Curriculum change and teacher professionalism in elementary education: a multiple case study

Dr Stavroula Philippou, University of Cyprus

Curriculum reform has been a prevailing characteristic of the international curriculum policy landscape over the last decades. This phenomenon has been conceptualized as a “curricular turn” or “the new curriculum”, since in the context of tensions between local, national, international and global agendas for education, the official (usually national) curriculum, has been heavily construed as “preparation” for the 21st century. Such rhetoric was apparent in the educational reform launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) in 2004 in the Republic of Cyprus and amidst which curriculum change was pursued, resulting in the production of new official curriculum texts by 2015-2016. This presentation draws on data from a research project employing an ethnographic case-study methodology to explore curriculum enactment in certain subject-areas as in conversation with Greek-Cypriot elementary teachers’ (re)constitution as autonomous professionals at the launch of the reform. It is argued that the enactment of the (new) curriculum took the form of complex curriculum-making in classrooms, implying different rationalities between teachers for the purposes of elementary education; the disciplinarity of and boundaries between subject-areas (which also spoke to the perceived value of teaching materials produced officially, mainly textbooks, and other materials); and for teacher professionalism. Through these cases, curriculum change and implementation are theorised as contingent, non-linear and complex since different rationalities met and competed in teachers’ narrations and practices in classrooms.

Stavroula Philippou is an Assistant Professor (Curriculum and Teaching) at the Department of Education, University of Cyprus. She has taught in a variety of educational contexts and has acted as a consultant for UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture. Her research draws upon the theoretical, historical and sociological study of curriculum and teaching, focusing on teacher professionalism, curriculum change and teacher education. Such research has been funded by local, European and international bodies. She has published widely in international peer-reviewed journals and books and is currently the Lead Editor (along with Prof. Mark Priestley) of The Curriculum Journal.