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Norwegian Civic Education – Beyond Formalism? L'Éducation Civique Norvégienne – Au-delà du Formalisme?

L'éducation civique norvégienne s'est développée depuis presque 200 ans. Jusqu'à la seconde guerre mondiale, le contenu principal portait sur la constitution et la structure formelle des institutions politiques de l'état. Après la guerre, et surtout après 1970, jaillirent de nouvelles idées plus radicales sur l'éducation civique changeant le cadre de l'enseignement. Ces idées amenèrent une reformulation des objectifs fondamentaux basés sur des perspectives critiques, une participation politique plus importante et les idéaux démocratiques. Mais ces idées, ont-elles influencé l'enseignement de cette matière dans les écoles norvégiennes?

Norwegian civic education traces its origin almost 200 years back in time. Until World War II, its main focus was on constitutional matters and on the formal structure of governmental institutions. After 1945, and in particular after the 1970s, conceptions of civic education change. Among others, critical perspectives, political participation and democratic ideals became major issues. Have these ideas been able to influence teaching practices?

Keywords:

political education, civic education, Norway, citizenship, political participation.

1. Introduction

In the deliberations leading to a Norwegian constitution in 1814, it was suggested that a paragraph should be included, making it compulsory for all young Norwegians to study the constitution (Sivertsen 1946). The proposal fell, but the idea of civic education supporting the Norwegian state was thus born at the same time as the state itself.¹

During the 19th and early 20th century, civic education gradually developed in the Norwegian educational system. Civic education came to focus on constitutional matters and the formal structure of governmental institutions. Civic education also promoted deeds such as subordination, loyalty and obedience to the king and his government and made voting in elections a virtue for Norwegian citizens. Eikeland labels this civic education patriarchal (1989).

This tradition is not unique for Norway. Francois Audigier sums up available studies and concludes that political education falls into one or a combination of the following main types of political education (1999b).² The first he labels moralism, emphasising

civic deeds. For instance, citizens are obliged to pay taxes, obey the laws and serve in the armed forces (Audigier 1999a; 1999b). The second is a formalistic political education, emphasising the formal organisational structure and procedures of the main political organs (Patrick, Hoge 1991; Dekker 1994). In most countries these formal arrangements are mainly those of competitive representative democracy. In the third, political education takes the form of debating current issues in a critical fashion (Farnen 2001). In the fourth, emphasis is on the legal rights and obligations of citizens (Audigier, Lagelée 1996; Anderson et al. 1997).

The overall question for this article is whether the tradition emphasising formal structure and civic deeds of loyalty and voting still dominates Norwegian civic education. During the last 25 years, Norway has reformed its entire compulsory curriculum three times, in 1987, 1996 and 2006. These reforms have taken place in an international context where many European countries have tried to strengthen their civic education, among others influenced by the European Council (Birzea 2004; Spanring 2008). It is assumed that this has entailed efforts to develop civic education some way or another. There is a need to debate what the contents of such education should be. The objective of this paper is to contribute to such a debate.

By the term civic education is meant educational efforts that are concerned with the relationship between citizens and governmental authority. Such authority could be local, regional and national. Due to globalisation processes citizens are also governed by international authorities. Civic education thus includes citizen relations to international authorities as well. Finally, civic education concerns how citizens relate to intermediaries in this relationship, for instance interest organisations and political movements. This conception of civic education must be distinguished

1 In 1814, Norway had been ruled from Denmark for some 400 years. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, Norway re-established itself as a state with its own political institutions and a constitution which is still operative. The new kingdom was forced to accept the Swedish king as its sovereign, and Norway stayed in a rather loose union with Sweden until 1905.

2 Audigier at one point sums up available research in four types: moralism, formal organisation, debating current issues and political education by means of democratising the school or classroom (1999b). Elsewhere in his work he refers to other orientations, and he thus identifies more than the initial four. I base my review on his extended categorisation.



from the much wider concept of citizenship education, although civic education is a component in citizenship education (Gross, Dynneson 1991).

One may distinguish between civic education aimed at facilitating political participation, on one hand, and on the other, improving the competence in developing opinions and judgements about political issues (Soltan 1999). Both will be included in the understanding of civic education in this paper, as they are closely related (Popkin, Dimock 1999). Facilitating political participation may include various issues, but a key issue is the development of an understanding of what political participation actually is and what role it plays.

Civic education may be examined at various levels. John Goodlad distinguishes among the level of ideas, formal curriculum, the curriculum as understood by teachers, as implemented and finally as experienced by students (Imsen 1997). In this article we will thus ask: Has Norwegian civic education, since the 1970s, evolved beyond an emphasis on formal structure and civic deeds of loyalty and voting at the level of formal curricula? At the level of teaching practices, i.e., the level of implementation?

Civic education, as the term is defined above, can be part of different school subjects. Today, Norwegian children start compulsory education at the age of six. During ten compulsory years they have a subject called society subjects every year. This includes geography, history and social studies, the latter including civic education. In upper secondary education many courses are optional, but all must follow a course in social studies 3 hours a week the first year. In this course, civic education is a key topic. When referring to civic education in the Norwegian educational system, I refer to these compulsory social studies courses.

The method applied in this paper is a review of available literature on civic education in Norway. The national curricula from 1987, 1997 and 2006 have also been examined. The literature on civic education at the level of formal curriculum is of two types. The first is analytical in scope, examining one or more curricular documents and describing the contents. The second is more normative. Generally, scholarly literature on civic education belongs to the level of ideas. But this literature, which comments, advises and discusses what the curriculum could and should mean, is not of this kind. It is more a literature which debates how a curriculum should be interpreted. I therefore consider it as belonging to the level of formal curriculum.

The literature on teaching practice contains some interview studies and some observation studies, but the most common approach is textbook analysis. It could be argued that textbooks belong to the level of curriculum. However, in the Norwegian case, it is documented that textbook influence teaching contents

very strongly (Christophersen, Lotsberg et al. 2003). It therefore seems justified to interpret textbooks as indicators of teaching practice.

Below, it will first be argued in an historical background section that Norwegian civic education developed from the early 19th century with an emphasis on formal structure of governmental institutions and on civic deeds, at the level of curriculum as well as in textbooks. It is against this background we must see the attempts to develop new ideas of civic education, especially from the 1970s. The next section will examine these changes at the level of curriculum, before the following section will examine the level of teaching practice.

2. Historical background

The first laws on education in post 1814 Norway had passages referring to civic education. The law on primary education of 1827 required all schools to keep a copy of the constitution (Sivertsen 1946). An introduction to the constitution could be found in history books from the 1820s (Koritzinsky 2006). The law on education of 1848 stated that the educational system should provide students with the knowledge that was required for members of the political community (Lorentzen 2003).

During the 19th and early 20th century, civic education was developed as an appendix to history (Koritzinsky 2006). The dominant content was the constitution and the formal structure of national political institutions (Lorentzen 1991). When coining this a patriarchal concept, Eikeland refers to core values such as national unity, citizen obligations, subordination toward authority, obedience and leaving politics to elected officials (1989, 27-30).

In the post war years, civic education was strengthened, not least due to the war time experience and the intention to prevent fascism from re-emerging as a political force. Gradually, civic education was liberated from its status as an appendix to history. Social studies, including civic education, became a compulsory subject on its own in upper secondary schools from 1964, in primary schools from 1959 and in the new lower secondary schools from 1969 (Eikeland 1972). In primary and lower secondary school social studies was linked to history and geography in a broad subject labelled society subjects. In upper secondary school there is no such link.

Civic education after 1945 was meant to be more than traditional formalism. Interest organisations, in particular those related to the economic life, became more important in the curricula from this period (Eikeland 1989). The curriculum stressed that students should be encouraged to be engaged in their society and to take on a responsibility for the community.

This was a period of strong social democratic domination in Norwegian politics, it is therefore not sur-



prising that civic education focused on the collective level. An overall objective was to make students see society as a community in which all must participate in order to contribute to the common purpose of reconstruction, growth and welfare development. Politics was not about defending one's interests but about a large-scale co-operative endeavour (Eikeland 1989).

Before World War II there were also a few examples of schools that established student councils (Hareide 1972). In the post war years, student councils were gradually made statutory. The Folk High School Act of 1949 made student councils mandatory in this type of schools.³ In upper secondary schools and lower secondary schools, student councils were made mandatory by law in 1964 and in the reformed lower secondary school from 1969. Following these laws, the student councils were made up of elected representatives from each class and the council would have a representative in an advisory organ at each school (Børhaug 2008b). When the student councils were introduced, the idea that they should serve political education purposes was quite explicit (ibid.) Student councils should educate for democracy by being democratic themselves.

At the level of teaching practice, the well known introduction to the constitution and the formal structure of the main political institutions maintained its dominance in practical teaching in the post 1945 period. Analyses of the textbooks from this period found that formal structures and constitutional principles dominated (Baldersheim, Tvedt 1971; Holmer Hoven 1972; Koritzinsky 1972; Lorentzen 1991).

Gradually the textbooks from this period included international politics (Lorentzen 2003). In particular, the problems of the underdeveloped South became an important issue.

Lorentzen and Eikeland both point out that in textbooks, social development was understood as a rational process, and that society moved towards ever better and more rational forms (2003; 1972). This technocratic perspective on social change made the room for political choice very small. Conflicting values and interests became irrational disturbances in this perspective. Political participation remained a matter of voting (Eikeland 1989).

Also Theo Koritzinsky and Magnus Haavelsrud point out that textbooks from the 1960s stressed how society moved forward towards ever more rational and better forms, which narrowed the political field (Koritzinsky 1972; Haavelsrud 1979). In an analysis of textbooks from 1971, Baldersheim and Tvedt argue that the entire economic field was somehow defined as non-conflictual and as unrelated to political choice (Baldersheim, Tvedt 1971).

Holmer Hoven notes in a textbook analysis from 1971 that textbooks tended to insist that Norwegian society at large was democratic, without any reservations (1972). The liberal democratic welfare system was somehow "finished". Baldersheim and Tvedt also point out that problems in the political system were ignored (1971). The uneven distribution of political influence, the political strength of business interests and interest organisations, constraints on the power of parliament and the transfer of powers from the legislature to the executive were all ignored.

Implied in the formal structure of governmental institutions is that political elites are potent sovereigns who rule effectively without being constrained. Koritzinsky remarks in his study of textbooks from the 1960's that the government's control of society was presented as decisive and not questioned in any way (Koritzinsky 1972).

Throughout the postwar period, voices for further change were heard, starting immediately after the war (Sivertsen 1946; Storstein 1946). They argued that in addition to formal structure and constitutional matters current issues should be important. Storstein argued that democratic ideals should be taught and he argued for mock elections at school. In fact, even before 1945 there were ideas and suggestions pointing at civic education beyond formalism, voting and loyalty. Helge Sivertsen points out that a long time before World War II, in the folk high schools political education was a matter of discussing the major political issues of the time (Sivertsen 1946; Eieland 1972).

3. A new civic education

In the 1970s, Norwegian conceptions of civic education changed. These changes reflected the general radicalisation that took place in most Western societies and they reflected changes in educational theory and research. Changes can be seen in the new national curricula from 1987 and 1997, as well as in the normative, advising literature on the civic education curriculum from the same period. Clearly referring to traditions, the curriculum of 1987 stated that social studies should not be reduced to presenting institutions in a theoretical manner (Royal Ministry of Church affairs and Education 1987, 231). Although much changed, there were also elements of continuity. New elements were added without necessarily replacing older elements.

3 The peoples' high school was a type of school that offered one year courses or even shorter courses. The schools were private, some of them owned by religious organisations others had a secular value basis and were more national and liberal in the profile. These schools were a major movement in Norway and they still exist. A course at such a school was not meant to prepare for further study but to prepare for life. Literature, history, arts and in religious schools, religious studies were combined in courses that aimed at the spiritual development of young people.



From the 1970s in particular, civic education emphasised that students should take a stand in current controversial issues and discuss such issues in class. The teaching should be up to date and reflect the current political situation (Eieland 1972). This is clearly seen also in the curricula from 1987 and 1997. The 1987 document states that teaching should be linked to current issues (Royal Norwegian Ministry of Church Affairs and Education 1987, 231). The 1997 curriculum is even more explicit and states that students should: "Take a stand in controversial issues and normative questions" (Royal Norwegian Ministry of Church Affairs, Education and Research 1996, 176).

In the curriculum of 1987, the technocratic vision of co-operative democracy was abandoned and society was seen as contested and problematic (Eikeland 1989; Lorentzen 2003). The conflicts are not identified in the curriculum, but they are allowed.

In the curriculum from 1997 critical perspectives are repeatedly promoted, as this example from the 1997 plan shows at page 184: "Students must develop their ability to independent and critical thinking and to make justified choices in normative issues" (Royal Norwegian Ministry of Church Affairs, Education and Research 1996). In the curriculum from 1997, critical perspectives were explicitly invited on issues such as racism, environmental issues and consumption.

Civic education, and social studies in general became regarded as well suited for cross-disciplinary teaching (Eieland 1972). In the curriculum of 1987, social studies, geography and history were even dissolved as separate disciplines and the curriculum instead introduced themes that could involve all disciplines (Eikeland 1989). This crossdisciplinarity is particularly stressed in examination of social and political controversies and issues. For instance, in teaching environmental problems (Farstad, van Marion 1993).

According to Lorentzen, the international level gradually became more important in social studies curricula (1991, 2003). In particular global environmental and developmental problems and the arms race. These issues played such an important role in Norwegian social subjects that from the late 1980's until around 2000, the teacher training programme course on social subjects was centred on environment and development.

Concerning political participation and how to teach it, civic education also changed significantly at the curriculum level.

Political participation was, in the 1987 curriculum extended from voting to include interest organisations and various forms of direct participation, not least in local politics (Eikeland 1989). In the 1997 document it is stated that students should "be introduced to how various pressure groups work with lobbying and peoples movements" (Royal Norwegian Ministry of Church Affairs, Education and Research 1996, 186).

The 1987 curriculum states, concerning global environmental issues, that the teaching should "wake the students to responsibility and engagement for reasonable management and just distribution of resources (...). The work must create understanding for active environmental protection" (Royal Norwegian Ministry of Church Affairs and Education 1987, 233). Further, concerning the theme Peace and international understanding, the peace movement is included as teaching content (*ibid.*, 239).

Birgit Brock Utne outlines teaching for peace as a matter of civic education (Utne 1982). First, it involves teaching students to solve problems and make decisions by means of peaceful cooperation and democracy among themselves. Second, civic education must problematize the arms race and encourage young people to take a stand against it. Political activism against the arms race was something the school should encourage. Schools are supposed to teach students how all nations of the world are interdependent.

The normative literature on environmental teaching also strongly underlines that students must focus on what can be done with these problems and what they can do themselves. Tolerance and solidarity towards less developed countries were promoted (Hansejdet et al. 1994). Teaching recommendations on this are inspired by models of problem based teaching. Students should start with a problem, examine its causes and consequences and analyse how it affects people. The next step is to consider what can be done and what may they, the students themselves, do (Farstad, van Marion 2003).

Critical perspectives on most issues were encouraged in the 1987 plan (Lorentzen 2003). Not least important in this respect was the question of whether Norwegian society and politics really were democratic (Eikeland 1989). But in the 1997 plan, the political system was, on the contrary, labelled „our democracy“ and critical analyses of it were not directly encouraged.

Democracy as ideal and principle has gradually been made a key element in the national curricula. In general terms, democracy has replaced Christianity as the normative basis for the educational system (Telhaug 1994). In particular, students should study democratic principles in social studies lessons. The curricula, however, do not specify what democracy is to any significant extent.⁴ In several books and articles discussing Norwegian civic education, democracy is elaborated further (Tønnesen 1992; 1993; Arneberg 1994). In these works, direct participation and dialogue are pointed to as the basic democratic ideals.

4 The 1997 curriculum has a chapter on student councils and argues that these councils should illustrate the workings of both representative and participatory democracy.



Related to the emphasis on democratic norms and ideals is the endorsement of human rights. Human rights have gradually become more important, in particular with the curriculum of 1987 (Royal Norwegian Ministry of Church Affairs and Education 1987). In an article from 1991, Tønnesen argued that human rights must form a basis for teaching at school (Tønnesen 1990).

The local governmental level was introduced as a major element in the 1970s, and this was kept in later plans. In the 1997 plan, it was expected that lower secondary school students should examine a selection of local government issues and how the local government dealt with them (Royal Norwegian Ministry of Church Affairs, Education and Research 1996, 185).

Civic education has been expected to give a broad overview of the functioning of the entire political system. Or as it was stated in the 1997 curriculum: "Students must be aware of how the Norwegian political system is built and how it works, and know how they themselves may influence the development."⁵

The curricula do not specify what the political system looks like, other than pointing out the importance of governmental institutions and by referring to the political system as "Norwegian democracy" or "our democracy".

As a new component the mass media has become an important topic in the new civic education that emerged in the 1970s (Eikeland, Teig 1976).

Student councils were seen as examples of democracy. Norway seems to be the only country which elaborates on student councils in the national curricula – in addition to making it statutory by law. Their function as examples of democracy is clearly stated and elaborated upon. It is said that through student councils, students should have democratic influence on the planning of all aspects of school life.

Related to notions of political participation as well as to work with current political issues is the stronger emphasis on untraditional teaching methods. Eieland argues that social studies in general has been fought for by reform educationalists, who saw this subject as a suitable frame for untraditional and innovative teaching practices such as student debates, student projects and group based teaching (Eieland 1972; Heide 1972; Skarpenes 2007). Civic education was expected to be marked by projects and problem oriented teaching (Eikeland, Teig 1976). This is a form of teaching suited to examine current political problems and it is a form which, it is argued, is in itself democratic (Arneberg 1994).

Untraditional teaching methods are related to a broad concept of knowledge. From 1974 the curricula in general, and social studies in particular were marked by a broader concept of knowledge (Skarpenes 2007).

Knowledge was no longer restricted to knowing and applying concepts and facts derived from various academic disciplines. Knowledge also included problem solving skills, flexibility and tolerance, social and organisational skills, critical attitudes, skills in finding relevant knowledge from available sources and argumentative skills. Included in this broad conception of knowledge was a notion that students also had relevant knowledge in their own experience. Education had to activate and use this knowledge base that the students themselves represented (Eikeland, Teig 1976).

Skarpenes relates these ideas to current developments in educational theory, but also to post-industrial, globalised capitalism and the need for a new employee that could supplant the old blue-collar worker. He examines how these ideas came to influence social studies which was seen as particularly appropriate for the development of such knowledge, its factual base being unclear and its didactical traditions less robust and firm (Audigier 1999a; Seixas 2001). Social studies thus, more than many other subjects, became the subject of having opinions, student debates, project work, group processes, using student experiences and of relative truths.

Summing up, the curricular development since the 1970s points to an activist citizen. The overall objective of social subjects is active, engaged, socially oriented citizens. This point is very clearly stated in the national curriculum of 1997 for primary and lower secondary education. This document states: "Students must develop an interest for and be trained in democratic ways of working and active participation in society" (Royal Norwegian Ministry of Church Affairs, Education and Research 1996, 184). The curriculum for upper secondary education from the same period states: "A modern and living democracy assumes critical thinking, participation and engagement from most people. This represents an important and challenging task for schools."⁶ It is thus an ambition to empower citizens to take control over and responsibility for society (Eikeland, Teig 1976). This requires a civic education which stimulates engagement.

In short, Norwegian civic education as it evolved in the 1987 and 1997 curricula and in the normative literature was marked by the following characteristics:

- Current issues.
- Society is conflictual.
- Critical perspectives on society
- Cross disciplinary teaching
- International issues.
- A broad concept of political participation.
- Critical perspectives in political life (at least in the 1987 curriculum)
- Democracy as ideal and principle, including human rights

5 <http://skolenettet.nls.no/dok/1p/samfl.html>. 12.01.00, p. 4.

6 <http://skolenettet.nls.no/dok/1p/samfl.html>. 12.01.00. page 3



- The local governmental level
- Systemic overview.
- Student councils as examples of democracy.
- Untraditional teaching methods.
- Broad concept of knowledge.

This approach to civic education is problematic in many respects. However, such critical discussions are outside the scope for this paper. Instead, we will focus on the extent to which these ideas materialised in school practice. On some points, we do not have empirical research, these points will therefore be omitted in the following section.

4. Norwegian civic education implemented

To what extent have the curricular ambitions and the recommendations in the normative literature of the last 30 years been implemented? Have they supplanted or complemented the older formalistic approach or has formalism remained the dominant form of civic education in Norwegian classrooms?

4.1. Current issues

In his survey study from 1984, Svein Lorentzen finds that work with current issues plays a prominent part in social studies teaching (Lorentzen 1984). More recent research confirms this (Børhaug 2005; 2008a). Some teachers teaching classes with low academic performance even made this the major activity in social studies.

Much time is spent on discussing what is on the news. The mass media as such are thus systematically studied in many schools. Newspapers invite classes to visit, sometimes they also offer programs such as “Journalist for one day”, or “Newspaper at school”, the latter is a week-long subscription on a newspaper, and during this week the class receive one copy per student each day (Børhaug 2005; 2008a).

4.2. Critical perspectives on society

As pointed out above, post war civic education tended to emphasise modernization and rational organising of society to such an extent that there was little room left for political choice, i.e., choice among conflicting interests or values. To some extent this seems still to be the case. In the CIVICs study, a majority of Norwegian teachers reported that they could be better at teaching critical analysis of Norwegian society (Mikkelsen et al. 2001). Lorentzen actually finds that pride in the achievements of Norwegian society, notably the welfare state, economic growth, development assistance and peace making policy becomes more and more clearly pronounced in the textbooks until the late 1990’s. He, nevertheless, finds that critical discussions of various issues gradually are introduced in textbooks, but quite carefully in the majority of them (2003). Clausen finds that globalisation is treated as an unavoidable process and not as a process involv-

ing political choice and strategy (Clausen 2007). On the other hand, a recent examination of textbook treatments of the welfare state concludes that problems and challenges of the welfare state are being addressed and that it is pointed out that difficult choices must be made (Andreassen 2008).

4.3. Focus on international political issues, notably environment, poverty and the arms race.

The curricular emphasis on global problems of poverty seems to have reached the classroom level in the sense that it reached the textbooks (Haavefsrud 1979). In particular, environmental problems and third world problems are included in textbooks (Lorentzen 2003).

Claussen also finds that Norwegian engagements in development assistance and peace processes are discussed (2007). The newest textbooks introduce students to the war on terror, mainly as the US understands it. Besides, there is a well established traditions that Norwegian schools engage the students in solidarity projects benefitting poor people in a poor country (Tvedt 2003).

4.4. Broad concept of political participation

Empirical research suggests that voting is the major type of political participation that is being taught and that it is defined as a matter of choosing among alternative party programmes (Børhaug 2005; 2008a). Teachers make examinations of the political parties and their programs a major activity, often in the form of student projects and often linked to role plays and simulation of party officials debating. The importance of keeping up with the news and having independent opinions is also stressed. Elections are portrayed as decisive for public policy concerning the everyday life of young people. Elected representatives are presented as supreme makers of political decisions affecting all, while political processes involve only politicians. These politicians keep themselves informed about what others think, but the only political actor with an independent power besides the elected politicians is the mass media. All these elements are very much in line with Schumpeter’s conception of competitive elite democracy (Schumpeter 1976).

To varying extents, some teachers expand their teaching beyond voting towards an activist model emphasising more participatory forms and elaborating more on the various stages in the political process and on policy contents. Studies of political process and policy content open up a possibility that pupils develop a more nuanced view of how various actors might play a role at different stages in the decision making process in addition to elections (Børhaug 2008a).

New forms of direct political participation across borders, often by means of the internet, are not

taught (Clausen 2007; Børhaug 2008a). An interesting exception is the solidarity projects that Norwegian students are involved in. Often a humanitarian relief organization offers a package with information about a country and some vulnerable groups in it. Students are then invited to collect money by asking for charities, selling a produce from the poor country or otherwise raising funds. This is an example of teaching what one can do in relation to the global problems of poverty and injustice. One may contribute.

Teachers signalise to their students that it is important to be politically active. Teachers also try to justify political activity, without being sure how to do so (Børhaug 2008a). Such attempts include one or more of the following ideas: participation leads to influence on political decisions, one may learn a lot from it, it is necessary to support and maintain the democratic nature of Norwegian politics and all citizens have a responsibility to do so. Comparisons with non-democratic regimes show the importance of democracy. Some teachers said that participation is fun or that it is a duty for all citizens. The combination of emphasis on the importance of participation, i.e. voting, and the vague justifications can be seen as a bit moralistic.

In his analysis of textbooks, Skogrand argues that in general, textbooks individualise political and social engagement. In the 1970s, the importance of seeing the individual as member of a group was more strongly underlined, but later on textbooks appeals to a YOU who stands alone but who is never the less expected to be engaged, critical and to change society (2006)

4.5. Critical perspectives on the political system

There are few indications that civic education offers critical analyses of the Norwegian political system. To the contrary, defending and legitimising seems more typical (Børhaug 2007). One aspect of this system legitimising tendency is to underline that the political elites are in control of what happens in society. Clausen finds this in his textbook analysis from 2007, just as Koritzinsky found in his review 35 years earlier (1972). Skramstad argued in a 1993 paper that textbooks and teaching practices tend to frame social issues in normative terms, using simple good-bad dichotomies. The good democracies and the evil non-democracies, the good and needy poor countries and the evil western exploiters are examples (Skramstad 1993). Critical analysis is guided outwards. It is likely that when discussing current issues, public policies are critically examined but there is little empirical research on this.

4.6. Democratic ideals and human rights

The national curricula often refers to democracy without explaining what it is (Royal Norwegian Ministry of

Church Affairs and Education 1996). Democratic standards for political life are not systematically taught (Børhaug 2006).

The teachers who responded to the CIVICs study questionnaire also reported that they could be better on this. What seems to be the case is that democracy is sometimes seen as a synonym with the Norwegian political system (Mikkelsen et al. 2001). Textbooks use phrases such as “the Norwegian democracy” or “how can we protect our democracy?”, meaning our political system. In his textbook analysis Lorentzen only points out one book which stresses what democracy is (2003).

However, in the newest textbooks for upper secondary school social studies - after a new curriculum from 2006, democracy is explained somewhat more thoroughly (Børhaug 2007). In these books democracy is defined in terms of classical competitive elite democracy and pluralism (Held 1996).

4.7. The local level

Lorentzen argues that in the 1970's, local community studies expanded in social studies (1991). Empirical research suggests that more recently, local politics is not taught as much as national politics, but there is not much research available (Børhaug 2007). When considering current textbooks the picture is also somewhat mixed, some books offer introductions of local issues whereas others ignore it completely. Treatments of local government tend to focus on how responsibilities are divided between local, regional and national institutions and on the formal structure of local government institutions. Local level political participation is also sometimes outlined.

4.8. Overview of the functioning of the entire political system.

As pointed out above, as civic education was established in the 19th century, the constitution and the formal structure of governmental institutions was the main content. This is also a model of the total system. In his analysis of textbooks from 1970 to 2000 Lorentzen finds that formal structure is given ample space in most of them (2003). Formal structure is still being taught and some teachers still emphasise this to a significant extent (Børhaug 2007). In his textbook analysis, Clausen also finds that the formal structures of political institutions are elaborated in quite some detail (2007). In a review of the new textbooks from 2006, Skogrand argues that the formal structure and procedural rules still play a major role (Skogrand 2006).

As indicated above, there are indications that civic education extends beyond formal structure, and perhaps more advanced, integrated models are offered. But there is no much empirical evidence concerning this.



4.9. Student councils as examples of democracy

Norwegian student councils are involved in a broad variety of issues, in particular organising sports and social events for students. But they do not set their own agenda and their involvement is reluctant and weak on issues relating to the core activities of the school (Børhaug 2006). Procedures that enable the student council to play an independent and influential role are practically non-existent, the only exception is that there are legal provisions giving the student councils representation in an advisory committee that all schools have. The relationship between student council and school management is more of an administrative, hierarchical nature. It is thus very difficult to conclude that student councils operate according to democratic principles. It is possible that internally, the student councils operate on democratic lines, but the decisive issue is whether their involvement in decision making processes is democratic.

4.10. Untraditional teaching methods

In a national survey on social studies teachers, 60 % of primary school teachers reported that they used field studies in the local community (Christophersen et al. 2003). At primary school level, drama and role plays are also quite common. Most teachers try to activate students in classroom discussions, and 70 % report that they sometimes organise student projects. 20 % do it often. Student activating teaching methods seem to decrease as the students get older and reach lower secondary education.

Less is known about the contents of these various activities. A quite common project in civic education is to have students examine the programs and profiles of the various political parties. In these projects student may study party programs, nowadays found on the internet, or visit local branches of the political parties.

Let us also note that Storstein's proposal from 1946, to organise mock elections has been adhered to and today all Norwegian upper secondary schools organise such elections. To some extent, also lower secondary schools do. At each school, a debate for all students is organised and the political parties send their representatives to these debates. After the debate, the students vote. The mock elections of upper secondary schools have become a political institution. The results are published nationwide and results from all schools are aggregated to national level in order to see partisan tendencies among the youngest. It is experienced that changing support for the political parties are often first seen in the school election results, which serve as an early warning system for how the electorate evolves.

4.11. Broad concept of knowledge

There is a strong tendency among Norwegian civics teachers to accept a broad concept of knowledge. Among teachers in a survey from 2003, values and attitudes was the most important target that teachers worked to realise. Second in importance was to teach students to manage in society. Only third came knowledge and concepts (Christophersen et al. 2003).

The teachers in this survey also reported that when evaluating and grading students they applied a wide variety of criteria including knowledge, values, skills, effort, oral activity in class and practical work (ibid.)

5. The national curriculum from 2006

Naturally, there is not yet much research on this curriculum at any level, but a few remarks are in order. In as far as civic education is concerned, most aspects of the concept of political education that has been dominant since the 1970s are still there. But politics, and especially international politics is clearly reduced in scope. The broad concept of knowledge is kept. In addition, in the curriculum for social studies it is now required that basic skills such as reading, writing, digital skills and mathematics skills must be taught systematically in relation to all subject topics, including civic education. The curriculum furthermore insists that in all subjects, including social studies, subject specific skills should be developed. Trond Solhaug argues that students must be able to understand and interpret various types of texts that are relevant in social science, not least in politics (facts, analysis, normative arguments, statistics, debate arguments). Furthermore, students must learn to make up their mind, argue for their position and take part in debates and dialogues (2006).

When the student councils were introduced, the idea that they should serve political education purposes was quite explicit (Børhaug 2008b). It still is. In the present national guidelines it is stated that student councils are meant to **develop student understanding of democracy and ability to democratic participation**. This will lead forward to active citizenship (http://www.utdanningsdirektoratet.no/templates/udir/TM_Laereplan.aspx?id=2100&laereplanid=215974).

Social studies were introduced with civic education as its primary mandate (see above). In subsequent curricular reforms, new topics have been introduced and the subject has become a quite unsystematic compilation of various themes that do not fit easily together. The didactician Rolf Tønnesen has in a recent book argued that the subject should reconsider its priorities and again become primarily a civic education subject (Tønnesen, Tønnesen 2007). Tønnesen is at least right in the sense that social subjects have become a very fragmented and not very focused subject.



6. Discussion

At the level of formal curriculum, to what extent has Norwegian civic education developed beyond formal structure of governmental institutions and citizen deeds? At this level Norwegian civic education has developed substantially beyond its origin and tradition. It now emphasises studying current issues at local, national and international level and often by means of untraditional methods. It stresses social and political conflict and acknowledges that society is conflictual.

At the level of formal, national curriculum, Norwegian civic education envisages political activism by means of a range of different ways to participate politically, also at an international level. Democratic ideals and principles are favoured even if they are not specified. Student councils are expected to function as models of democracy and civic education is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the political system.

Considering the level of teaching practice, the picture is more mixed. Student councils are operative at most schools most of the time, and many of them are quite active. But it is difficult to see them as models of democracy. Work with current issues, also at the international level, and the use of untraditional teaching methods seems to have been implemented to a significant extent. It also seems that a wide concept of knowledge is accepted among teachers. What has also evolved at this level is the thorough work on political parties and international solidarity projects.

There are indications that critical analyses of current issues, political participation other than voting, local politics and explaining why political participation is worthwhile are to some extent taught – by some. Concerning the obligation to offer students a holistic image of the political order, it seems that the formal structure of parliament, cabinet and the courts – sometimes with a parallel outline of the local government structure – remains the dominant teaching content.

What is most systematically ignored seems to be democratic principles and critical assessments of the political system. These two aspects are probably related because democratic ideals are key norms for critical assessments of political life.

Compared with Audigier's account (1999a; 1999b), this is a broader and different idea of civic education. Not least the role of political parties, international solidarity and a broad concept of knowledge stand out as deviations in this respect. Other elements such as current issues and student councils are parallel with what Audigier reports.

It is also an interesting finding, which also deviates from what is reported elsewhere, that the reasons to be politically active have entered as an issue. Knowledge of participatory arrangements in itself does not lead to action, somehow students must be taught how such participation is meaningful and worthwhile. This is becoming an ever more pertinent issue. A brief look at the new textbooks published after the new curriculum of 2006 shows that the subject is becoming more important there as well. However, the motivation for political participation seem to be framed in a rather individualistic fashion which is problematic, political participation has a collective aspect which should not be ignored (Melucci 1996).

7. Conclusion

In Norway, civic education developed from the early 19th century as a task for history in both primary school and secondary school. Civic education was mainly an introduction to the constitution and the formal structure of governmental institutions at national level and promoted citizen deeds such as voting and national loyalty. After 1945 civic education was reformed and expanded but in many respects its contents was retained. Around 1970 a radical turn led to reformulations of civic education in both national curricula as well as in a flourishing normative, advising literature that developed in the 1970's and 1980's.

The research question for this article has been: Has Norwegian civic education, since the 1970s, evolved beyond an emphasis on formal structure and civic deeds of loyalty and voting at the level of formal curricula? At the level of teaching practices?

It is found that in the curricula that have followed since the 1970s, a broader democratic, activist, issue oriented and critical conception was developed. Civic education was also strongly influenced by broader conceptions of knowledge and untraditional teaching methods. Student councils as examples of democracy were also an important issue.

Concerning teaching practice, implementation seems to have been mixed. Student councils are viable, but hardly democratic. The tradition of formal structures and constitution is still strong and critical perspectives are hard to introduce. So, it seems, are democratic principles and ideals. On the other hand, untraditional teaching methods and focus on current social and political issues has developed and untraditional teaching methods have become quite common in civic education. Party politics and international solidarity projects have become main themes in civic education. Some teachers also teach a broader variety of participatory forms.



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