemented and the desired results of the policy will be near those expected by the policy-makers'. This has not been the case for Norwegian teacher education. The formal curriculum in Norway is not in line with the teacher educators' professional opinions or practice when looking at the different perspectives between skill-based and competency-based educational cultures. This creates a situation where teacher educators are relating to a formal curriculum that is not in line with their professional convictions. Nevertheless, they expressed loyalty towards the formal curriculum, but were struggling with an inconsistent espoused theory when talking about their own practice (Madsen et al. 2018a, b). Both the New Zealand teacher educators' concerns and the Norwegian teacher educators' expressed attitudes correspond with the Ludvigsen Committee's evaluation of the Norwegian curriculum. The committee claimed that the Norwegian curriculum should, to a greater degree, be based on a broader understanding of competencies (NOU 2015).

Bentzen (2015) claims that increased employer control obstructs innovation and employees' sense of responsibility. She explains that it is because employees are motivated to work within a fixed framework, which does not reflect the complexity of reality. There is therefore a risk of developing professional tunnel vision, where employees are forced to do what is being measured and not what is professionally reasonable. A concern is that increased control will demotivate dedicated employees as the top-down governing could be perceived as a lack of trust in their professionalism (Bentzen 2015; Moynihan 2010). The curriculum as a guiding document for practice should be based on empirical knowledge concerning what is beneficial to learning, not political pressure. One of the criticisms of curricula development is that it is done far from the field of practice and implemented top down by politicians. The results from the qualitative interviews revealed that this could be understood as a global concern. It is a concern regarding deep educational values and different cultures for learning. As described, the teacher educators tended to position themselves as positive towards the competency-based perspective on learning, and following critical towards the skill-based perspective. The way the majority expressed their views, it was evident that these two perspectives were understood as quite conflicting perspectives, almost mutually exclusive. Are there contradictions between the subject curriculum and the core curriculum that lead Norwegian teacher educators to teach with a discrepancy between their espoused theory and theory in use? How can both a skill-oriented and a competency-oriented perspective be combined in a joint understanding of learning? The conflicting elements of this discussion seem to run deep in the educational culture.

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