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## **EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN NORWAY 1994-98**

*The scope and perspectives of the field*

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### *The scope and perspectives of the field*

#### **Introduction**

This paper put focus on the educational reforms in Norway throughout the 90thies. These reforms are part of am more extensive programme of reforms from kindergarten (barnehage) to adult education. (KUF 1996)

In Norway, changes have taken place in the society over the last thirty years concerning women's participation in academic studies and work. Technological development in industry and communication and economic growth based on oil-production in the North Sea is also a part of that picture. There has also been a great expansion in the educational system, more and more of the young people taking part in higher education and university studies. In Norway, education is looked upon as a medium for equal opportunities and rights (KUF 1996).

Norway, not being a member of the European Union, still has to face internationalisation in economical, political and educational affairs. Therefore, at the summing up of this millennium, the minister for Educational and Research Affairs in Gro Harlem Brundtlands government, Gudmund Hernes, started to plan a reform programme in education. The questions that were asked were: How can the Norwegian Society be able to shape the further development themselves? In what way can Norway cope with the challenge of the computer technology, inter- and intranett communication and other forms of globalisation? And: How can all children in Norway have the equal rights to education, in spite of social heritage, parent's income, religion or place of birth? Here there were challenges for the educational and school system, and therefore the answer was educational reforms.

From the middle of the Eighties, there had been a development in the view of centralisation versus decentralisation in political affairs in Norway. Law gave the local council in the communities given power to decide in local affairs. In the same act (The community act of 1986) the main principle was to give more empowerment to the local authorities and the inhabitants on local committees and boards connected to local institutions (e.g. schools). This democratic principle, right to participate on the arenas that you are a part of, is a principle of *decentralisation*, and one of the main changes in all the reforms concerning education and upbringing in Norway from 1994 – 1998. The other principle that operates on the same time is *centralisation*, in forms of fewer institutions and bigger and more comprehensive units.

Why start educational reforms on all arenas at the same time? The Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affair (changed name since Minister Hernes) describes the reforms to have a common objective, namely to ensure quality, coherence and continuity in the educational system (KUF 1997). With correspondence and continuity as a main target, it looks like as if it was necessary to involve reforms on every level of the educational system. Therefore there has been reforms for people from 0-100 years.

I will further on, present the educational reforms in the chronicle run.

## **1994: The reform in University and Higher education**

### *Fusion and Centralisation*

Norway is a small, but long country. Being a country with approximately 4 million inhabitants spread around from the south border to Denmark up till the Barents Sea, the university- and college systems have a long tradition in decentralisation. In Norway, until 1994 there were 4 universities and more than 100 small colleges distributed all over the country. One of the aims of the reform in University and Higher education, was to centralise and reduce the amount of small colleges. 1994 merged the amount of colleges into app. 25 campuses.

Oslo College, where I come from, is the largest institution of professional education in Norway. The campus is situated in an old brewery in the middle of Oslo. Presently there are 8000 students and approximately 800 employees at the college. Oslo College consists of more than 20 professional study programmes and a large number of credit courses. There are 7 faculties and the Faculty of Teacher Education is the largest unit at the college. The faculty offers both primary school teacher education and early childhood teacher education (*førskolelærer in Norwegian*). In addition to basic degree courses for both primary school- and early childhood teachers, Oslo College offers postgraduate courses in the field of Multicultural and Development studies and in Early childhood Education. The college also offers a great extent of in-service training courses.

To merge and centralise the system of decentralised units was one of the aims of the reform. The outcome of this fusion was supposed to be financial, managerial and administrative savings.

### *Network Norway*

A network has been made between all the regional colleges and universities, both technical (e-post and Internet connection) and to encourage specialisation and division of work. One part of the Network Norway is the electronic network; the other prospect of the network is specialisation. In 1995 Oslo College was allocated national responsibility for Journalism, Library and Information science, (The Faculty of JBI) and in Early Childhood Education and in Minority and Migration (The Faculty of LU)

### *More rights for students*

One of the main principles in the new act for University and Higher Education is more rights for students. One part is linked to the right to take an exam. This is a sovereign absolution, which give the students, who have qualification for entering the university or the college, right to enter and take part in the exam without attending courses or other student activities. This has been a major change, especially for professional studies, as e.g. teacher education and nurse education that has a long tradition of process oriented educational goals. Today there is a small opening for allowing this. If any attendance is compulsory it has to be a part of the local curriculum and thoroughly put in reason for.

## **1994: The reform in Upper secondary School**

The previous major change in this sector occurred in 1976, so in this way the upper secondary School system probably needed a reform. Compulsory primary - and lower secondary education has been developed all over Norway, and an increasing number of young people

enter upper secondary education voluntarily. This is part of a trend where more people want more education than earlier. Together with the majority of young people entering upper secondary, there was also a need for providing broader education and flexibility, especially on foundation level (1.garde upper secondary). The most drastic change in Reform-94 has been made in vocational and technical training. This is a reflection of the labour market, the business and the industry (KUF 1996)

### *3 years free upper secondary school*

From 1994 all young people have right to *free* 3 years of upper secondary school after completed 9 years (now 10 years) compulsory school. It is the county administration who is responsible to provide sufficient number of school places to guarantee this right. Norway is a long country, and the counties are rather big in extent, therefore many young people have been forced to move to another city, in order to receive the foundation course or further specialised courses. It is utopia that all the small town and villages can provide an extended assortment of all 13-foundation courses and the wide number of specialised advanced courses. Among many, there is Music and Drama courses, Sports and Physical Health, Building and Construction, Chemical and Processing, and of course general humanistic and language Courses. In different ways, the young pupils have the possibility to specialise in various subjects within all these courses, but in reality that is not the fact. The pupils usually start their career at one school, and select "the menu" from that particular school.

The right for 3 years free upper secondary is open for young handicapped or mental retarded pupils as well. The county administration and school board have the responsibility for establishing special education or special courses for this group of people. Especially there is a challenge to give all pupils some kind of formal competence and certificate (KUF 1996)

### *3 years run towards entry for university or higher education*

The reform in upper secondary education is designed to create more flexibility in the system, but also to support young people to take full 3 years run towards entry for university, higher education or craft certificate. Therefore there has been an "open gate" to the foundation alternatives, but more narrow road to different kind of advanced vocational and technical courses. Types of certificates are fewer, but all courses are either three years full run or four years included training and productive work. For the more theoretical advanced courses with general subject's supplements, there is lots of specialisation available.

All upper secondary education is supposed to lead to full qualification, either vocational qualification or qualification for university entrance.

### *New curriculum*

The curriculum for upper secondary education consists of a) a core curriculum (The same as for primary and lower secondary education) and b) subject syllabuses which state the aims and main elements of the subjects.

The syllabuses are broader, applicable regardless of in what kind of courses they take place. Previously there were different syllabuses depending on what kind of class you was in: apprenticeship training or ordinary general subjects. The syllabuses are divided into modules, which give the pupils opportunity to choose parts of the modules as "links" in different stages of their education. There is also formulated a wide concept of knowledge, ethical values, personal and social competence in the new curriculum.

There has been unstressed that the pupils within upper secondary education ought to participate more in planning, preparation and implementing their own education. (KUF 1996). A Pupils Guide has been made which advises the young ones to take a more active responsibility for their learning.

### **1996: The reform in Kindergarten (*Barnehage*)**

#### *Maternity leave and home-care economical allowance*

A system of extended parental leave has been introduced for parents with infants (0-1 year), by which each mother may take one year statutory paid leave from work in connection with childbirth or adoption. A *time account system* is also introduced that allow parent to have reduced working-hours when their children are under 3 years old. And following up on this, *home-care economical allowance* (kontantstøtte in Norwegian) was introduced this spring. This part of the reform is so new, that only the frame, and not the whole picture are revealed. What is to become of this reform, we don't know yet (BFD 1998)

#### *"Barnehage" for all children 3-5*

The political goals of full coverage of kindergarten (*barnehage*) by the turn of the century are soon realised for children from 3-6. *Barnehage* as the Norwegian term is a common expression for all kinds of part-time or full-time childcare. In Norway there is not common to attend evening- or nightnurserys, this model is expanding in some bigger cities. Still there is *no right* for children to attend barnehage. It is not compulsory, but the political aim is that all parent who want one or the other form of public or private childcare institution, the local community should provide this within year 2000.

#### *A new child care Act*

A new Act of childcare institutions was presented in May 1995 (Q-0513). The purpose and regulations for all kind of children's day institutions are the content and design of this new act. Section 2 says: *Day-care institutions shall be educationally oriented.* Norway and the other Nordic countries have a long tradition for kindergartens based on a holistic view of the child with emphasise on play. So the purposes and aims of the New Norwegian kindergartens are based on the new expression *edu-care*.

One of the crucial points in the new act, is that of parental participation. In order to secure co-operation with the children's home, parents taking part in the daily life of the institution is stressed and looked upon as an important issue. The kindergarten is supposed to co-operate with the home of the child, to take their values and perspectives of life and caring.

#### *A new curriculum*

Curriculums for the kindergartens were introduced for the first time the 1. of January 1996 (BFD: The National Framework plan) The model of the curriculum integrates both education, play and care into the subject matters. Learning through play and social interaction, creativity, experience, joy and high spirits are looked upon as the main working methods in the Norwegian *barnehage*. A "happy childhood", as well as basic competence, knowledge, and skills are the eventually result. This is what the curriculum points out. Conscience and caring

for the nature and environment are e.g. looked upon as valuable virtues in the Norwegian upbringing and in education.

### **1997: The Reform of Compulsory School (*Primary and lower secondary*)**

#### *The age of starting school*

The Compulsory School reform came into force the 1. of August 1997. The main changes are that children now start school at 6, instead of 7. Compulsory schooling expands from 9 to 10 years. This is the first time that the Norwegian government has extended the years of schooling with one extra year on the bottom, not on the top. This crucial question about age of starting school had been debated for more than twenty years. There had also been an extensive educational experiment in the last 80s to find out what was best for the 6-year-old: kindergarten or school? The evaluation of this experiment is widely documented by the Norwegian researcher Peder Haug (1994) who points out that the choosing between the two: kindergarten or school, is a choice of values. If you prefer kindergarten for the 6 years old, it is a choice of extended freedom for play and self-directed activities. It is also a signal for protection of the childhood and the "freedom" for the individual child. If school is chosen, as the outcome eventually was, it is a choice of a more academic approach to childhood, upbringing and to children's learning.

One of the reasons why the politicians chose school was that all children will receive education that equips them to meet the challenges of the future (KUF 1996). The main reason was that schooling is compulsory, *barnehage* is not. Therefore there is an idea of equality and equity in the choice of lowering the school age for children.

#### *A new act of education*

In connection with the REFORM 97, A new act of compulsory education has been presented (Ot.prop nr 46 1997/98). This new law of compulsory education stresses the *rights for* education for every child in Norway from 6 – 16. All children mean *all children*. Children who need extra care and support or special educational are getting these opportunities in their home class, and in their community school. One school for all is based on a balance between consideration for the community and adapted education for the individual. As far as possible, all children shall receive an education that takes into account their own special abilities. (KUF 1996). These rights are put into action in case if an assessment by experts has shown that special education is necessary. The Educational-Psychological Service-Centre (PPT in each community in Norway) is this expert- and advisory body. These rights are also applying on pupils from language minorities. In Norway these groups are the minority inhabitants in Northern Norway, the Sami people and the Kvaens and the Refugees or immigrants from Asia and other parts of the world. The education also helps the pupils to further development of their mother tongue as well as the Norwegian language.

#### *A new curriculum*

The new curriculum consists of three parts:

1. A general introduction for education on all levels – a core curriculum (KUF 1993)
2. A document of principles and guidelines for teaching (KUF 1996)
3. A set of subjects and syllabuses defining the content of the education (KUF 1996)

For all children there are two main principles: a) All children should be taught the same basic subject matter, but adjusted and adapted to the individual pupil (*tilpasset opplæring in Norwegian*) and b) the education and working methodology should reflect the progression and development of the different stages and age group (KUF 1996).

The new curriculum (L97- KUF 1966) contains new syllabuses for all subjects, and especially for the 1. – 4 grade, there has been major changes. For the youngest ones, the school day should be flexible with emphasis on play and other "playlike" methods. The contents of the education are supposed to be organised as *themes* in contrast to syllabuses. Working methods like project-oriented and teamwork are introduced from 1.grade. There should be a gradually transition from themes to subjects and syllabuses. There has also been build out a system of organised after-School activities for the 6-10 year olds.

### **1998: Reforms in Teacher Education**

#### *Why new teacher education?*

After "reforming" from kindergarten to university and adult level *on paper*, the question is: who is going to implement all this reforms and put them into action? The answer for Gudmund Hernes was to reform teacher education. The last thing he did as a minister was to put a committee into action, who had the mandate to prepare the reform of teacher education (NOU 1996 :22). New competence is also necessary for the old and more experienced teachers, so reforms in teacher education go for in-service training and education as well. In order to change the competence of the teachers and able them to teach accordingly to the new reforms, it has been developed a marked for comprehensive in-service courses.

The reform of teacher education includes different kinds of University Teacher Education providing teachers for upper secondary school, colleges and universities as well. This paper put focus on General Teacher Education at college. In Norway General Teachers teach in primary and lower secondary schools.

The Norwegian pre-school teachers (early childhood teachers) may be employed in grades 1-4 in compulsory primary school, in addition to the competence to work in different kinds of *barnehage*. If the early childhood teachers are going to work with the 2-4 grades, they require one-year further education. This makes 3+1, the same length as the Primary Teacher education. This spring is the new curriculum for teacher education presented.

#### *More equity and equality in teacher education in Norway*

In Norway there are approximately one college for teacher education in every county, and previous these colleges were strictly regulated and centralised from the Department of Education and Research. As a part of the reforms in University and Higher Education (1994), lots of colleges emerged and moved into big campuses, and the authorities were in urge for a new way of steering the big units. The answer then was steering by goals and evaluation. The system of school evaluation is not yet built out in Norway. The system of steering only but the goals in curriculum made distinctive different models for teacher education. From 1994 there has been different ways of "making" a general teacher: a) in separate colleges for Teacher Education, b) in Departments of Education in bigger units, and c) to select subject from the "curriculum list" in colleges which has desolated the old professional education's and made new syllabuses and criss-cross subject menus. Minister Hernes meant it was time for more equity and quality in teacher education. Therefore all general teacher education now is formed

from model where practising as a teacher and the subject pedagogy is the core of the education, linking the three first years together. Other compulsory subjects are Mathematics, mother-language, religion and pedagogy (10 point's courses) and Art, music, gymnastic and English (5 point courses)

### **Summary remarks**

Today we are standing on the threshold of a new millennium. This imposes new changes both in reality and as a symbol. Norway has during the 90thies, started out new reforms on every level of the educational system. Is it necessary to make reforms in the system to make changes? And: Do reforms always make changes? Can you feel and sense the changes inside the institutions? What is effected by reforms?

The Norwegian evaluation researcher Peder Haug has discussed these questions (Haug 1994, Haug 1995). In the big run, Minister Gudmund Hernes reforms have put a focus on more scientific oriented educational ideas (Haug 1995). One of Hernes better known sayings are that the talent and competence potential in the population had not been exploited (NOU 1988:28). The need for more qualified work force was important, in particular concerning international relations.

Two more ministers have followed after Gudmund Hernes and implemented his visions into practice. But how long does it take to see the results of his ideas? Haug (1994 and 1995) found out that one consequence of reforms in education is a significant change in rhetorical policy and in the view of the schools mandate and substantial content. One result of a reform is that the implicants are cleverer to talk about what have changed, than to do so in practice. To observe real "results" of a reform takes more than 10 years, argued Haug. Another voice in the debate about the reforms and the consequences is Johsmoen (1998) who is asking why the discussion about the reforms is so strikingly absent? His argument is that people think that the reforms are definite and unchangeable, once and for all. But history shows: Reforms come and go.

Minister Gudmund Hernes is characterised to believe that the educational system in Norway was like a sick or handicapped child (cartoon Aftenposten 4/5-98), therefor he wanted to heal the child by revolting the educational system and institutions in Norway. Today the complete system of reforms is a united system. You cannot remove one brick from the wall, because the bricks are cemented together in values, political interests and prestige. And: The bricklayer has left the house.

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