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## State-based curriculum work and curriculum-making: Norway's *Læreplanverket 1997*

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### ABSTRACT

This case study of the development of the Norwegian compulsory school curriculum of 1997, *Læreplanverket 1997*, parallels a study of the development of the *Illinois Learning Standards* of 1997. The pair of case studies is designed to explore the administration of state-based curriculum-making and, in particular, the use in curriculum-making of the administrative tools of *compartmentalization*, *segmentation* and *licencing*. Often the use of these tools serves to make the curriculum as a guiding instrument largely symbolic and/or ideological.

### KEYWORDS

Curriculum; national curriculum; Norway; *Reform97*; state-based curriculum-making

A shared knowledge base is the core in a national network of communication between the members of a democratic community ... Education [plays] the principal part in passing on this shared background information—the education everybody has to be familiar with to remain a democratic society and the members of the society empowered. (Kongelige Kirke-, Utdannings- og Forskningsdepartement [KUF], 1993; in Volckmar, 2008, p. 10)

Norway has maintained a long tradition of developing national curriculum guidelines, with the first guidelines for the primary level emerging in 1890. In the years since the Second World War, curricula for the compulsory school were issued in 1969, 1974, 1987, 1997 and 2006. For most of the Norwegian state's curriculum-making across these years, curriculum change was understood to be a matter of dialogue between global and local experience nested within national structures and processes. The dialogue necessarily involved experienced teachers from schools, regional teachers colleges (now university colleges) and universities. The compulsory curriculum of 1987 (*Mønsterplan for Grunnskolen [M87]*, Kirke- og Undervisningsdepartementet 1987) reflected this division of labour: it was developed as a framework for national policy control while simultaneously focussing on school-based, local development (Gundem, 1993; Hagen & Tibbitts, 2006; Lauglo, 1995). Its platform was 'progressive' and, in a sense, populist.<sup>1</sup>

But in the 1980s in Norway, as in other nations, public and political discourse around the educational system was changing dramatically (Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2004). Schools and universities became objects of a discussion centred on new themes and slogans: human capital development; the 'knowledge society'; the 'knowledge explosion'; outputs and outcomes; education and unemployment; internationalization and globalization; national

identity, cultural consciousness and multiculturalism, etc. In Norway questions also emerged about the appropriateness, in national terms, of local, school-based curriculum development with all the variations in opportunities to learn (and achievement) this might imply. There was a new concern for the central monitoring of the quality of what was done in the schools and for the evaluation of what was being accomplished (see, e.g. Granheim, Kogan, & Lundgren, 1990; Granheim & Lundgren, 1991).<sup>2</sup>

In addition, a new discourse around the governance and management of the state itself was to become central in discussions within politics and the public administration. The questions centred on the distribution of power between national and local interests and institutions and the central state, and on the tools that might be available to better co-ordinate and manage the *national* delivery of services like health care and education (see Helgøy, 2006; Telhaug et al., 2004).

A minority Norwegian Labour Party (DNA: *Det Norske Arbeiderpartiet*) government came to power in 1990. The DNA was divided ideologically around, e.g. the question of participation in the European Union (Geyer & Swank 1997). However, the leadership of the party, and of the government, was positioned on the 'modernizing' side in the debates of that period. The DNA government promoted the direction of local institutions by the central state through reform ideologies such as the 'new public management'; market efficiencies and liberalization; international competitiveness; and sweeping centrally directed reforms of the comprehensive, upper secondary and university education systems in the interests of the development of a 'knowledge-dominated' educational policy-making (Helgøy & Homme, 2004; Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2004).

The long-term DNA programme for education that was to emerge was largely the project of Gudmund Hernes, a leading member of the 'modernizing' wing of the DNA and the DNA minister of education (see Hernes, 2001; International Conference on Education [ICE] 1996, 2001; Volckmar, 2008, pp. 7–12). A reform of curricula at all levels was at the centre of Hernes' agenda. In the pages that follow we will outline the process of designing the curriculum component, that is, *Læreplanverket 97* (L97; KUF, 1996; Royal Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs, 1999), of the reformed compulsory school, that is, grades 1–10, ages 6–16. At the time of the development of L97, many—including many working in the KUF—believed that the implementation of M87 was still ongoing. The new platform for Norwegian schools, and the curriculum as an integral part of that platform, had to be legitimated for puzzled, and sometimes hostile, stakeholders (Koritzinsky, 2000, 2002; Løvlie, 1997; see also Hernes, 2001; Solstad, 1997).

Our focus will be on the process of development of L97 from the drafting of the initial trial texts to their formal adoption in the fall of 1996.<sup>3</sup> We were particularly interested in how L97 came into being and how the work of development was 'managed' during the curriculum-making process. In this paper we will draw on the interviews and the research questionnaires administered in the course of the OCC study of L97, as well as research reports and the white and green papers presented to the *Storting*, the Norwegian parliament, and its committees to examine the workings of L97 curriculum commission. In particular, we are interested in Haft and Hopmann's administrative tools of *compartmentalization*, *segmentation* and *licensing* and the role they might have played in the management of the issues around the commission (see Westbury & Sivesind, 2015; see also Haft et al., 1986; Haft & Hopmann, 1990; Hopmann, 1985, 1988a, 1988b). In this issue of *JCS*, we also pursue these questions within the commission that developed the *Illinois Learning Standards (ILS)* of 1997.

## **Læreplanverket 97 (L97)**

### **Beginnings**

The first public announcement about a reform of the comprehensive school and the replacement of M87 with a new curriculum was made by the DNA government in September 1991. The new policies and structures for the compulsory school were to emerge as a part of a comprehensive reform based on a common vision applied to all stages of the educational system. In addition a new curriculum and new forms of teaching were necessary to support the proposed incorporation of the kindergarten within the 'school'.

As we have noted, Gudmund Hernes,<sup>4</sup> the Minister for Church Affairs, Education and Research, had long been at the centre of the DNA's project of reform of Norway's public administration. He was also an advocate of the DNA government's policies for modernizing Norway's human resource development. He was also known for his firm convictions about educational principles and the belief that any curriculum must reflect the interests of, and be addressed to, parents and the public as well as teachers and schools. The new curriculum should not merely capture professional ideas and concepts but be formulated in such a way that it made sense for all groups engaged in education, not least pupils and their parents.

In spring 1993, the *Storting* made the formal decision to relocate 6-year-olds from kindergartens into schools. This organizational decision was accompanied by declaration of a commitment by the ministry to integrate the best of both kindergarten and school practices in the 'new' school, especially for the early years (see Hagen & Tibbitts, 2006). In 1994, the *Storting* extended the comprehensive school to 10 years.

### **Developing L97**

In 1993, as the first step within the larger school- and curriculum-reform project, the *Storting* had approved a 40-page document, *Læreplan for grunnskole, videregående oppføring, vokseoppføring* ('Core curriculum for primary, secondary and adult education'; KUF, 1993, Royal Ministry of Education, Research & Church Affairs, 1999) as the platform for Norway's primary and secondary school systems.<sup>5</sup> This text described in detail the human qualities the curriculum should foster, emphasizing principles of equity, individual responsibility, entitlement and societal needs (see Table 1). More important, albeit as a subtext, the *Core Curriculum* framed education as a *national* project and a foundation that would guarantee the teaching of a common core of knowledge and traditions to all Norwegians as well as prepare them for a 'knowledge society'.

In 1994, before the *Storting* had formally voted to extend the compulsory school to 10 years, an Action Plan for the implementation of L97 was announced. The plan foreshadowed two stages for the development: first, a document that would outline the pedagogical principles that would undergird the new curriculum as well as the range of subjects and their time allocations, that is, the '*Bridge*'. Both the principles and the public response they generated would be debated in the education committee of the *Storting*, and later in the *Storting* itself; second, subject-area syllabi for each of the teaching areas in the reformed compulsory school.

**Table 1.** Core curriculum for primary, secondary and adult education: chapter and section headings.

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Introduction
<b>The spiritual human being</b>
• Christian and humanistic values
• Cultural heritage and identity
<b>The creative human being</b>
• Creative abilities
• Three traditions
• A critical sense of judgement
• Scientific method and the active pupil
<b>The working human being</b>
• Technology and culture
• Learning and work habits
• Teaching and personal initiative
• From the familiar to the unknown
• Adapted teaching
• All-round development
• The role of the teacher and educator
• Teaching ability and active learning
• Learning as teamwork
<b>The liberally educated human being</b>
• Specific knowledge and broad frames of reference
• Common references in a specialized society
• Internationalization and the appreciation of tradition
<b>The social human being</b>
• A diversified peer culture
• Duties and responsibilities
• Social learning from the school community
• A broad context for learning: peer culture, parent participation and the local community
<b>The environmentally aware human being</b>
• Natural sciences, ecology and ethics
• Humans beings, the environment and conflicts of interest
• Joy of nature
<b>The integrated human being</b>

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### ***'The Bridge'***

Needless to say, one of the core issues for the committee working on the so-called *Bridge*, that is, the curricular and pedagogical principles for the reformed school, was the balance between the kindergarten's activity-based, thematic teaching and the more traditional text-book- and subject-based teaching of Norwegian schools (see Broadhead, 1999). The committee was to recommend that, at the elementary stage, 60% of classroom time should be devoted to thematically organized contents and project work; at the intermediate stage, 30%; and the lower secondary stage 20%. The final text of *L97* makes clear the larger compromises between those who advocated a subject-oriented curriculum and those advocating a child-centred curriculum:

Through general aims, subject-related objectives and main subject elements, syllabuses offer centrally defined common contents, which in principle all pupils are intended to work on.

Play is imagination, trial and error, joint action, and a natural arena for physical, social and intellectual challenges ... Play is self-motivated and an important source of learning, especially during the earliest school years ... By observing pupils at play teachers can learn what they are interested in and what they understand. Observation of pupils at play can thus help to lay the foundations for further work. (Royal Ministry of Education, Research & Church Affairs, 1999, pp. 75, 84)

The *'Bridge'* was also intended to define the curricular architecture the subject-area syllabus-writing committees that were to be appointed would be working within. However,

**Table 2.** L97 curriculum-writing committees.

Writing committees	N of members
Arts and crafts	6
Christian knowledge and religion and ethical education	7
English	6
Home economics	6
Mathematics	7
Mother tongue 1 (Norwegian)	6
Mother tongue 2 (Norwegian as a second language for minorities)	6
Mother tongue 3 (Norwegian as a second language for Sami)	5
Mother tongue 4 (First language for minorities)	4
Mother tongue 5 (Norwegian for the deaf)	3
Music	8
Nature and environmental studies	7
Norwegian sign language	6
Sami (first language and subject)	10
Sami (second language)	4
Schools' and pupils' choices	8
Second foreign languages (German/French/Finnish)	5
Social studies	7
Sports	6
Total	119

the committee developing the '*Bridge*' was in practice to run in parallel with the syllabus-development process, both taking three years.<sup>6</sup>

### **Syllabus development**

The work of L97's subject-area writing committees, involving 131 people, was launched in November 1994 with the appointment of 19 subject-area committees and a cross-subject committee (see Table 2). The process of syllabus-development was to entail the development of initial drafts; solicitation of public and professional comments on those drafts; revision and rewriting in the light of the review; and formal approval.

As he pursued the themes of the *Core Curriculum* in the context of the compulsory school, Hernes commissioned the US educationalist, E.D. Hirsch, Jr to give the keynote address at the first meeting of the members of the L97 commission.<sup>7</sup> In his speech Hirsch outlined his ideas about the necessity of strengthening societies and cultures by inducting young people into shared bodies of specific knowledge as well as criticizing the progressivism that was for many the implicit ideology for the then-curriculum, *M87*, and indeed of Norway's post-war elementary schools and teachers colleges.

Hirsch's speech was interpreted by many who heard it—and heard of it—as outlining Hernes's personal platform for L97. For them the speech defined the challenge his ideology and platform posed to the 'progressive' ideologies and convictions of many Norwegian teachers and teacher educators, including many in KUF and on the writing committees. As Espeland (1997), the leader of the music committee, wrote recording his initial reaction to Hirsch's address:

I was worried about what the combination of core curriculum and the severe criticism of the progressive movement in education could lead to ... Would my committee and I be 'ordered' to identify a national curriculum in terms of, for example, special songs, pieces of music, artists and composers? Would the idea of a core curriculum change the emphasis in education from

process to product, from local curriculum to a centralized curriculum, from development of children to demonstration of formal knowledge? (p. 12)

The spectre of this challenge was to become a major theme in the critical within-commission, public, and professional narratives around the *Core Curriculum* and the making of *L97* (Koritzinsky, 2000, 2002; Løvlie 1997, Solstad, 1997; for Hernes's viewpoint, see Hernes, 2001). Many members of the writing committees were to report that they had worked throughout the writing process to guarantee the freedom of teachers to decide what should be taught.

However, although such issues loomed large in the professional, ideological and even political discourse around the drafting of *L97*, many committees were to find easily achieved formulations that fitted with Hernes's platform:

The committee avoided sentences with easy-to-do tasks and the verbs were selected so that the content could be adapted in practical teaching for different groups of pupils; e.g. 'the pupils are going to meet' ... rather than 'the pupils shall'. (Interview, Leader of the Mother Tongue Group; our translation)

Pupils should have the opportunity to learn (OTL) songs from bygone ages taken from central areas of culture and life, with special emphasis on hymns and songs by well-known text writers and composers, including Petter Dass and Edvard Grieg.

*Music, Grade 7.* (Royal Ministry of Education, Research & Church Affairs, 1999, p. 258)

## The structure of the *L97* commission

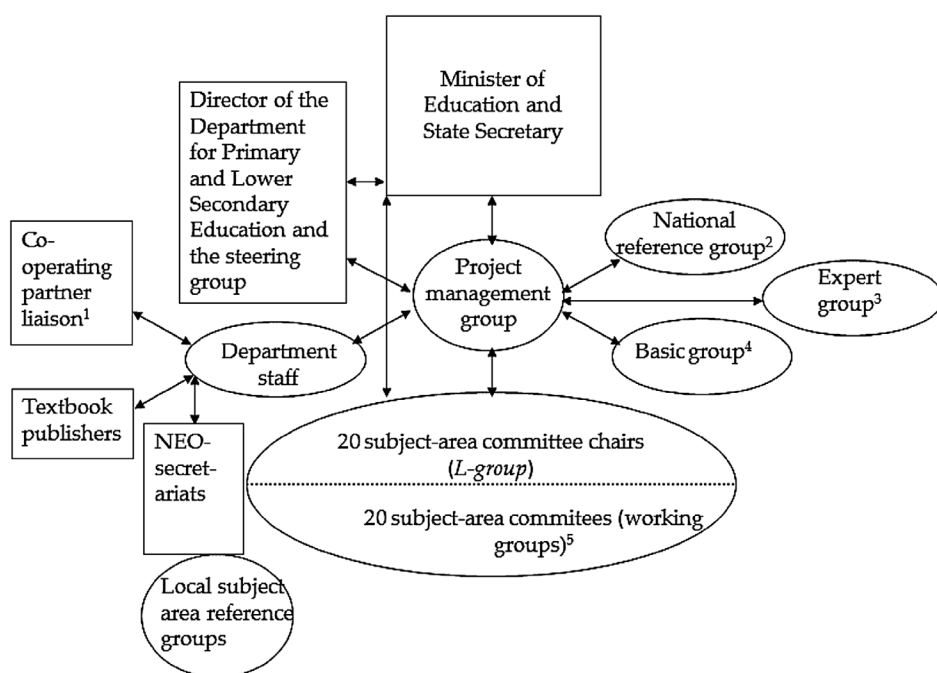
### *Organizing the work of curriculum-making*

*L97* was intended to be built on the platform of the *Core Curriculum* (KUF, 1993). A reform of the curriculum of the upper secondary school (ages 16–19) had followed,<sup>8</sup> and in 1993 work was initiated on a new curriculum for the compulsory school, that is, for *L97*.

As we have noted, the core of the technical work of the *L97* commission was carried forward by two working groups: the so-called *Bridge* work-group and the 20 syllabus-writing groups. The chairs of the subject-area committees were the core of the *L-group*, a coordinating committee that addressed the issues emerging across the subject-area working groups. The *L-group* was to also play a key role in finalizing the drafts of the syllabus. In addition, the curriculum-writing task groups included a '*Basic Group*', an '*Expert Group*' and a National Reference Group along with groups liaising with textbook publishers, education interest organizations, etc. (see Figure 1).<sup>9</sup>

The first year of curriculum-writing was focused on the drafting of the subject-area outlines. However, challenges around the work of the writing groups soon emerged:

- For the project's managers two clusters of issues were paramount. First, the relative failure of the earlier reform of the upper secondary school and curriculum meant that more explicit guidelines for the development process and for the final document needed to be in place. Second, decisions had to be made about the timetable and the range of experiences to be offered within the compulsory school. Would dance and drama be incorporated as separate subjects within the overall compulsory school programme? In *M87*, functional bilingualism had been the goal for language minority students. This had become controversial at the end of the 1980s (Øzerk, 1997). What should be the institutional response to this controversy?<sup>10</sup> Many such questions were formally under the



**Figure 1.** The L97 task group. Adapted from Kongelige Kirke-, Utdannings- og Forskningsdepartement (1994), Section 14.

Notes: (1) Employees' and employers' organizations; Norwegian Association of Local Authorities, Norwegian Federation of Trade Unions, Norwegian Federation of Handicapped People, etc. (2) The 9-person *National Reference Group* spanned both the work on *The Bridge* as well as the syllabus working groups. It gave advice and comments as the work proceeded. (3) The 6-person *Expert Group* was a committee of experts in curriculum-making that assisted the *L-group* and others as needed. (4) The 12-person *Basic Group* was responsible for developing guidelines and principles for organizing the overall curriculum. Its deliberations covered the work on *The Bridge* as well as the subject-area syllabi. (5) The subject-area working-groups were based in various Norwegian regions. They were supported administratively by the regional offices of the National Education Office (NEO). The NEOs also selected subject-area reference groups at the regional level and administered the evaluation and implementation activities that followed the curriculum-writing.

remit of the committee working on *The Bridge* and required ultimate resolution by the *Storting*—while bearing immediately on the work of the syllabus-writing work groups.<sup>11</sup>

- The subject-area committees had to develop practical outlines for their areas as well as consider a range of potentially contested 'new' ideas and the cross-subject, that is, the thematic, implications of their proposals. They had to balance innovation within their subjects with tradition and 'new' concerns about multiculturalism, and anticipate the reactions of their larger subject-area communities (and KUF's political leadership) to the proposals they developed. Thus, the proposals of the visual arts and crafts working group faced splits within its larger subject community framed in terms of visual arts vs. the traditional crafts, process vs. product, skills vs. expressiveness, and the study of art and craft history vs. the making of art and crafts (Espeland, 1997; Gundem & Karseth, 1998). The syllabus-writers for the newly named and newly imagined 'Religious knowledge and ethical education' advocated a need for a common religious 'literacy' for all Norwegians, notwithstanding ethnic, religious and cultural background—and provoked a storm of protest from a unified Muslim, Jewish and agnostic community.<sup>12</sup>

## Managing the L97 curriculum-making

How were the tasks of curriculum-making within the L97 project managed? How were the political and policy issues around the project untangled to facilitate timely and orderly resolution? How could the 200-odd people who were centrally involved see themselves working with a common purpose? How were the differences between the *political* mandates around the government and minister's agendas and the *school- and teacher-based 'educational'* principles of the curriculum writers managed? Given the breach with Norway's traditional ideologies that the DNA government's reforms represented, how was the symbolism of a common purposes, and ultimate legitimacy, developed and maintained?

Many of the principles undergirding L97 can be attributed to an active minister with firmly held ideas about schooling and education. However, Norway's long-standing traditions of public administration and the state's curriculum-making provided a principled frame for ordering the work within and around the commission. Thus, government and parliamentary decisions, along with ministerial decision-making within KUF, were understood by everyone to be legitimate and authoritative (at least in the short run). But such activity was seen as 'political' and very different from the 'professional' tasks around schooling and the work of curriculum development.<sup>13</sup> The professional staff of the ministry were understood (and understood themselves) to be non-political. Their tasks within the L97 project were 'professional', albeit undertaken within context of a government or ministerial policy. The curriculum-writing committees were ultimately committees of non-political 'professionals', focused on best practices within their subject areas, not with debating the principles of a government's reform programmes.<sup>14</sup>

Such a *differentiation*, seen as a separation of decision-making into different settings, was supported by the way the L97 project was stretched over task-groups working at different places and times on different issues, albeit all directed by the minister and his office. Thus, the platform of the curriculum reform, the *Core Curriculum*, had been developed and endorsed by the *Storting* before the work on L97 had begun, and was, as such, authoritative and legitimate. Subsequently, in 1994, the *Bridge* task group, made up of officers from KUF with two reference groups, had begun its deliberations about the issues of the overall curriculum and pedagogical structure of the L97 reform. The subject-area syllabus-writing took place within subject-based working groups, with many meeting outside Oslo and thus segmented by geography and distance.

We see another aspect of such differentiation of tasks in the *segmentation* of professional background and experience of the commission's members across task groups.<sup>15</sup> Figure 2 presents a classification of the underlying professional roles of the core members of *The Bridge* and the syllabus-writing committees.<sup>16</sup> The work of the syllabus-writing was dominated by committee members drawn from schools, regional colleges, and KUF, representing 73% of the members of the writing groups. Only a scattering of other groups was represented. In the case of the *L-group*, the leadership group made up of the chairs of the individual subject-writing groups, 15 of its members came from schools, regional colleges or universities, i.e. 79% of the members. In contrast, representatives of schools and faculty from regional colleges had no role in the core membership of the '*The Bridge*' committee: the committee was made up only of KUF personnel.

When we expand the definition of the different working groups including the various working, advisory and reference committees, we see a broader representation of Norway's

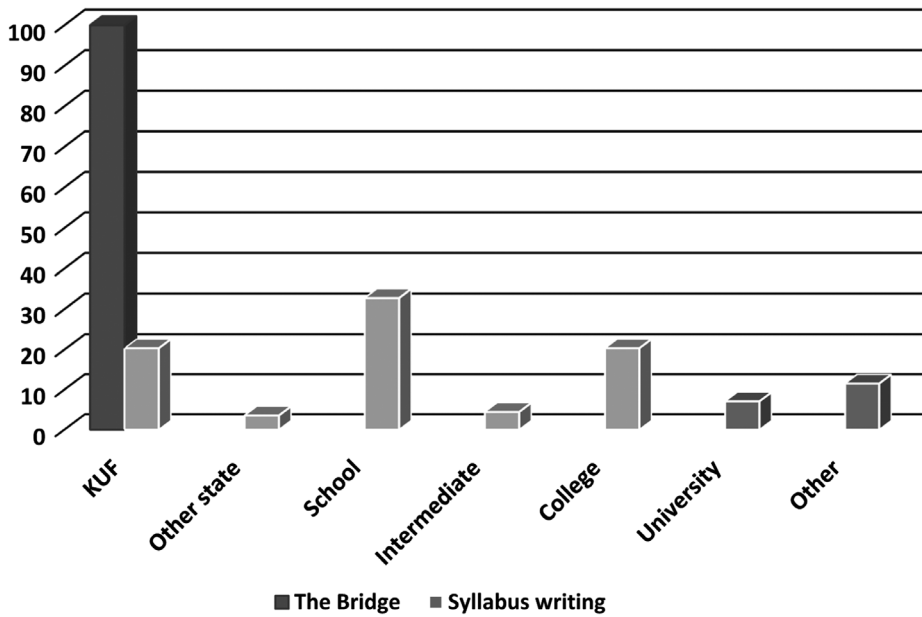


Figure 2. Professional backgrounds (%) of core members of the 'Bridge' and syllabus-writing work-groups.

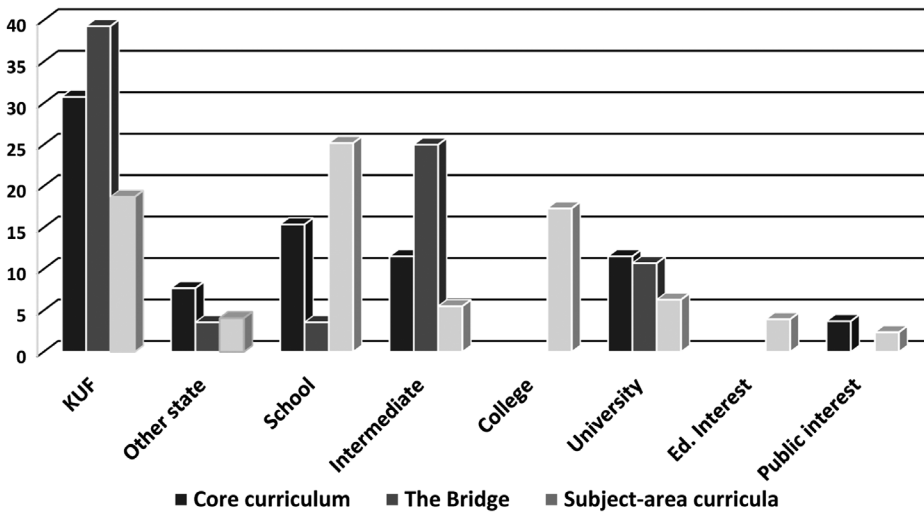


Figure 3. Professional backgrounds (%) of all members of the Core, Bridge and syllabus-writing work-groups.

education community. As seen in Figure 3, representatives of 'other state agencies', schools, intermediate organizations, regional colleges and universities, and 'other' join the roster of the group working on *The Bridge*. Likewise, the subject-area task-group now includes representatives of other state agencies, education interest groups and 'other'.

Thus the 21-member 'National Reference Group' worked at writing short reports, summaries of research, etc. for the information of KUF and the committees working on *The Bridge*

**Table 3.** Institutional homes of the full rosters of members of the Core Curriculum and L97 task group.

	KUF	Other state	School	Interme- diate	Regional college	Univer- sity	Ed. interest	Public interest	Other	Total
Core Curriculum	8 (32%)	2 (8%)	4 (15%)	3 (12%)	–	3 (12%)	–	1 (4%)	5 (19%)	26
'The Bridge'	11 (39%)	1 (4%)	3 (11%)	7 (25%)	–	3 (11%)	–	–	3 (11%)	28
Subject-area syllabi	23 (19%)	5 (4%)	39 (25%)	7 (6%)	23 (17%)	8 (6%)	6 (4%)	3 (2%)	13 (8%)	127
Total	42	8	46	17	23	14	6	4	21	181

**Table 4.** Norway: L97 writing groups: Shared conceptions of the ... (%).

Shared conceptions of the ...	From the beginning or after a short discussion	After long discussion	Never
Tasks of the school	91	6	3
Tasks of subject/learning areas	82	16	3
Methods/approaches to teaching	65	29	6
Political convictions	63	11	26

and the syllabus-writing. This group was dominated (15 of the 21 members) by representatives of universities and regional colleges. The 6-member 'Expert Group' likewise had three representative of universities, one from regional colleges and two from the intermediate level. The 10-member 'National Reference Group' associated with the syllabus-writing committees consisted of two representatives each from 'other state agencies', schools and public interest groups, three from the intermediate level; and one from an education interest group. In other words, we see a clear functional differentiation, or segmentation, of occupations between the core memberships in both working groups and the groups appointed to advise them. Haft and Hopmann (1990) hypothesize that such patterns of affinity and difference, i.e. *segmentation*, facilitate communication and thus their work. Like can talk to like without the 'interference' of the unlike!

Thus, as seen in Table 3, in their responses to the OCC questionnaires of the members of curriculum-writing committees, 91% of the Norwegian respondents reported that there was a shared conception of the tasks of the school in their group and across curriculum-writing groups; 82% reported a similarly shared conception of the tasks of their subjects/learning areas. On the other hand, only 63% of the respondents reported shared political convictions but, as we have contended, 'politics' was *not* the task of the syllabus-writers. As seen in Table 4, it was arguments from school practice ( $M = 4.29$ ), pedagogy ( $M = 4.09$ ) and subject matter ( $M = 3.88$ ) that were most significant to these groups; political ( $M = 2.71$ ) and administrative/legal ( $M = 2.33$ ) arguments had less importance.<sup>17</sup>

The character of the potential differences between the world-views of school people and 'politicians', central office and state administrators, and advocates of public policies can also be seen in the starting points of the curriculum-writers we surveyed. In the course of the 7-state OCC study, we asked the respondents to indicate what had 'guided' their work. In Norway, a decisive 46% checked 'the basics of educational "work"', 37% the 'fundamental values of an open democratic society', and 31% the 'feasibility of implementation'.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, only 6% mentioned the nation's 'international competitiveness', a response we interpret as one indicator of the preoccupations of the Norwegian elite's reform discourse.

**Table 5.** L97 writing groups: frames of reference.

Importance of arguments derived from ...	Mean
Educational practice	4.29
Pedagogical	4.09
Subject-matter	3.88
Political	2.71
Administrative	2.33

Notes: (1) No importance; (2) little importance; (3) some importance; (4) significant; (5) very significant.

## Licensing

Haft and Hopmann (1990) interpretation of *licensing* is drawn from traditional German law around trade and professions. After an apprenticeship, a journeyman or master is given considerable discretion in how he or she practises his or her craft or profession. Within the German school system, a teacher has a parallel discretion, a formal 'freedom to teach' (*Lehrfreiheit*): a right to interpret the state curriculum, the *Lehrplan*, in the light of reasoned analysis of the pedagogical situation of his or her classes. In such a situation the teacher is no longer a conduit for the curriculum. *Licensing inserts an intermediary between the state's formal curriculum, 'reform' implementation, and teachers' practice.* But, usefully from the point of view of a curriculum authority, issues around or the problems of implementation and/or the (in)effectiveness of a curriculum can always be attributed to the (non-)actions and behaviours of teachers rather than to the curriculum itself or to the agencies that developed the curriculum.

In contrast to the principle of licensing, L97 was declared to be binding: 'Municipalities and school administrators and staff are individually and collectively responsible for seeing that the education is in accordance with the curriculum' (Royal Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs; quoted in Koritzinsky, 2002, p. 213). Furthermore, in addition to its content specifications, L97 set out detailed principles for the organization of schools and classrooms as well as specifying the methods that teachers were to use.<sup>19</sup> However, there are reasons for arguing that L97 did in fact maintain the leeway that licensed schools and teachers to make their own decisions about implementation—and, as we have seen, many syllabus committees self-consciously built a prerogative of school- or teacher-level interpretation into many of the subject-area syllabi (Table 5).

Furthermore, in Norway as elsewhere, any school reform is invariably mediated through geographic and institutional distance as well as the boundaries that separate centres from peripheries that contribute to the maintenance of the rationales and logics already established within local practices. Thus, Helgøy (2006) contends that Norwegian education policy during the 1990s followed traditional reform trajectories with divisions between different authorities and powers. The school system did not dramatically change during the 1990s—one outcome of the absence of an evaluation system that might have assaulted the discretion associated with licensing and transformed established practices.

## Conflict and confusion

The syllabus groups worked for about a year on their initial drafts of the subject syllabi. During this period they had regular contact with KUF personnel and met occasionally with the minister and his staff. Over the year, working professional cultures developed within and

across the groups as they responded to the minister's interventions and arguments, to the project's framing and the immediate problems that each curriculum-writing group had to solve.

One complicating issue around the *L97* process was *timing*. The work on the new subject curricula began a year before the *Storting* had decided on the number of years in the compulsory school. The long-term process of developing overall principles and guidelines for what was to be *L97* along with the development of structures for the school system created a need for coordination. This coordination was not actually undertaken directly by the political or KUF leadership but emerged as an outcome of the working communication among different institutions and stakeholders (see Sivesind 2002).

Nevertheless, the work did not always run smoothly:

The perceptions of Ministerial influence were strong from the outset. Clear examples were given of subject content and clear images were conveyed of how teachers should teach. While some [of the curriculum writers] welcomed this specificity, others believed it conveyed an unrealistic view of learner's needs; that the experience and interest of one individual could not be sufficient justification for curriculum content. In general, respondents began to feel less positive about government responses as the process progressed ... Towards the end, there seemed to be the greatest breakdown in communication ... (Broadhead, 2002, p. 53)

Furthermore, and as we have noted, many members of the syllabus-writing groups questioned some of the starting points of the project from its beginning. They maintained a narrative of concern about Hernes's demand that specific authors, books, characters, composers, etc. should be included in the syllabus documents. However, for most of the writing groups, most such issues were readily resolved in practice in the give-and-take of discussions, by negotiation and occasionally by the Minister's fiat:

One would think, then, a language community would share conceptions and views, but when they come with such different terminologies—as they did for example in English and Norwegian—I gave instructions such as: It is not possible to use 'communicative competence' in every second sentence; moreover, aunties in [the Norwegian city of] Trondheim do not realize what it is. (Gudmund Hernes; see also Sivesind (2002, pp. 57–58)

But such discussions and decisions within the syllabus committees did not surface as public issues in large part because of the ministry's control of administrative processes and of the presentation of the curriculum-making in the media. However, some professional conflicts around the work of *L97* did emerge. What light do the conflicts within the *L97* task force throw on strategic issue-management?

The most persistent concerns of the curriculum-writers, as well as those critical of the project, circled around what were seen as the 'political'/'policy' starting points for the curriculum-making—that the curriculum would be national rather than locally based and emphasize *content and competence*. In addition, there was concern about what seemed to be the 'efficiency-oriented' ideology of the platform. This framing was an echo of the controversies of the 1980s around the English National Curriculum and around the emerging right party-political discourses across Europe. But at the same time they had a special force among the curriculum-writers because such arguments echoed the seeming dichotomies highlighted in education's traditional accounts of 'progressivism' and 'reform pedagogy'.

It was clear from our interviews with the KUF leadership that political visions were a driving force around *L97*. The government's policy platform for the schools had emphasized equity in the delivery of content of schooling, i.e. opportunity-to-learn (OTL), across a national school system. This theme had been highlighted in Norway's modernizing political discourse

since the late 1980s, and by Hernes since the 1970s. And there were Hernes's own significant educational commitments. His *Core Curriculum* (1993) had centred on the need to emphasize Norway's national identity and cultural heritage: 'the increasing specialization and complexity of the global community requires a deepened familiarity with the main currents and traditional tones of our Norwegian culture'. He contended that it was a misconception that an emphasis on content would hinder active participation and motivation among local actors. Rather, he advocated a content orientation to create renewed professional interest in the curriculum as well as greater commitment by the students:

[This] is exactly in alignment with the learning vision I have for them [i.e. the pupils] ... to have a stronger tradition, anchoring them to develop a greater sense of community, and that they should be more active. That school should be an exciting place is the most important task and that is my main critique of the educational communities; there is too little attention to this. What is it that rekindles and intrigues pupils' motivation? The main premise is that if you burn, you can ignite. (Gudmund Hernes)

But Hernes' political/policy and educational platform for *L97* was interpreted (or misinterpreted) by communities of discourse that had long framed their self-understanding in terms of the well-worn dichotomies of a 'progressive' ideology: process vs. product, learners vs. subjects, local curriculum vs. centralized curriculum, formal knowledge vs. children's development, etc. Such framing was commonplace within KUF itself as well as within in the *L97* commission. Hernes's framing went against the grain of much of the dominant professional discourse within the Norwegian compulsory-school community.

Thus, as we have noted, accounts of Hernes's seeming demand that specific items of content be included in the curriculum, surface again and again in the accounts of the *L97* syllabus-writing: 'I took out the names (e.g. Humpty Dumpty and Robin Hood) and the politicians put them back in' (Broadhead, 2002, p. 53; see also Broadhead, 2001). Hernes regarded 'Humpty Dumpty' and 'Robin Hood' as classical English content and therefore of significant value for the curriculum (see also Hirsch, 1987). But 'Humpty Dumpty' and 'Robin Hood' were symbols of deeper problems. The implications of the ideological framing around *L97* were to come to a head in the reception of the draft of the Norwegian, i.e. mother tongue, syllabus. The committee's draft was changed by the political leadership of the commission *before* it was released for public comment in July 1995. Subsequently, after the period of public comment, an 'alignment group' led by the State Secretary prepared a new draft—that was interpreted by many, but not all, in the field of Norwegian as a 'change in the subject'.

The issues underlying this controversy went the heart of the rationale for *L97*: the *Core Curriculum* had put the teaching of Norwegian literature and culture at the centre of the affirmation of the national *cultural heritage*. The mother tongue working group, on the other hand, was divided around the issue—with some opting for a view of 'Norwegian' as *communication*. The intervention fed into the political and professional narratives around the government's larger educational-reform project (see, e.g. Koritzinsky, 2000, 2002), and provided grist for the mill of those who rejected the reform programme.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

For many of the syllabus-developers who worked on the project, *L97* was a significant undertaking; in that it could codify (and indeed ratify) emergent changes in their subject areas (Espeland, 1997, 1998–1999). For the modernizing reformers of the state's institutions and

practices, the L97 process and final texts brought a new frame of reference stressing the double purpose of the school—as both a caretaker of traditional culture *and* a knowledge promoter. Needless to say, L97 was to have only limited immediate effects on the day-by-day practice of schooling—the effect of Norway’s long-standing but unwritten principle of *licensing*. School owners, school leaders and teachers who understood themselves had considerable discretion to interpret a state curriculum in their own ways and this discretion/‘freedom to teach’ was celebrated within Norway’s professional communities (Broadhead, 1999; Sivesind, Bachmann, & Afsar, 2003).

## Notes

1. As Svinyby (1995) observed: The reforming of the schools systems [in Scandinavia in the post-war years was], on the whole, based on a social democratic ideology. The fact that the Scandinavian countries have had almost half a century of social-democratic political dominance has made possible the realization of a school ideology that in other countries has been weakened by compromises. (p. 213)
2. ‘We know very little about Norwegian education. This was said clearly in the OECD review of Norwegian education more than two years ago. The OECD experts had difficulty evaluating the schools’ use of material resources and the achieved results of teaching. It was the data which was not good enough; even the statistics on education were imperfect. The experts could not quite understand how one could direct school and education on such a fragile basis’ (Sjoberg 1991; from Hagen and Tibbitts (1993), p. 27).
3. We interviewed 30 participants involved in the writing of L97 shortly after that writing was completed: two of 5 members of the political staff of KUF; 13 of 30 persons from the permanent staff of KUF; and 27 (of 193) persons engaged for subject-area syllabus committees.
4. Hernes as Minister was at the centre of the work around L97 from 1991 until his appointment as Minister for Health and Social Affairs in 1995. He was succeeded as Minister by Reider Sandal.
5. Gundem and Karseth (1998, p. 6) note that “‘core” [is] used in a special way—denoting underlying principles and aims meant to be common to all schools ... and not as a common core of factual knowledge and skills to be mastered by everyone’.
6. Both projects concluded in fall 1996.
7. See Hirsch, 1987; Hirsch and his colleagues went on to publish a series of, e.g. *What your first grader needs to know: Fundamentals of a good first-grade education*, etc. and to develop a model for a school. In 1996, he published the controversial *The schools we need and why we don’t have them* (New York: Doubleday).
8. i.e. *Reform 94*; prior to the 1994 reform there had been three branches of upper secondary schooling: ‘general’ (language, history, etc.), ‘mercantile’ (accounting, etc.) and ‘vocational’ (electronics, carpentry, etc.). *Reform 94* merged these branches into a single system.
9. *The Bridge* and the syllabus-writing task groups were also augmented by ‘reference’ and ‘expert groups’ that provided advice and feedback to the task-groups. The leaders of the syllabus-writing groups were dispersed across the country and supported by the regional offices of the KUF.
10. There was no mother tongue syllabus for language minorities in L97 (Gundem & Karseth, 1998).
11. The ultimate drafting of the syllabus texts was managed by Hernes, and his successor, Reider Sandal, and their political staffs.
12. Note that Hernes was Minister of Education, Research and Church Affairs, responsible for the governance and management of the established Christian church. Religious education had long been taught in Norwegian schools as part of the formal curriculum.
13. The members of the minister’s office were the only respondents we interviewed who acknowledged interactions with the political and policy issues and constituencies around L97.
14. Hernes, the State Secretary, and other members of the minister’s office played active roles in all aspects of the commission’s work. As noted earlier, public and political advocacy, along

with on-going liaison with the *Storting* and its committee on education, political parties and organizations, etc. were handled only by the minister's office. These 'political' tasks were regarded as outside the professional scope of work of the staff of KUF or those involved in the curriculum-writing.

15. The focus here is on the core members of the committees responsible for the '*The Bridge*' and the subject-area syllabi. The work of each of these task groups was augmented by formal national 'reference groups' and smaller working committees.
16. 'KUF'; personnel in the Department for Primary and Lower Secondary Education of the Royal Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs; '*Schools*', working in schools as teachers or administrators; '*County and district education offices*', working in county or district education offices; '*Regional colleges/research institutions*', working in Norway's regional colleges (now university colleges), teachers colleges or research institutions; '*University*', working in universities; '*Public, professional, business and education interest groups*', appointed from teachers unions or other education-focused interest groups, from public interest and business (including textbook publishing) interest groups as well as other education-focused interest groups; '*Other*', from other central state agencies, artists, musicians, etc. The music curriculum-writing group included, for example, a prominent folk musician.
17. 'As your team/group made its final recommendations, what priority or significance was given to the following types of arguments'. What followed was a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "none" to "very significant".
18. The respondents were asked to indicate no more than 2 responses from a set of 11.
19. For this reason, L97 was seen as being 'against' local interests and teachers' *professional* mandates (see Hovdenak, 2000; Løvlie, 1997; Solstad, 1997; Trippestad, 2003).
20. For a discussion of parallel mother tongue issues in the development of the *Illinois Learning Standards*, see Westbury (2016; see also Wixson, Dutro, & Athan, 2003).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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