
Curriculum Reform in Lower Secondary Education in Ireland and the Literacies

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Ireland embarked on an ambitious reform of lower secondary education in 2010 that places emphasis on the literacy and numeracy and other key skills. The push for reform in Ireland can be traced back to Lisbon in 2000. Lisbon is significant in education for a number of reasons—not least that it linked education with social policy, labour market and overall economic policy. It also saw the introduction of Open Method Coordination, which has led to policy borrowing and peer learning, but also to ideation convergence and an obsession, some would say, with global data such as that from PISA and TALIS. Curriculum discussions tend to be about how change is managed, rather than its meaning; about who controls and decides, rather than what is decided; and about the relationship between curriculum and economic success, rather than the common good. The domination of the rational technical paradigm has supported the climate of fragmentation resulting in the neglect of macro-curriculum issues. Curriculum reform in Ireland is at present in a liminal state. In this lecture the lower secondary system of education in Ireland is viewed as an assemblage –as an open, adaptive system and the sum of the whole is greater than the number of its parts. The study builds on interviews with teachers and focus groups of their students. The interviews are analysed in relation to teachers' role in a process of arranging, organising and fitting together, a process of knowledge making as part of a bigger whole. It shows how this knowledge making in a change-oriented environment can promote or inhibit curriculum making.

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