

SPECIAL ISSUE

Between Rhetoric and Reality

How Diversity Was Dismissed from Curriculum

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This article presents results from a doctoral study on the Norwegian National Curriculum Regulations for Teacher Education, 2003 (Skrefsrud, 2012). Using archival data to compare the curriculum policy draft with what actually ended up in the final version, the article shed light on political decision-making that goes into the writing of curricula. Based on results from the analysis the article asks if the school authorities – despite a well-intended reform – failed to bring the field of teacher education beyond a superficial and fragmented treatment of diversity.

Keywords: Educational policy, teacher education, intercultural teacher competence

Artikkelen presenterer funn fra et doktorgradsstudium (Skrefsrud, 2012). Studien analyserte prosessen rundt innføringen av allmennlærerutdanningen i 2003 og vilkårene for flerkulturell opplæring med utgangspunkt i rammeplanen. Ved bruk av data fra høringsprosessen foretar artikkelen en sammenligning mellom rammeplan og høringsutkast som kaster lys over den politiske tilblivelsesprosessen. Basert på funn fra analysen spør artikkelen om skolemyndighetene – til tross for intensjoner om en samfunnsrelevant utdanning – mislyktes i å gjøre det flerkulturelle til et gjennomgående perspektiv for lærerkompetansen.

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Like other plural societies, Norwegian kindergartens and schools need committed teachers who are able to respond appropriately to the variety of needs in a diverse group of learners. Thus, intercultural competence has been and remains central to Norwegian teacher education policies (Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2012). Following Villegas & Lucas (2002) teachers' intercultural competence includes an affirming view of students from different backgrounds and the ability to design a pedagogy that builds on the students' cultural and linguistic resources, while stretching them beyond the familiar. Teacher education is thus given the task of educating teachers who are capable of bringing about equitable change in the educational system and have the knowledge and capacity to maximize the academic achievement for all students, regardless of ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic background (Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2012).

Nevertheless, despite broad political attention towards the field it is necessary to continuously examine the ways in which government policies on cultural diversity are being articulated in formal documents, like the National Curriculum Regulations (Apple, 1990; Burbules, 2000; Engen, 2011). To what extent is the ability to respond to cultural diversity seen as a premise for being a professional teacher in today's schools? Is the increasing cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious multiplicity in society and schools understood as something that affects all subjects and carries ramification for all sides of teachers' professional work? Or are issues of diversity treated separately – without truly permeating the content of input, assessment, teaching approaches or other areas of professional teacher practice? In other words; what does it look like, the space between rhetoric and reality?

In this article I draw attention to these questions by presenting results from my doctoral study on policy documents for teacher education in Norway (Skrefsrud, 2012). As part of this study I examined the process of introducing the National Curriculum Regulations for Teacher Education in Norway (2003) and discussed the preconditions for a diversity perspective on education in light of this document. A diversity perspective on education would imply that pre-service teachers are given the means of understanding the complexity of cultural differences in a school population coming from different backgrounds and are enabled to address and respond appropriately on the increasing variety of needs in today's schools (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Bartolo & Smyth, 2009; Skrefsrud, 2013).

From a historically point of view, this is thus an interesting document given its focus on the recognition and acknowledgement of an increasing cultural complexity in society, schools and classrooms (Eritsland, 2003; Engen, 2011). Like today, the political message to teacher education was clear; in order to be socially relevant, teacher education must prepare and qualify the next generation of teachers for work in a diverse group of learners. However, there are reasons to ask to what extent the political rhetoric on diversity was only superficial, and if the new reform really was able to challenge the mono-cultural tradition of Norwegian schooling.

In order to critically examine the documents the study makes use of a discourse-analytical approach (Skrefsrud, 2012). Following Gee (2014) discourse analysis is a useful tool for studying the political meanings that informs policy texts. The aim of the article is thus to uncover the feature of the documents and critically analyse

assumptions and statements made by the school authorities regarding the development of pre-service teachers' intercultural competence.

The analysis concentrates on the introductory part of the reviewed document (chapter 1), which presents the overall structure and content of teacher education. More precisely I have chosen § 7 in the final document which correspond with § 4 in the draft document for a closer analysis. The reason for deciding on these excerpts is that they present the core political intentions and aims for the new teacher education. Additionally the sections of the chapter are chosen due to the substantial changes that were made from draft to final document. As I got access to the archival data from the public hearing I discovered that the draft document and the final version is almost identical, except for these sections in the introductory chapter, where several excerpts has been removed, rewritten or changed. This makes this part of the chapter particularly interesting for my purpose.

This analytical approach sheds light on political decision-making that goes into the writing of the curricula. Furthermore, it reveals how the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research – despite a unanimous professional support for the draft document in the hearing process – and without argumentation – edited the Curriculum with substantial consequences for issues on diversity. On this basis the article asks whether the Ministry – despite the best intentions – failed to integrate a diversity perspective in the introduction of the new national guidelines regulations for teacher education.

Interpretative Frame – Integration, Assimilation, Segregation in Norwegian Schools

As an interpretative theoretical frame for the analysis the article relates to three different political approaches to diversity which have been prominent for Norwegian school policies the last 200 years; *integration*, *assimilation* and *segregation* (Skrefsrud, 2013). These political approaches function as a background for analysing current policies – both hidden and open – in the Curriculum Regulations. Further, I identify some main characteristics of these political strategies, both in a contemporary and a historical perspective.

The contemporary educational policy of Norway is *integration* (Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2012; Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2006). Integration implies that all children should be allowed to express their culture, language and identity in the classroom, and at the same time qualify for future work and participation in society (Engen, 2010; Skrefsrud, 2013). Local school boards, school leaders and teachers are being challenged to engage in a continuously reflection on school and education in a wider context than before. Seen from an integration perspective intercultural competency is about developing knowledge on cultural complexity, and skills to both understand and act in cultural encounters (cf. Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

This competency obviously stands in contrast to a national identity policy which aims to restrict diversity within the borders of the national state (Horst, 2006; Gitz-Johansen, 2009; Engen, 2011). This way of constructing reality is closely related to the period of industrialisation and has traditions also in the Norwegian school system. Historically, the Norwegian educational policy towards schooling of minorities has not

involved integration, but rather *assimilation* (understood as a process whereby groups and/or individuals gradually adapt to the customs and attitudes of the prevailing culture and customs), and partly also *segregation* (understood as a separation of groups and/or individuals from the dominating culture) (Engen, 2010).

With regard to segregation, the transition from “peasant school” (allmueskole) to “public school” (allmenn folkeskole) in 1889 involved a reverse inclusion, where middle class and upper class children were included in a school originally meant for the lower classes (Engen, 2003). However, the public school was not open to everyone. In order to maintain a professional standard and ensure that the children of the “elite” were not pursuing their education elsewhere, some students – the “abnormal, neglected and disfigured” were separated from the others, according to the 1889 Education Act and its section on segregation. Following Engen (2010) this policy of segregation continued up until the 1950s, when pedagogical research invested a great deal of effort in the development of assessment tools designed to identify students who did not fit into the framework of the mainstream.

However, for most students the comprehensive school (“enhetsskolen”) involved assimilation into a defined national culture. This was due to the nation building process which in Norway started in the 1850s with the “The Modern Breakthrough” and lasted until just after the post-war era (Engen, 2010). Norway was striving towards cultural liberation from Denmark and political liberation from Sweden, whereby the comprehensive school was given a key role in implementing and spreading a nationalistic program. In this manner the school contributed to cultural homogenisation and played an important role in establishing a common national identity constructed from a selected set of motives. The construction of the Norwegian nation therefore became an early example of what Anderson describes as an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991).

Although this period may be characterized as a golden age in modern Norwegian history, there was definitely a downside to nation building. The educational system became a useful tool in the implementation of a policy of assimilation which ostracized a number of local cultures. For the Sami people this meant that lessons in the Sami language were forbidden. Teachers were also instructed to ensure that Sami students did not communicate with one another in their native language, neither in the classroom, nor during recess (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996; Engen, 2003). For the Romani people, assimilation was even more dramatic (Moen, 2009). Other groups, such as the Forest Finns and the Kven people were also subject to cultural and political measures (Niemi, 2003). Common to all of these groups was that their cultural identities were never considered as part of the national culture.

The policy of assimilation during this period was not unique to Norway, but yet it lasted for quite a long time compared with similar policies throughout Europe and North America. Gradually, over the course of the post-war era there was a shift in political attitudes. And by the early 1970s the strategy of integration was introduced in political documents, particularly due to the negative implications that nation building implied for the groups which today are referred to as national minorities (Engen, 2010). Additionally the Norwegian government has ratified a number of international agreements on the protection of minorities (Skrefsrud, 2012). Contemporary Norwegian education policies

must therefore be understood against the backdrop of negative experiences with the strategies designed to incorporate the national minorities.

Nevertheless, there are those who claim that cultural assimilation has prevailed in school, but in a more concealed manner. Slagstad (1998) identifies a political shift in the school's mission during the 1950s and 60s, from nation building to social equalization. With the labour movement as a driving force, the school authorities became more interested in structural conditions that would enable schools to offer equal opportunities, and less in the role of nation building, which by now was referred to as "indoctrination" (ibid.). Thus, the school system should build on a stronger scientific foundation, and in so doing, provide all students with equal opportunities.

According to Slagstad (1998) however, the lack of emphasis on educational content led, paradoxically, to a curriculum aimed at the middle-class and the cultural majority. When the content was taken for granted and not discussed, a homogenising strategy was concealed behind the argument for social equalization (ibid.). Engen (2003) states that this tendency prevailed until the introduction of the 1987 Curriculum Guidelines for Compulsory Education (M87), which proposed that schools should consider the local cultural heritages of the students, calling for a greater contextual understanding of the school system. By incorporating the principle of adaptive education, the M87 also facilitated qualitative differentiation as opposed to a differentiation purely based on levels or standards, opening the possibility for a wider cultural content in the school curriculum.

To what extent the proposals of the M87 were implemented in the schools is up for debate. There is evidence that the intention of a qualitative differentiation was suppressed in favour of a more individualised approach, which understood the principle of adapted education primarily from an individual perspective, and less from a sociocultural perspective (Nordahl & Dobson, 2009). The development of Curriculum L97 may indicate the same thing, since it includes strong arguments for the necessity of a common frame of reference and a culturally inclusive school (Skrefsrud, 2013).

However, L97 proved merely to be a brief interlude. In the curriculum reform known as "*Knowledge Promotion*" (L06) (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2006) the absence of centralised guidelines for educational content is more noticeable than ever before. Basically, L06 has reintroduced the contextual perspectives from M87, opening up for an approach to cultural diversity that greatly differs from the earlier strategies of assimilation and homogenisation. Yet there are also tendencies that steer in the opposite direction. There are, for example, indications that teachers and administrators still interpret the principle of adjusted education primarily as an adjustment of individual levels (Nordahl & Dobson, 2009). In this manner the principle seems to function as a basis for curriculum mainstreaming, whereby all students receive the same instruction, but the amount of instruction and the level of difficulty are adjusted according to individual educational levels (Engen, 2010). In combination with a narrow focus on basic skills and national and international testing, quantitative differentiation will win over qualitative differentiation, meaning that the cultural educational content may again be taken for granted (ibid.). This time however, cultural homogenisation would be more hidden, which makes it more difficult to identify, not at least for teachers.

On this basis, it is reasonable to claim that the school system is struggling with appropriate ways to approach cultural differences. A mono-cultural approach appears to

be consistent, despite the focus on the concept of integration in proposed curriculums. The important question is therefore how the National Curriculum Regulations for Teacher Education reflects this political discourse. To what extent did the Regulations take a diversity perspective seriously, the way it was intended by the politicians?

Diversity Perspectives in the Curriculum – Main Features

At first glance the Curriculum Regulations highlights the importance of bringing an increasing cultural complexity to the forefront of a new teacher education. In the introductory chapter it is stated that society is constantly changing, resulting in changing conditions for teaching. If teacher education is to be relevant, it must therefore prepare pre-service students for the requirements and expectations imposed by society on kindergartens and the school (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2003, p. 4).

In the next paragraph this relevance is related to nine different developmental aspects. The situation regarding increasing cultural diversity is mentioned first:

Norway is increasingly seen as part of a global society. Its benefits are provided through a greater diversity of knowledge, outlooks and beliefs, lifestyles, languages and artistic expression. Children from linguistic minorities make up a growing element of the education system, while the needs and interests of indigenous peoples and national minorities have been given increasing attention. The teacher must have knowledge of the situation for bilingual and multilingual students, more generally speaking, of the meeting between cultures, and he or she must be capable of cooperating with parents and guardians from different cultures. The students must be familiar with the history, culture and institutions of indigenous peoples. In Norway, this applies particularly to Northern Sami, Lule Sami and Southern Sami language, culture and society. For its part, teacher education should recruit and include an increasing number of minority language students and make use of the competence that these students can provide kindergartens and the school (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2003, p. 7).

Further, this competency is stated as important for *all* subjects in teacher education. In Norwegian language classes, pre-service students are expected to reflect on Norwegian as a subject for “identity development and cultural affinity in a multicultural Norway” (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2003, p. 28), while competency requirements in Social Sciences emphasise the fact that pre-service students must have knowledge of “cultural and political social conditions” and “facilitate instruction in the area of social issues in a multicultural and global perspective” (*ibid.*, p. 43). Also Religious Education stands out in this context and aims at establishing “competency in understanding Norwegian culture and tradition, as well as the multicultural world” (*ibid.*, p. 23).

From this point of view it seems like the National Curriculum Regulations hold the intercultural flag high. According to the Regulations, encountering diversity in a way that establishes mutual understanding is a key competence for the next generation of teachers and relates to all subjects. On this basis it is also easy to identify the political intentions behind the process: The new Curriculum Regulations was to put intercultural education on the agenda and make teacher education more relevant for an increasingly diverse student population.

The Curriculum in Light of the Draft Document

In order to examine the Regulations more thoroughly I got access to the archives of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research where the draft document and comments and responses from the hearing process is kept (Skrefsrud, 2012). This sheds a provoking light on the Curriculum text. As will be demonstrated, significant changes were made in the process from draft to Curriculum. In the following, I present the political choices that were made and reflect upon both the reasons for the choices and the possible implications this might have for the development of pre-service teachers' intercultural competence.

The preliminary work on the Curriculum was organised by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) at the request of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. Several working groups were established, consisting of professionals from various fields, and in December 2002, the draft was ready for public comments and discussion. The deadline for comments on the draft was already in February 2003. As part of the process, NOKUT also arranged a draft conference in January 2003. Finally, in the spring and summer of 2003 the Ministry decided on the final Curriculum.

What is striking in the comparison between the draft document and the Curriculum Regulations is how the formulations are more or less the same, apart from the final section of the introductory chapter which is completely rewritten in the final document. Which changes have been made?

In the Regulations the rising level of cultural diversity in society is one of many challenges mentioned, as we have seen above. Further, a number of other challenges are listed, such as the media industry, information and communication technology (ICT), changing consumer patterns and the need for a more egalitarian society (ibid.).

In the draft, however, this section is formulated quite differently. Here the same challenges are outlined, but formulated in a way that takes into account the cultural diversity of society. The explicit message is that a culturally diverse student population provides an extra dimension to all five of the areas of teacher competency mentioned in the *Knowledge Promotion*; subject competence, didactic competence, social competence, adaptive and developmental competence and professional ethics competence (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2006). Teachers' pedagogical judgement and actions are redefined within a wider context for both professional and didactic reflection. Increasing cultural diversity is a challenge that has relevance for *all* school subjects and *all* aspects of a teacher's practice. The following examples highlight the changes that were made:

Both the draft document and the Curriculum consider *media industry* as well as *ICT* to be important challenges for teachers to be familiar with. However, the documents describe these challenges in a very different way:

Draft document:

Today's society is increasingly characterised by a world-encompassing cultural industry and technologies which result in new forms of information flow and communication. Another prominent feature of the world we live in is

National Curriculum Regulations:

Society is increasingly characterised by world-encompassing media industry and ICT, which results in new forms of learning. Children and adolescents are often the first to begin using new technology. This is a challenge for teachers, who

mobility. Many seek experiences, work and study where there are more opportunities...contributing to a global agenda with both a national and local impact. This creates change, diversity and variation, with effect on peoples' identification with their ethnic, religious and geographical backgrounds (NOKUT, 2002, p. 7)

often lack knowledge of new technology. Students shall be able to use new technology for learning and communication, but they shall also be capable of critical reflection concerning its use (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2003, p. 8).

The Curriculum Regulations is primarily concerned with the ability of future teachers to keep up with the development of technology. Teachers need to master the technology which students already grasp, and must be able to utilise it for educational purposes while also developing a critical awareness of the use of technology. In the draft document, however, there is a different focus. Here, the concern is on how new technology contributes to a greater degree of complexity and diversity of experiences and perspectives at all levels, including the local society. Communication technology contextualises the global sphere and gives it a new local design. In this manner, technology contributes to cultural changing processes which influence teacher and student identities.

Another example of changes can be found in the interpretation of *equal opportunities* as a challenge for school and society. Not surprisingly, both documents view the task of promoting equal opportunities for all students as fundamental for pre-service teachers. But while the Curriculum Regulations focuses on gender as a central topic, the draft document has a broader perspective:

Draft document:

The extent and pace of societal changes also influence the everyday lives of children and adolescents. Family structures are changing, views on child rearing vary, lifestyle norms are many and variations of the outlook on life are on the rise...In this manner, the community is enriched by the access to a new range of choices. But there are also new challenges. Future teachers must convey fundamental values and norms of society such as equal opportunity and equality between genders and groups (NOKUT, 2002, p. 7).

National Curriculum Regulations:

Society is increasingly characterized by world-encompassing media industry and ICT, which results in new forms of learning. Children and adolescents are often the first to begin using new technology. This is a challenge for teachers, who often lack knowledge of new technology. Students shall be able to use new technology for learning and communication, but they shall also be capable of critical reflection concerning its use (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2003, p. 8).

While the Curriculum traditionally links equal opportunities to gender-related issues, the draft document points out how the promotion of equal opportunities also involves other categories. Exactly which categories they are referring to is not mentioned in the text. In light of group pluralism as part of school integration strategies it is reasonable to assume that the draft wishes to include the principle of formal equality also at a group level, such as it is expressed by the right to mother tongue instruction for linguistic minority students (Skrefsrud, 2013). At the same time, the draft document focuses on the way in which growing diversity also involves a varied number of views and perspectives with regard to equality and equal opportunities. According to the draft document, pre-service teachers must be able to convey these ideas as fundamental norms, but must also develop a *broader* perspective on these values.

A third and final example concerns the concluding *summary of challenges*. In the draft document there is a concluding paragraph which for some reason has been completely revised and reduced in the final Curriculum version:

<p><i>Draft document:</i> This [cultural diversity in society] adds an extra dimension to the five areas of competency and to the teacher's judgement. In order to construct an inclusive learning environment and accommodate instruction to all students, regardless of background, teachers must have knowledge of diversity in society and be able to adjust instructional services to meet the needs of various groups. Educational history must also be seen from an indigenous and minority perspective and knowledge of development and learning, leadership and organisation must encompass bilingualism and encounters between different cultures. Furthermore, concepts and skills related to social and professional ethical competency must be expanded to include a diverse groups of students and parents...thereby also expanding the context for the establishment of judgement and actions. This challenge applies to all subjects and participants in the field of teacher education (NOKUT, 2002, p. 7).</p>	<p><i>National Curriculum Regulations:</i> It is a deeply rooted principle in Norwegian kindergartens and schools that children have a right to equivalent education regardless of background, abilities and sex. This value is of particular relevance in a multicultural society. This principle must be particularly expressed in teacher education by placing an emphasis on equity, equality and adapted teaching (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2003, p. 8).</p>
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Although both documents conclude by mentioning the significance of diversity for teacher competency, there are also significant differences. In the Curriculum Regulations the right to equal education is presented as a value and principle in teacher education which is meant to be diversity-oriented. Thus it resembles the draft document in describing equal opportunity as a challenge. The draft document, however, concludes in a different manner. It refers to the five areas of teacher competency and points out that cultural diversity adds an extra dimension to all these five of the areas. Each area of competency must be understood in terms of a broader range of needs. Thus, the professional group behind the draft document saw it necessary to point out that the heterogeneous classroom is significant for *all* areas of professional teacher practice.

So, what is the reason for these changes? The explanation has to do with the interpretation of the Parliamentary White Paper no.16 (2001-2002) that was written prior to the draft document. When comparing chapter 2, §1 in the White Paper with chapter 1, §7 in the draft with chapter 1, §4 in the National Curriculum Regulations, it is clear that there are greater similarities between the White Paper and the Curriculum than between the White Paper and the draft document (Skrefsrud, 2012). In the same manner as the Curriculum, the White Paper outlines a number of challenges which teacher education must prepare future teachers to meet. And like in the Curriculum, diversity is designated as a separate challenge (*ibid.*). With its alternative formulations, the draft document can therefore be said to interpret and reformulate the policy guidelines in the White Paper from a pedagogical point of view – to a greater extent than what the Curriculum Regulations did.

However, this in itself does not explain the changes. They must have arisen as a result of the drafting process. Thus, that makes it interesting to take a closer look at the responses to the draft and what they say about this section of the chapter. How did the agencies receiving the draft react to the pedagogical interpretation and reformulations?

In the summary from NOKUT, comments on the draft document are sorted into six main categories; statements from student- and teacher organisations, from universities and colleges, from national organisations and councils, from other ministries and from the County Governor's office. As noted in the reviews of these statements, very few agencies have any critical comments on this specific section of the chapter in the draft document.

Exceptions include statements from *NLA University College*, *University of Bergen* and *IKO – Church Educational Centre*. In their feedback, these agencies wonder why the chapter section did not place more emphasis on school and teacher education as a counterculture, in other words, enabling pre-service teachers to deal with cultural fragmentation in a manner that would reinforce a sense of community (Skrefsrud, 2012). What this specifically entails is not clear from the comments. Other feedback on the draft from *the Norwegian Association of Researchers*, *the Norwegian University of Science and Technology* and *the University of Tromsø* include suggestions to tighten the writing in chapter 1, but provided no further suggestions for concrete formulations. However, the section which outlines the challenges is not mentioned.

Other relevant feedback in this context includes suggestions that the chapter section should emphasise “multiculturalism” to a greater degree, but provides no concrete suggestions for formulations or specifications on how this ought to be done (Skrefsrud, 2012). This applies to feedback from *the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions* and *the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development*. A general comment made by the latter agency states that “multicultural understanding” should be an integral part of basic teacher education, and should also be offered as continuing education courses (*ibid.*). Interestingly, these agencies commented that the chapter section should have distinguished “multiculturality” as a challenge for pre-service teachers *to a greater extent*, and that teacher competency in issues of diversity should be more clearly in demand. This demonstrates the importance of the perspectives presented in the chapter section.

The same impression is confirmed by the report from the draft conference, which did not comment on the content of the chapter section (Skrefsrud, 2012). The report states that the comments with relevance to the chapter section on challenges, refer to the same issues as mentioned in the draft feedback. Viewed together with the summary of the draft feedback, it appears that the draft has received fairly wide approval throughout the process. At least there are no indications on a direct dissatisfaction with formulations in the main part of the draft (apart from suggestions for an even stronger focus on how an increasingly diverse student population requires a certain kind of teacher competency).

However, one response distinguishes itself from the rest, breaking this trend. This involves the statement from the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, which presents a thorough review of the draft topics and provides specific comments to text. What do their statements indicate?

The Ministry find the draft unclear, compared with the White Paper. With regard to the chapter section on particular challenges, the Ministry refers to the White Paper and states that the chapter section should be expanded to include several of the current challenges and values encountered by teachers (Skrefsrud, 2012). The challenge associated with cultural diversity is only one of many challenges, they state, in accordance with the White Paper proposal and the final version of the Curriculum Regulations.

The Ministry also suggests several formulations which they believe correspond better with the White Paper's thematisation of the challenges. Their proposals for altered formulations were clearly adopted in the final version of the Curriculum text, as is evident in the text's description of challenges such as "equal rights" and "consumer society", which both partly stem from the suggestions by the Ministry (Skrefsrud, 2012). Thus feedback from this particular ministry influenced the final version of the text, with regard to both structure and formulations.

A review of the feedback on the draft document suggests that *one* consultative body in particular has had an impact on the final version of the Curriculum Regulations – the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. As stated in White Paper report no. 16 (2001-2002) this Ministry was also represented in the reference group working on the White Paper report (Skrefsrud, 2012). The comments from the Ministry on the draft document do not therefore come as a surprise. Rather, they must be interpreted as an attempt to ensure the quality of the intentions that the Ministry proposed in the White Paper report. What *is* surprising, however, is how a widely accepted professional perspective became virtually invisible in the final version. Neither the professional group behind the draft document nor the many professional consultative bodies who agreed on the group's interpretation of the White Paper report were heard in this case. Thus it seems that professional considerations were put aside in this process.

This is interesting *per se* and provides grounds for debate in terms of the function which curricula processes are meant to have. What is the actual scope of action for the appointed groups? How do professional and political considerations compare with one another? In other words, to what extent is there room for professional modifications of the precepts of the premise documents?

With regard to this specific text, the pragmatic reply from the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research would be that the Curriculum Regulations is a text of compromises and must therefore take into account the many challenges that teachers face, and that this was more clearly stated in the Parliamentary White Paper than in the draft document. However, as noted, the same challenges were thematised in the draft, but formulated differently, and with an obvious broad acceptance, not least from the professional hearing agencies. In this case one might ask if professionally grounded perspectives have been put aside in favour of politically pragmatic considerations, and if the Ministry of Education forced the implementation of something that seems to have already been decided.

I will not continue to discuss the hearing process here. Instead I turn to the Curriculum in its final form. The Ministry had the opportunity to choose formulations that demonstrate the way in which cultural complexity in society challenges *all* aspects of professional teachers' practice. Yet they chose a different approach. The issue then is; what are the consequences of this choice?

A Mono-cultural Approach? – Concluding Remarks

By comparing the two documents – the draft and the final Curriculum Regulations – we see that teaching practice is outlined in different ways. In the draft, cultural diversity is consistently emphasised as a challenge for the entire teaching profession. Encountering diversity is an integral part of what it means to be a teacher. In the Curriculum Regulations, however, it is possible to see an implicit call for future teachers to carry out the major part of their instruction *without taking into account the actual existence of cultural diversity among the students*. True, the Curriculum does mention that pre-service teachers must have knowledge of students' cultural heritages, because the composition of students is more complex than it once was, and that the school must accommodate for a broader scope of needs. But the way in which the chapter is formulated, this knowledge is not assigned any further importance, neither for teachers' awareness of their own cultural revision nor for pedagogical activity in general.

For many teachers this implies that majority culture is the natural frame of reference. Even though this might be unintentional, it reflects what Gitz-Johansen refers to as “a national strategy” when encountering diversity (Gitz-Johansen, 2009). As pinpointed in the introduction, this implies a hidden assimilative pedagogy, which takes the majority context for granted. The message from the school and the teacher is that academic success is only possible by adopting the majority culture. In order to succeed the cultural stranger must therefore leave the cultural heritage behind. If so, a mono-cultural construction of school continues, despite educational policies which speak of adaptive education, inclusion and integration.

In conclusion one can therefore ask whether the National Curriculum Regulations give way for a cultural hegemony and represents a disguised attempt to produce cultural unity. Obviously, such a way of reading the Curriculum violates what is stated explicitly about cultural complexity and teacher competency. That makes the document contradictory and difficult to comprehend, both for teacher educators and pre-service teachers. Nevertheless, one cannot rule out the possibility that an assimilative approach to pedagogy becomes a relevant framework for interpretation. Those who already are aware that pedagogical activities in contemporary classrooms take place within a broader range of needs, find support for this. But those who do not see this might continue as before. This means that a majority cultural perspective can continue as the naturalised base for educational practice, i.e. a hidden cultural assimilation dressed in a rhetoric of diversity.

A New Way?

“Schools and kindergartens are common meeting places in the community where diversity must be seen as the new norm”. That was the message from Secretary of State Ahamd Ghanizadeh of the Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion when he opened the conference “Diversity and Community - Intercultural Competence in Teacher Education” in Oslo May 31st last year. The conference marked the start of the Ministry's new initiative on intercultural competence in kindergarten, compulsory school and higher education, involving initiatives in pedagogies, language education and multilingualism, equivalent to 150 million NOK the next five years.

As a delegate at the conference I experienced a strong political commitment to the field. Norwegian school authorities obviously take cultural complexity seriously, and maybe have realized the unintended consequences of their choices.

However, a similar research like the one presented in this article would be valuable on the new Curriculum Regulations for teacher education in Norway, which was introduced in 2010. Additionally, little is known about how a diversity perspective is reflected in the actual teaching in teacher education, both in the various subjects and in practical training. As this article reveals one cannot take for granted that a supposedly progressive curriculum necessarily brings the field of teacher education beyond a superficial and fragmented treatment of diversity.

Notes on contributor:

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