# Curriculum making as professionalism-in-context: the cases of two elementary school teachers amidst curriculum change in Cyprus

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# Curriculum making as professionalism-in-context: the cases of two elementary school teachers amidst curriculum change in Cyprus

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**ABSTRACT**

In this paper, two case studies of elementary school teachers in the Republic of Cyprus are constructed to discuss how curriculum making relates to teacher biographies and sense of professionalism, as those are shaped at the intersection of their professional history and projections for the future, informed by and informing their constitution as professionals in local institutional and broader social contexts. Drawing on the ecological model of teacher agency, the two cases are utilised to examine how teachers' narrated professional experiences in past and current schools were at interplay with their general sense of professional role and purpose as teachers. This complex interplay is simultaneously connected to the ways they perceived and constituted their pupils as well as to the ways they themselves were constituted by others as professionals. The examination of the two cases foregrounds the notions of teacher agency and of curriculum making as contingent, negotiated and negotiable, and opens up the space to consider the politics of both as those are permeated by micro-processes of subjection and subjectivation.

## Introduction

This paper explores how curriculum is made in ways which relate to teacher biographies. More particularly, we focus on notions of professionalism as constructed in relation to teachers' previous and current school experiences and their constitution as professionals amidst institutional contexts. In the Republic of Cyprus where the study was conducted, the institutional context is characterised by hierarchical relations that have traditionally constituted teachers as a particular type of a professional-as-public-servant. The paper is drawn from a broader project[1] in which a small number of elementary school teachers were studied as performing particular types of professional subjectivities, drawing upon a multiplicity of resources that cut across boundaries of personal, classroom, school and institutional contexts. This paper focuses on how teachers' sense of professionalism is instantiated through curriculum making, thus rendering the latter an active, negotiated and negotiable process linked to teachers' subjection, subjectivation and possibilities for

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agency within particular contexts. To explore this complex process, we draw on theorisations of teacher agency and teacher professionalism, which together enable us to unpack curriculum making as contingent and to discuss the (micro) politics thereof.

We argue this by contrasting two cases of teachers, Niki and Anna, which brought into sharp relief how their professional history (and in particular their previous experiences of different schools) was at interplay with their current classroom and school contexts, as well as with their general sense of professional role and purpose as teachers. We argue that the ways in which Niki and Anna negotiated official curriculum demands were connected with their differing constructions (by themselves and others) as professionals, which were simultaneously connected with how they perceived their pupils and schools. While both teachers construed their pupils as in-need, the nature of this 'need' was perceived as different (i.e. academic vs. Social–emotional), thus leading to different curriculum makings (a more academic as opposed to a more social–ethical oriented curriculum, respectively). By looking specifically at how these two teachers, through their professional school histories and sense of professionalism as they intersect in the present, come to make curricular decisions informed by the past and projected in the future, we argue two points: first, that this shows how teacher agency is achieved in relation to the institutional context (especially in the form of the official curriculum) as teachers do not 'follow' or 'conform' to this context non-mediationally; second, we argue that these cases illustrate how, when such agency is achieved, in and through the school and classroom contexts, it is permeated with micro-processes of subjection and subjectivation, thus exemplifying the macro- and micro-politics of curriculum making. The following section draws together the theoretical and analytical concepts mobilised in this paper to argue for these points, bringing together work on teacher agency, teacher professionalism and curriculum making, whilst accounting for the Cypriot context.

## Teacher agency, professionalism and curriculum making

Drawing on broader debates over issues of agency-structure that are key in social research, research on teacher agency has conceptualised teachers as agents who can actively shape their professional lives, albeit within the limits set in given contexts (e.g. Hilferty, 2008; Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, & Miller, 2012; Vongalis-Macrow, 2007). Such work has been recently marked by the suggestion of the ecological model on teacher agency (cf. Priestley & Biesta, 2013; Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015), a model which moves beyond the structure-agency binary by highlighting:

> that the achievement of agency is always informed by past experience, and in the particular case of teacher agency this concerns both professional and personal experience. The model also emphasizes that the achievement of agency is always orientated towards the future in some combination of short[er] term and long[er] term objectives and values. It also illustrates that agency is always enacted in a concrete situation, constrained and supported by cultural, structural and material resources available to actors. (Priestley, Biesta, Philippou, & Robinson, 2016, p. 192)

For the ecological model, cultural aspects include ideas, values, beliefs, aspirations, discourses and language; structural aspects refer mainly to social structures and particularly relationships, roles, power and trust; and material aspects include resources and the physical environment which may promote or hinder agency. Taking these together, the model

constructs teachers' agency as emergent, contingent and dependent upon various inter-connected fields of action (personal, classroom, school, institutional), as those may be mediated by teachers' past and present experiences as well as aspirations for the future (e.g. Priestley et al., 2012; Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015). For example, through this ecological model, researchers have explored the ways in which agency was achieved in differential ways, when focusing on structural and other resources encountered in differ-ent schools (Priestley et al., 2015) as well as the influence of teacher beliefs and aspira-tions, teacher vocabularies and discourses (cf. Priestley et al., 2015). Such work has thus contributed to studies of teachers as biographies with intertwining personal and profes-sional lives (Goodson, 2008); to studies exploring the formative years of the teachers' pre-vious school experience as pupils (Lortie, 1975) or of initial teacher education, especially the practicum (e.g. Ciuffetelli Parker, Pushor, & Kitchen, 2015), as well as later professional development (e.g. Tang & Choi, 2009). These are just few examples of the kinds of com-plexities that are recognised when teachers are studied as agentive biographies, complex-ities which have particular implications in the ways in which teacher professionalism and curriculum making are theorised in this paper. We intend to expand the study of complex-ity in teacher agency by also accounting for both the macro- and micro-politics at stake, when the two teachers we focus on make curricular decisions through their understand-ing of the context and their sense of professionalism. This is a concept we explore in the following.

Drawing on such work on teacher agency is in congruence with defining teacher pro-fessionalism, not as an external imposition of standards or norms to the profession or in comparison to other professions, on which a lot of sociological study of professions has focused (cf. Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996; Runté, 1995), but as the interplay of individual teachers' professionality and of the more collective/shared notion of professionalism at a given time. It is thus in sync with work which has destabilised the agency-structure binary cited earlier. This opens up interpretative spaces for exploring teachers' professionalism as shaping the profession, as much as the profession is shaping teachers; of exploring teacher professionalism, as it unfolds in particular settings, rather than as an ideal norm to be reached or aspired to (e.g. in the form for standards). Taking such a standpoint, Evans (2008) views the elemental nature of professionalism as individualistic and interprets pro-fessionalism as the 'plural' of professionality, as constituted by the 'multiple professional-ities' which teachers might enact. She further argues that distinguishing (collective) professionalism from (individual) professionality enables us to study professionalism, as having its basis in 'individuals' professionality as a singular unit, and the inherent diversity that this imposes upon it' (Evans, 2008, p. 35). This diversity is interpreted in this paper through teacher agency, since teachers are seen as being 'professionals' in the myriad ways in which their past lives, present circumstances and future aspirations differ whilst being shaped by local and broader socio-political circumstances.

An analytical implication of this is that teachers are not viewed as of one 'type' of pro-fessional, but that at any given moment they may potentially draw on different and diverse discourses of professionalism, which may be 'available' in their local contexts or circulating in the broader public sphere as kinds, types, ideals or definitions or even imper-atives of teacher professionalism. Such discourses differ in their ascribing emphasis to dif-ferent characteristics expected to constitute the teaching profession. Some of these discourses stress teachers' anticipated commitment to 'the public good', which echoes

Talcott Parsons' (1937, p. 366; cited in Wilkins, 2010) view of a profession as 'a blend of altruism and intellectual engagement' (Wilkins, 2010, p. 2).With altruistic undertones and a sense of social mission, Mockler (2005) argues for 'transformative teacher professionalism', one with a vision for social change-transformation, which resembles Evans' (2008) notion of extended professionality and Day and Sachs' (2004) democratic professionalism. Other definitions stress the importance of 'intellectual engagement' in its many potential manifestations. A key example is the one of classical professionalism, a discourse which has sought to reinvent teacher professionalism through defining a knowledge base for teaching. It has also been critiqued for privileging (academic) knowledge and cognition above care and ethics as the foundation of school teaching, aspiring to the 'higher status' professions of medicine and law, rather than the 'caring' professions such as nursing or social work (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). Even in the other types of professionalism accounted for or suggested by Hargreaves and Goodson (1996), which define teacher professionalism against measures pertaining to the nature of teaching itself rather than against other professions (e.g. as flexible, practical, extended, complex and postmodern professionalism), the distinct expertise/knowledge is highlighted, even though it differs and often attempts to blur the distinction between academic and practical knowledge. And yet other discourses of professionalism, such as 'new', 'managerial' 'incorporated' or 'governmental' professionalism (e.g. Wilkins, 2010), render this expertise as the ability or competence to adhere to state norms, standards or other forms of regulation. While these types of professionalism are seen and marketed as teachers' re-professionalisation, numerous scholars have pointed to those as concurrently inferring a process of de-professionalisation (e.g. Beck, 2008; Wilkins, 2010).

Different notions of professionalism hold different implications, in terms of how teachers are expected to shape their work through the institutional context and particularly in how they 'make' curriculum. Drawing on previous theorisations of education which constructed teachers as important, such as on work by Dewey, Tyler and Swab (Craig, 2010), in the 1980s Connelly and Clandinin foregrounded 'how classroom teachers *experienced* and *made* curriculum from their personal and professional knowledge, rather than through the top-down conduit of policy, documents, and standardized measures' (Ciuffetelli Parker et al., 2015, p. 4). Their argument is depicted through their use of the image of teachers as 'curriculum planners' (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988) and later 'curriculum makers' (Connelly & Clandinin, 1992), which 'works from the assumption that a classroom space exists within which teachers and students negotiate curriculum unhampered by, though not oblivious to, others' mandates and desires' (Craig, 2010, p. 867). This has contributed to understanding curriculum as relational, as 'what teachers and students live as they interact with one another, [...] what happens—what becomes instantiated—in the moments when teaching and learning fuse' (Craig, 2010, p. 868). Though the institutional context (e.g. official curriculum texts and syllabi, textbooks) frames these relations, it does not confine them in ways which render teachers as 'implementers' (the opposite image of that of the curriculum maker), or as technicians who faithfully apply and conform to other peoples' directives and state imperatives (and which is in line with the 'fidelity perspective' in curriculum implementation literature, see Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). However, this image of the implementer or the technician is what has been traditionally dominant in the history of the profession in colonial and then independent Cyprus,[2] which we briefly outline below so that we contextualise the study of the two teachers' cases in the broader socio-political context in focus.

## Teacher professionalism and curriculum in the Republic of Cyprus

Approaching a study on teacher professionalism in Cyprus necessitates a significant historical understanding of elementary teachers' position in Greek-Cypriot society. This position has been marked by their constitution as civil servants in 1929 and thus 'subjection' (in the eyes of the locals) to the colonial government (as opposed to secondary school teachers who remained accountable to the Church), long before the country's independence in 1960 (Persianis, 2006). Greek-Cypriot elementary teachers' positioning has also been marked by the centrality of the school textbook (rather than the official curriculum text) in teaching, in a highly regulatory context of textbook state monopoly (see Koutselini-Ioannidou, 1997; Persianis, 2010). It has also been marked by the gradual rendering of elementary education as mandatory by the colonial government and of childhood as a period of schooling rather than work (cf. Persianis & Polyviou, 1992; Philippou, 2014), but also by the transition of the 'teacher role' from spiritual and moral leader, to a national/political anti-colonial missionary, to an economic agent and a typical professional/public servant (cf. Persianis, 2006).

While the educational system in Cyprus evolved, but yet remained highly centralised over the years after independence, the positioning of teachers as civil servants has been reiterated through official moves and even teachers' own actions, feelings, and desires, thus rendering the latter unable to view themselves as autonomous professionals (e.g. Karagiorgi, 2012). On the one hand, the central position of the state has been reconfirmed as the Ministry of Education and Culture remains its sole policy-making, administrative and (educational) law enforcing body, which prescribes and provides curricula, materials and professional development, as well as regulating teacher appointments, secondments, transfers and promotions (e.g. Kontovourki, Theodorou, & Philippou, 2015; Kyriakides & Campbell, 2003; Pashiardis, 2004). On the other hand, teachers themselves have often been reported as not seeing themselves as leaders (e.g. Nicolaidou, 2010); recognising the state – rather than themselves – as responsible for key actions such as those regarding their professional development (Karagiorgi, 2012; Philippou, Kontovourki, & Theodorou, 2016); and, nevertheless feeling that they were rather influenced by official policy discourse as this was mediated primarily through school inspectors, especially during periods of curriculum change (Kyriakides, 1997).

The relationship formulated historically between teachers and the state in Cyprus has been particularly pertinent in the way teachers experienced the most recent educational reform initiated in 2004, in which there has been a conscious effort at the level of rhetoric to re-cast teachers as autonomous professional pedagogues, so as to challenge the traditional subordinate relationship between the teacher-technician/public servant and the state (see, e.g. Educational Reform Committee, 2004). Findings from our research, however, indicate that changes in the official rhetoric were not matched by changes in policies and practices, both on behalf of the state and of the teachers. Instead, these policies and practices continued to mirror and reproduce previous conceptualisations of teacher professionalism, with restricted curricular autonomy and guided professional development (e.g. Kontovourki et al., 2015; Philippou et al., 2016), even when teachers were asked to provide their expertise in subject-area committees alongside academics and ministry technocrats (cf. Theodorou, Philippou, & Kontovourki, 2017). More important, previous analyses from our broader project have indicated that teachers positioned themselves

largely onto different points on a continuum regarding their sense of professionalism during curriculum reform. These were conceptualised as positions veering between teachers' sense of minimum and maximum autonomy over their participation in the development and introduction of new official curricula, offering a typology of four positions described as spectators, receivers, implementers and reformers (Philippou, Kontovourki, & Theodorou, 2014). Teachers' narrations also revealed diverse and often contradictory understandings of professionalism which shaped teachers' professional lives and negotiations of change (Philippou et al., 2016; Theodorou, Philippou, & Kontovourki, 2016). The complex nature of teacher professionalism was also evident for us in how teachers negotiated their professionalism as emerging at the intersection of their personal biographies and immediate classroom context; in how teachers navigated the local context of the school unit and the broader institutional context as this was instantiated through official rhetoric and practices (Theodorou, Kontovourki, & Philippou, 2015); and in how teachers achieved agency through creative mediation of or strategic compliance to new curriculum policies (Priestley et al., 2016).

However, we were able to read teacher professionalism in the ways described in the previous paragraph through individual and relatively brief interviews with Greek Cypriot teachers (conducted every spring between 2011 and 2014) about how they were experiencing the curriculum change and how they saw themselves as professionals at that particular time. Drawing on conceptualisations of agency and professionalism as complex and contingent, spanning personal and institutional contexts and times, we designed a third phase of the broader project, in the form of a multiple case study of a small number of classroom teachers. A case-study methodology informed by biographical research allowed us to delve into the teachers' individual personal and professional life histories as well as their classroom and school practices over a long period of time. The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of how, during the implementation of (new) curricula in everyday classrooms, teachers as professionals drew and acted upon their own biographies (as aged, gendered, educated and agentive subjects with personal (hi)stories prior and after entering the teaching profession), as well as upon the realities they confronted at a school, institutional and broader socio-political context. The cases thus provided rich means through which to explore teacher agency and professionalism as in complex interplay. In the following part, we describe how the two cases presented in this paper were constructed.

## Methodology

For the purposes of this paper and for reasons we explain in the following, we draw on interview data to construct the cases of the two teachers. The study employs a case study approach, which allows the in-depth description of complex phenomena (Creswell, 2006; Yin, 2009) and foregrounds the examination of a particular subject, setting or event in its relation to a broader whole (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). We constructed the cases of teachers through ethnographic data collection methods, particularly video-recorded classroom observations, multiple interviews with the teachers and collection of teaching and other materials over extended periods of time during one school year. Procedures of purposeful and criterion-based sampling were employed toward the identification of participants based on criteria that emerged from previous phases of the project and through the study

of relevant bibliography. Eventually five female teachers participated, with ages ranging from 34 to 45 years old and from 12 to 26 years of service/experience who were working in different kinds of school settings and grades. Informed consent was collected from teachers, children and their parents, and access was formally pursued from the school administration and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

More specifically, data collection methods included ethnographic observations of the teachers' regular teaching practices during their Language Arts, History, Geography and Health Education lessons documented through video-recording and observation field notes. Lessons were observed and video-recorded during three different phases (of an approximately two-week duration each time) during the school year 2015–2016. In addition, semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted with each of the participating teachers before, during and after the completion of ethnographic observations. Interviews sought to unravel teachers' personal and professional histories and identities, sense of professionalism, understandings of processes of curriculum change and the subject areas in question, as well as how these might have related to their curricular choices and teaching practices throughout the school year and as observed in the video-recorded lessons during each phase. Finally, the archiving of documents related to teachers' enactment of Language Arts and Social Studies curricula was another important data collection method to supplement classroom observations and teacher interviews. These documents included teachers' planning for each of the subject areas, teaching materials used and produced during class, pupils' work, as well as other documents they drew upon (official guidelines, announcements, professional development materials, etc.) as they engaged in teaching.

During each data-collection phase, the data were organised, catalogued and initially coded based on thematic categories of analysis stemming from the project's emphases. When data-collection was completed, the data were further processed/analysed to construct the five cases, comprised of each teacher's profile in terms of (1) their perceptions of and experiences from the profession and their professional identity, (2) their experiences within the profession, (3) their experiences from/with the curriculum change and (4) their teaching practices in general and in the specific subject-areas in particular (Language Arts [Greek], History, Geography and Life/Health Education). Based on these profiles, brief analytical memos were prepared, which constituted the basis for the development of case studies, whilst at the same time a coding scheme was developed which enabled us to further the analysis deeper into particular aspects of the study. The coding scheme in question included codes relevant to teacher professionalism, curriculum enactment, teacher perceptions of their relational positioning in the institutional context, the concept of curriculum change itself and how such change could be effected.

For the analysis presented in this paper, we further draw from the ecological model of teacher agency and focus on the component of teachers' professional histories and particularly their previous school experiences (from the iterational dimension of the model) as at interplay with the cultural aspect (specifically their beliefs and discourses of professionalism) and the structural aspect (specifically their roles, relationships and power dynamics materialised in their current school appointment) (from the practical–evaluative dimension) to discuss how all these components fuel into and are informed by particular projections of teachers' selves as individuals and as professionals in the future (from the projective dimension of the ecological model). The two cases of Anna and Niki were selected because, even though they were working in seemingly similar schools in social

and academic terms, their different professional biographical contexts shaped different senses and enactments of professionalism. The comparison between the two cases exactly allows for a closer look at different nuances of teacher professionalism and at the ways in which the two particular teachers achieved agency-in-context in the differential ways in which the specific dimensions of the ecological model intersected at that particular moment in time.

## Professionals in context: the cases of Anna and Niki

To make these points evident, we invite readers to consider the two excerpts below, which serve as summaries of each teacher's general sense of professionalism and thus anchor our discussion of each of the teacher cases and of the significance of their contrast:

Excerpt 1

I like inspiring people. This is the reason why I work…children are not for being taught, it is not [about] knowledge. I believe in this mentality. Pupils are not pieces of knowledge, pupils are [teaching is] what you build in their brains, what you give to them to believe in when you build a dream for them to achieve, to touch it, to do what they ought, to change the way they think. This is what I do. Basically, this must be our job. (Anna, Interview 1)

Excerpt 2

It [teaching] is a profession. We get paid to do it and have specific duties. […] To know that you are a 'public' figure, who is exposed, to be very careful with your moves. Either these are emotional or psychological, or if it is about substituting for a mother or a father, to fill any gaps. I do not agree with this idea of the 'multi-competent'[3] teacher. There are specialists for every issue. I cannot be a speech therapist and a psychologist and a special education teacher. I have my share. And my share is, I get paid to teach kids. Of course, I consult the specialists, but I cannot do everything on my own. Because, in Cyprus, there is this kind of mentality, 'oh, she is a teacher, she can do everything.' Where there is specialisation or a special interest or ability, this must be taken into account by the school principal, when it comes to what subject-areas to teach. (Niki, Interview 1)

Anna and Niki are two female teachers who graduated from the same department of education at a local university two years apart. Like all teachers in their cohort, they were assigned by the official ministry to a teaching position at elementary schools as soon as they received their degrees. While sharing similarities in their teacher education, professional and life history, they verbally construct the teaching profession and narrate themselves as professionals in very different ways. For Anna, teachers' professionalism brings together the moral and the ethical that stem from a sense of caring; for Niki, teaching is a profession with distinct characteristics, which are identifiable and should be valued in the broader societal/public sphere exactly as such: as distinguishable qualities that foreground a specialist's ability to facilitate academic success and learning in bounded spaces such as the school. In our discussion, we examine those constructions of professionalism as part of teachers' beliefs as well as premises for future actions, in order to exemplify how teachers' sense of professionalism relates to their past and present in particular schools, as this in turn connects to curriculum making in class and to teacher agency-in-context. Doing so, we do not argue that each of the teachers *was one type* of professional,

given that different constructions of professionalism were confirmed and contradicted in each teacher's accounts, particularly as these related to processes of their recognition as professionals *by* others and the subjectivation on their behalf *of* others.

### Anna – the caring pedagogue and moral leader

In Anna's description of the profession in excerpt 1, teaching emerges as an act of transformation; as a scaffold to children to build and believe in dreams, to develop as ethical beings, and to change the way they think. In this construction of the profession, academic knowledge is placed at the background, while the teacher is to perform a role of a leader. This is solidified in Anna's statements that:

> The teacher must play not a cognitive role, but primarily provide pupils with life lessons, guiding life lessons… It's unacceptable to have a pupil getting his [*sic*] education from particular videos to the degree of deformation and us, teachers, caring only for 'oh, get ready for math, we have to cover our subject matter'; and see that a child listens to vulgar stuff in that Youtube and repeats it and uses it on to his [*sic*] peers, and not stop to teach them some other stuff, some other notions. The teacher is a leader/mentor in their lives. (Anna, Interview 1)

The morality inferred in Anna's description of a teacher's role as a mentor conflates with the construction of herself as a caregiver, which is exacerbated in her current school experience. While she admits to such role in her previous schools, she identifies a crucial shift because of the current pupil population and broader societal needs. As she states:

> Anna: It changed in terms of [professional] demands; I mean, I came to a school where the kids, where our priority is not the cognitive development of the kids, the priorities are psychological, emotional. You might be their parent, their mother, father, counsellor, and then their teacher…
>
> Researcher (R): ok, while compared with other schools?
>
> Anna: If I was at [an upper-middle class neighborhood school], let's say, perhaps the (role) of the teacher, of educating, would be prioritized (… .) when you go to a school which suffers during the past five years in Cyprus, where problems increased because of the financial [crisis] which impacted all the other [dimensions of life], and you see this change, what can you do?
>
> (Anna, Interview 1)

For Anna, teaching involves, first and foremost, caring for children's safety because these are pupils 'who, when they get angry, they will get up and leave'. And this is to be confronted with love – a 'climate of love,' citing her school principal to explain their mission, as she repeats that 'now we are giving a bit more of ourselves to these kids' – and with a sense of security, supplemented by shaping a 'nice classroom environment where children will feel happy' (Anna, Interview 1).

Anna's construction of professionalism and her current professional role is mediated through particular curriculum making choices: from designing lessons based on examples from her personal life, to turning pupils' emergent personal and family problems into units of study, to utilising technology to make teaching and learning more playful, so that 'children do not get bored' and ensuring that 'there is a continuous shift in classroom activities' (Anna, Interview 1).

I never criticise anything. I mean, it's up to each teacher how he [sic] will work with it [the teaching material]. I mean, to come and say that our books are useless and that they don't help the kids, I don't like this. I mean, if you are a professional, mister [sic], you see something and think that you cannot teach it, that it doesn't help you, don't get, say, stuck on the book, make, how to say, a detour. (Anna, Interview 2)

[I can work off of] anything I have in front of me. It's true. It may be the simplest marketing leaflet that someone will throw at you, to something I see on the internet or read randomly to something I [specifically] look for. I mean it depends on how I will work on a unit or what I set my mind out to do. I mean, I am flexible, a lot. I mean I can't teach that exact same thing I did last year to next year pupils. There is no way I will do that (…). Because I think that they are different kids. If you did something last year in this way, next year something nicer may fall into your hands, so why use the old just because I have it? (Anna, Interview 2)

As Anna's and children's personal lives and playful engagement with materials become part of the classroom curriculum, curriculum emerges as both relational and child-centred. Yet at the same time, this child-centeredness works to constitute children as in need. The need acknowledged to them and their families is psychosocial and stems from their conditions of living through the broader socio-economic challenges, which Anna (and the school) promises and strives to ameliorate. While children and families are the receivers of such care, they are concurrently agents in the ways Anna herself is constituted and recognised as professional:

My pupils always loved me. And their parents came to meet me, because of my pupils' good words at home. I mean this is very important.

[…]

And you see the work you are doing, and in the afternoon, when parents call you, let's say, because they have problems with their kids and you need to talk to them, to provide the moral scaffolds and the social and emotional scaffolds. And you spend more time and energy. Because you are human, above all. (Anna, Interview 2)

Reiterating her professional role (even, mission in a missionary sense), Anna sets the conditions of her own recognisability as a professional. She sees her role as transgressing the boundaries of the school space and of curriculum making in class to provide emotional support to her pupils and their families after/outside school. Accordingly, and in sync with her constitution as the moral leader and caregiver, recognisability comes from the immediate receivers of what she perceives as professional acts – pupils and parents; while other players in the hierarchy of the educational terrain (her school principal and school inspectors) are attributed a peripheral role – as Anna says, they have always been supportive and she had never had any issues with them. This informs or is illustrated by her choices in class as curriculum making because recognisability stems from parents and pupils, rather than inspectors for example as seen below:

[…] I have never happened to follow the demands of inspectors to the last detail because I don't really care about the numerical evaluation I will be given, as a person. I mean, I am not interested in evaluation. I am interested in kids learning, that they [kids] like that there is a nice environment. (Anna, Interview 1)

In addition to her subjectivation as a child-centred, socially oriented curriculum maker, the excerpt above alludes to how she sees herself as a professional in a given institutional context. While seeing herself as having a lot of leeway in making curriculum, she nonetheless complicates that by admitting how teachers as public servants in current times are highly regulated by the state. Noting that 'the teacher executes', 'has no right' and 'has to do as told' (Anna, Interview 1), she laments the constriction of the public school teacher role which has been exacerbated over (her teaching) years.

### Niki, the academically oriented professional

Much like in the case of Anna, children and their parents are central in Niki's descriptions of herself as professional and, particularly, her current school experience. However, in excerpt 2, Niki's sense of professionalism is clearly one where academic knowledge and the very act of teaching as purposeful and distinct from providing emotional or other type of support are at the heart of the profession. Niki delineates this at different points:

Niki: Society plays a crucial role; the pressure onto the Ministry [of Education and Culture] and the teachers. We are in 2016, society is at a phase of digital evolution, of course, social realities force you to move forward, to move ahead and simulate European and national standards. Our profession is no longer makeshift[4] nor is it a service.[5] I don't think that what I'm doing is a service, it's a profession that I enact.

R: In what sense?

Niki: You are a professional teacher; it means, what you do, you do it purposefully, you know what you are doing, you aim at five basic, crucial things, but –of course – to be sufficient, you also have to cover for children's psychological and emotional needs.

R: So, you are talking about knowledge.

Niki: Learning needs, as well. But it is not, you are not surveilling, you are not substituting for a parent, nor are you a priest.

(Niki, Interview 1)

While Niki's references to standards and purposeful conduct indirectly cites a sense of professionalism that fosters academic learning, the latter is much more evident in the tensions she described in a new school to which she was appointed during the year of data collection. As seen in the examples that follow, tensions reveal how Niki's construction of teaching as a provision and facilitation of particular academic knowledge relate to curriculum making in her classroom:

This year, I feel that, despite planning particular activities so that kids spend most of the time acting and participating, many times I am disappointed because I feel that I, rather than the kids, need to be the leading actor in class. Either because…uhm, of their limited background either because of their restricted expressive and writing skills, and many times because of their lack of interest. (Niki, Interview 2, emphasis added)

It was a challenging year for me. Many times, in many of my lessons, I had to revise my practices, to utilise a thousand different ways so that children understand something. At the

beginning, this was very intense and it was really tiring. In the process, OK, less effort was needed, but nevertheless this was a year when my engines were functioning 1000%. And when schools were out, I was literally a pile of ruins. (Niki, Interview 3)

For Niki, curriculum making in class involves children as key actors who can actively engage in learning, provided that they have particular skills and backgrounds. This pre-condition is set because curriculum refers not only to what children can bring to class, but also to sets of knowledge and skills that are to be reached at a given pace. When related expectations are not reached, it is, for Niki, a challenge attributed to children's abilities and experiences. Thus, curriculum making renders as relational to the extent that child-ren's (academic) needs and abilities compare to standards, often predefined in terms of Niki's experience in previous schools (see below). However, this makes evident that, when curriculum is negotiated (in terms of Niki's changing practices and pacing), it feels more like a compromise.

Nevertheless, and much like Anna, Niki's attempt to perform her role as a curriculum maker extends beyond her pupils to reach their parents and colleagues. As she states at different interviews, Niki reaches out to her pupils' parents to provide guidance or feed-back on how to better support the learning of their children at home. Promoting a particu-lar programme at her school, which she has implemented for years in her previous school appointments, Niki 'sent them an informative leaflet' with suggestions on home activities (Interview 1), or 'conducted a mini professional development session to orient them towards the goal of the week' through a cell-phone application (Interview 3). Even though she admitted that she might have had overdone it, she reports that her consistency with parents and their positive reactions to her efforts were a source of satisfaction.

In a similar manner, curriculum making as a means to enhance academic achievement extended beyond involving her pupils and their parents to involve also other teachers in her school. Seeing her professional self as curriculum maker, Niki anticipated that col-leagues in her current school would likewise embrace this as a natural part their profes-sional role in a way that would render curriculum making a collective and collaborative process at the level of the school. Her expectations were heavily shaped by her previous professional experience in schools where she described teachers constantly engaging in curriculum making in collaboration and beyond the classroom (see below). During the school year of data collection, which was the first for Niki at a new school, Niki attempted to reach for her colleagues and support them to implement a programme that would fos-ter children's abilities and overall academic achievement. Being new at the school, she had reached out to colleagues to invite them in her classroom, to volunteer herself as a co-teacher and mentor, or even to:

... fill up their drawers with whatever [teaching] material I use, even though I don't consider this a sign of collaboration. They [other colleagues] put nothing inside and I'm in great dilemma in regards to how I will proceed next year, because I started feeling like a jerk. (Niki, Interview 1)

Disappointed to not have experienced the same collective curriculum making in her current school, Niki appears to be the person in power and in position to control, even in the sense of guidance, the actions of others in the tensions she experienced in her current school and classroom. In this view and in constantly employing a dual frame of compari-son between previous and current schools, colleagues and pupils, Niki constructs her

current pupils and their parents, as well as her colleagues, as not necessarily having the needed background experiences, abilities, aspirations or devotion to achieving high-standard education. While there are times when Niki verbally attributes this deficit of the majority to poor family experiences, low socio-economic and educational status, or non-investment in education (Interview 3), it is her professional history as a particular type of teacher and in particular types of school contexts that emerged as significant in her constitution of herself as a professional and of others as in need.

Nevertheless, to merely say that Niki constructs her pupils as lacking would do an injustice to the complex ways in which she enacts her professionalism as instantiations of teacher agency through curriculum making. In fact, the very sense of professionalism that makes her prioritise academic learning and contributes to her (uncritically) perceiving her current pupils as in need of academic support is that same sense of professionalism which allows Niki to continue to push towards what she perceives as the (academic) ideal for her pupils; she does this through curriculum making choices that maintain her academic expectations of her pupils unwavering. She takes pride in what she sees as the fruits of her labour and as progress towards the right direction marked by the way her relationship with the families and the pupils has changed over time and by the improvement in her pupils' academic performance.

The way Niki considered herself a 'school' rather than a 'classroom teacher' as a crucial feature of her professionality related to her graduate studies:

> You move a step further, you expand beyond the microcosm of your classroom, because I was never a teacher of the classroom. I work with my class, but I like action at the school level. [...] I see school as a community. I don't want to be a teacher hidden within the four classroom walls and …books-books-books, lessons-lessons-lessons. I like broader actions, in general. I think my graduate studies helped me toward this direction. (Niki, Interview 1)

And it also related to her prior professional experiences. Hence, while her attempts to enact such professionalism in her current school are not met with much success, Niki describes previous experiences in an almost nostalgic tone as she remembers having worked in schools that were 'very vibrant', with colleagues who were 'young, qualified, meritorious, energetic', thus resulting in being ahead of their times in terms of how school and curriculum were organised and how parents were involved (Niki, Interview 1). Talking specifically about her previous school, Niki admits:

> Another extravagant experience was [previous school]. The [previous school] will always stay in my heart, I will never forget it. We went there and it was unbuilt [...] Its facilities, its equipment, the school principal was the best who could be. Everybody was chosen/selected, in a way. There was this rumor, and a rumor indeed started being built around the school that it was a model/exemplar school, and *it was* a model school. (Niki, Interview 1, emphasis in original)

Niki was appointed to this 'model' school because of her own identification as an exemplar classroom teacher. As she describes, this 'identity' has been constructed *for her* via school principals and inspectors recognising her as a great first grade teacher. When the new school was built to serve the needs of a socio-economically affluent neighbourhood, Niki was transferred there because of that recognition; in her words, 'it is the school inspectors that transferred me to [the previous, model school], "she is a first grade teacher, she is very good, she goes to [previous school]"' (Niki, Interview 1). Niki's constitution as a

professional subject thus relates to her recognisability as such, not so much by the immediate actors with which she engages (as in Anna's case), but mostly by the ways she is perceived by certain inspectors, who are high in the hierarchical ladder that permeates the broader institutional context. By citing this in her descriptions of previous school and other experiences, she actively engages in the constitution of herself as a professional in terms of recognisable abilities and credentials (see e.g. reference to her graduate studies as pivotal for her constitution as a school rather than a classroom teacher) in a manner similar to how she sees her present pupils. The constitution of herself and others in these academic terms/criteria even extends to the ways in which she subjectivates inspectors as having less professional expertise than her. For example, she explains in passing 'our only contact [with the state] is through the school inspectors, who – truth be told – most of them are clueless' (Niki, Interview 1). This relates to her disappointment, not only over what she perceives as not working in her current class and school, but also over the way in which she sees teachers' evaluation system as unfair. She notes: 'either you work day and night or you do nothing... [it's all the same]; there is this complete lack of meritocracy' (Niki, Interview 1). In this sense, her relation with the state is marked by an (unfulfilled) desire to be formally recognised as professional on the basis of similar standards to the ones she holds for others.

## Discussion

The cases we constructed for Anna and Niki help us to problematise typologies or categorisations of professionalism as, for instance, managerial vs. democratic (Day & Sachs, 2004), or extended vs. restricted (Evans, 2008), by showing how porous the 'boundaries' between these categorisations are. They are further helpful for challenging the 'spatial' border implied in these categorisations between 'the classroom', 'the school', 'the community', 'the social' contexts, since, as we have exemplified in the cases of both Anna and Niki, each of these contexts is *nested in* and *open to* each other. The two teachers' decisions in the classroom are shaped by how they have been perceived and recognised in their (past and present) schools, how they repeatedly re-enacted such recognisable 'identities' (see, e.g. Niki's constitution as a good first grade teacher as well as her reiteration of the 'teacher of the school' rather than 'of a classroom') and the 'role' or 'mission' of school in the broader social context. Their enactment of professionalism as professionality is shaped by their own professional biographies and beliefs (e.g. school contexts, past experiences and training), but it is also shaped by and simultaneously shapes broader historical and historicised notions of professionalism as these have emerged in the context of Cyprus. The historical conceptualisation of the teacher as a public servant in Cyprus relates to Anna's reported mission of the school to ameliorate for the social and emotional/psychological needs of pupils and families, as a provision of public service perceived as social service. This sets the teaching profession in a particular relation to the state as a profession primarily of social work. Contrastingly, Niki's devotion to providing a high-standard education, to those whom she perceived as in-need, also takes up historical notions of the teacher as public servant who has no control over where she will be appointed (thereby having quite divergent professional experiences each time), but who also has a set of professional standards to adhere to and relative autonomy to pursue. The professionalities of the two teachers, then, reflect broader discourses of teacher professionalism and on

education, which have been historically formulated and were iteratively, perhaps unconsciously and unintendedly, taken up by these particular teachers. This produces two points of tension, as discussed below.

First, Anna and Niki constituted themselves and were constituted *by* principals, inspectors, parents and even pupils as professionals, citing a multiplicity of discourses of professionalism that are hard to distinguish and bound. Locating this in the local institutional context, one needs to take into account how such subjectivation is practised, since teachers (as public servants) get appointed and move between schools with certain regulations centrally designed to account for 'equal treatment' and address differential needs for teachers in different areas/districts in Cyprus. However, even though Cyprus is not a context where teachers openly choose where to work or where schools choose which teachers to hire or have appointed, these institutional regulations seem to be negotiated in the two cases unpacked in this paper, by teachers, principals and inspectors, who exert power to influence which school one is appointed at because of/through different kinds of anticipated professionalism (see especially Niki's professional history). In addition, as there is no sense of long-term appointment of more than 5–6 years to the same school, teachers are quite frequently challenged to situate\renegotiate their professional identity in different schools located in different geographical areas with vastly different social, economic and local cultures. This became prevalent for both Anna and Niki, who seemed to have been marked by their previous experiences in schools, despite their relatively short duration, while at the same time narrating a sense of professionalism in relation and in response to the ways they perceived their current school and pupils. While such sense of professionalism is concurrently personal and local, it is also a sign of how broader debates on education are surfaced: for Anna, her new/current school experience exacerbates a sense of professional self as 'human' amidst the economic and consequent social crises and calls for a (re)consideration of the social role of the school; for Niki, the entanglement of her previous and present school experience brought about tensions that seemed to connect to discourses of high quality education – both for pupils, as well as for the profession.

A second point of tension relates to the analytical possibilities and constrictions of professionalities. We could infer initially that both teachers may seem to manifest some kind of restricted professionality (Evans, 2008), in being unreflective and at times technical or habitual in their work mainly focusing in the classroom. However, studying them ecologically makes it implausible to neatly choose that label of professionality, since both teachers are actually based (1) on a particular pedagogical theory beyond habit as embodied knowledge, and (2) on a particular vision of society (in the form of what pupils and their parents need) in the present and for the future. Because of the strength of this social vision in their sense of professionalism, both Anna and Niki might be then considered as exercising extended professionality (Evans, 2008) or democratic professionalism (Day & Sachs, 2004). However, their social agendas and their construction of pupils and parents as in need do not essentially challenge the official curriculum or existing hierarchies of knowledge: In the case of Anna, 'caring' for pupils does not actually empower them with the school knowledge necessary to succeed in the given school system nor herself as a professional. Indeed Anna seems nostalgic of times when teachers were expected to be social and moral leaders of multifaceted missions, comparing it to a present when teachers' hands are tied by state.

In the case of Niki, catering solely for academic 'needs' as perceived at the particular grade does not expand the curriculum making process to include those particular pupils as biographies and as children. On the contrary, academic needs are seen by Niki as a gap she needs to fill in with knowledge of the canon, as in knowledge of the powerful, which resonates with official policy discourses on student outcomes and achievement that circulate national and international educational contexts, thus perhaps facilitating her constitution by herself and others (principals and inspectors) as a good-competent teacher. At the same time, it is from this position of professionality, which foregrounds academic knowledge, that she questions the state itself, at several instances expressing her frustration with the evaluation system in place for teachers, which is not in her opinion meritocratic, as well as with the expertise inspectors should, but do not, in her opinion, always have.

The above discussion suggests that, even if we understand professionality as multiple and in a continuum from restricted to extended, as suggested by Evans (2008), such a uni-dimensional model of professionalism does not help us understand the contradictions and tensions in the ways in which teacher agency was enacted in the particular situations where the two teachers (and us, as the reporters/makers of their narrations) were involved. The ecological model of teacher agency can thus be seen as enabling us to theorise teacher professional identity 'as ongoing, dynamic and shifting; influenced by personal, professional and political dimensions of teachers' lives and work which interplay in an overlapping and active way' (Mockler, 2011, p. 526). Put differently, theorising teacher agency 'ecologically' enables us to focus not on what 'being' a teacher means but what *s/he does* as s/he narrativises her/his own existence and a fictionated self; a non-static but emergent, achieved rather than fixed person, constituted and re-constituted in relation to others (as these are remembered in the past, perceived in the present and anticipated in the future). This further points to the macro- and micro-politics of teacher professionalism. Drawing on the dual notion of subjection and subjectivation (Foucault, 1982), we argue that, beyond the emergence of teacher agency as ecologically achieved, it could be understood as permeated by flows of power both vertically and horizontally: as the two teachers are subjectivated by others *and* subject others at the same time, possibilities for the achievement of agency through curriculum making of a particular kind (social–moral or academically oriented) are multiple and multiplied, while concurrently constricted and constricting.

This choice has particular implications for the theorisation of curriculum making as well, since it illustrates how the teacher and their teaching are brought together, indeed converge as curriculum, thus manifesting how curriculum is 'made' in unpredictable ways in classrooms and schools and how the dominant separation between 'curriculum' and 'teacher' in the field is fictional and constricting (cf. Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Craig, 2010). This study might thus be seen as contributing to the 'in-between' literature, not focusing on either theory or practice, but rather the kind which 'begins in practice, draws on theory, and uses context to make sense of both' (Connelly and ShijingXu, cited in Craig, 2010, p. 869).

## Notes

1. The broader project is a longitudinal research study of teacher professionalism and the ongoing curriculum change in the Republic of Cyprus. The change of curricula across subjects and

grades has been part of the comprehensive educational reform, which was initiated in 2004 by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), and substantiated with the development, publication and dissemination of new curriculum texts in 2010. The longitudinal research study has thus far spanned three phases: Phase I (2010–2011) which involved interviews with 66 teachers to investigate their perceptions of professionalism during the year of mass professional development seminars aimed at familiarising teachers with the new curricula; Phase II of the project (2011–2012, 2012–2013 and 2013–2014) which focused on the period of transition from 'old' to 'new' curricula and consisted of in-depth interviews with a large number of practicing teachers (*N* = 245), as well as with teachers (*N* = 24) who participated in the design and development of the new curricula in specific subject-areas [γνωστικά αντικείμενα]; and, Phase III (from which this paper is drawn) examines teacher professionalism in the context of everyday practice, focusing on case studies of elementary teachers who taught social studies and language arts classes in the school year 2015–2016. Framing these phases of the project is also policy analysis which investigates understandings of teacher professionalism which have emerged in the context of the reform and the positioning of teachers therein over a 10-year period (2004–2014), as well as analysis of archival documents pertaining to curriculum change and the history of the teaching profession in public elementary education in Cyprus over the past 150 years (late nineteenth century-to date).

2. The term 'Cyprus' is used to denote the 'colony of Cyprus' during the British Period (1878–1960) and the 'Republic of Cyprus' from 1960 onwards.
3. The actual word used by the participant in Greek is 'πολυδύναμος' [polydynamos].
4. The actual word used by the participant in Greek is 'μπακαλίστικο' [bakalistiko].
5. The actual word used by the participant in Greek is 'λειτούργημα' [leitourgima].

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