

## From Content to Competence

Juridical and spiritual aspects in the work with the new curriculum  
for the Norwegian Waldorf Schools

### The descending of Justice

The development of the Waldorf School curriculum over 80 years in relation to the demands of the authorities, the parents, the schools, the teachers and the pupils.

The list below shows previous curriculum plans and reforms within the two kinds of schools up to now:

#### NORWEGIAN STATE SCHOOL

1939, Normalplanen

1974, Mønsterplanen, M 74

1987, Mønsterplanen, M 87

1993, "Læreplan, generell del" G. Hernes

1994, Reform 94

1997, L 97

2006, Kunnskapsløftet, LK 06

#### NORWEGIAN WALDORF SCHOOL

1931: "*Vom Lehrplan der freien Waldorfschule*" (Heidebrand) was well known and used in its original German version

1976, Bergensplanen

1992, Å tenne en ild, Svein Bøhn

2004, Idé og Innhold, A. Mathisen, J. Kvalvaag

2007, En læreplan for steinerskolene

In Norway the first national curriculum was developed in 1939, based on an intimate connection between the Lutheran state church and the state, and on John Dewey's working school principle. The main intention was twofold, to build the nation and to even out the social and cultural differences in other words to secure all children the same possibilities to build up a future based on their own gifts and efforts. There were new plans in 1974 and 1987, both plans that in different ways reflected ideological aspects of their time. This time the plans were based on the ideas of Equality, Solidarity and Liberty. The connection between church and state was loosened up, and even more than earlier, the task to minimize and even out social and cultural differences were emphasised. They were rich plans that contained ideological aspects, suggestions and examples of content and methods. The teachers were given lots of room to choose what to teach and how to teach, and the social aspects of learning and upbringing were focused.

In 1993 there was an ideological break that brought first a general plan, then Reform 94 and L97. Knowledge was now in focus, methods changed and a new understanding of learning based on the pupils' own efforts and activities were introduced through methods like project work.

Before a single child had been brought through the ten years of compulsory school, the curriculum changed again. This time it was built on a new structure and a new ideology. This was the first curriculum based on process management towards overall aims of knowledge, “Kunnskapsløftet 2006”.

The Waldorf school curriculum also went through transformations. They described intensions and aims for the pupils’ inner development and faculties through the different areas that were taught. The plans had been open, suggesting, mixed pedagogical ideology, knowledge of human development, didactic issues and methods. The curriculum plans were looked upon as a source of inspiration and some guidelines for the Waldorf teachers. They contained indications and examples, and at the same time they served the need for information about the main issues and ideas of Waldorf pedagogy directed towards parents and the government.

These curriculum plans were based on Steinerpedagogy as

- Rudolf Steiner’s extended views of education and upbringing
- the understanding of human development from child to adult
- a way to freedom through a conscious development of body, soul and spirit
- Rudolf Steiner’s suggestions and indications on what to teach, how and when (initially collected and commented upon by for instance Heidebrand, Stockmeyer)
- A broad secondary literature based on practice and experiences from good Waldorf teachers
- A rich unwritten tradition that was delivered from one teacher to another

The emphasis is on one hand put on developing experience, skills and knowledge, and on the other hand on very specific and conscious choices of what to teach when - and in what way. The superior intension could be summoned up as two main lines, currency and individualization. The principle of currency is connected to the choices of what to teach; it is seen as meeting the spoken or unspoken needs of the pupils by teaching what is current; this could be central inner questions that belongs to one pupil or to the class, questions that is connected to the development of body, soul or consciousness of the pupils, questions about living together, about society and so on.

The principle of individualization is connected to method; the knowledge of learning as a cooperation process between teacher and pupil. The teacher should give pictures and indications, experiences and adventures, should be able to move the pupils, get them involved and motivated to take these themes further in their own way, transform them, make them their own and to act or to express their thoughts, reflections, feelings or mental pictures. All though the results of learning processes are individualized, the processes themselves are social and deeply dependant on human relations, atmosphere and by its surroundings.

In 2004, the quality reforms reached the Norwegian school systems; the law emphasized each child’s right to have an individual adapted education and an environment for learning that is safe and stimulating. In 2005 the work on a new curriculum started, and we saw the indications of how the

word quality was to be interpreted and controlled by the introduction of national tests. At the same time private schools were addressed with a request to implement the new curriculum or hand in an alternative curriculum based on the same structure and principles as “Kunnskapsløftet”(the Lifting of Knowledge), which is the name of the new curriculum in state school. “Kunnskapsløftet” was released in 2006, a new curriculum for pupils from the age 6 to 19.

At first, the Waldorf School Association in Norway did not react. The last rewriting of the Waldorf School curriculum “Idea & Content”, was completed in 2004 after ten years work. Teachers had come together in groups to produce the material, and more than one person had tried to coordinate the work, edit the texts and make them ready for printing.

The Norwegian Waldorf Association and their schools and teachers were still exhausted after these efforts and could simply not believe that the latest changes had anything to do at all with Waldorf schools. -The Waldorf schools already had an approved curriculum -, was what we constantly told each other within the Norwegian Waldorf Association when these letters from the National School Administration appeared. Even then we had still not understood the implications of the quality reform, namely the importance of finding measurable criteria on which it would be possible to decide whether a child had got his/her legal right for an adapted education fulfilled or not. The curriculum had changed its focus completely. While earlier plans had emphasized on the whats, hows and whys (– what to teach - how to teach - and why teachers should teach this or that in this or that way – ), this new curriculum contained subject plans structured vertically, from level 1 – 13.

They included:

- a description of each subject’s mission and their main areas
- a description of which competences the pupils should reach at some levels (after 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, and after each level up the end of compulsory school)
- a specific amount of time were defined for each of these descriptions
- a description of evaluation forms

In addition to this there were five basic skills that were implied in all subjects (the abilities to express oneself orally, to read, to write, to know basic mathematics and to have computer skills). The general part of the curriculum remained. (We have in fact heard that it is translated to many languages and used as a general part for curriculums in other countries.)

There are no longer guidelines that directs

- what to teach
- when to teach the different subjects
- which methods to use
- how to organize the teaching

To sum up this section I would like to conclude that the state school curriculum had been transformed from a basically “spiritual” document that reflected political intensions and the leading values of its time, to become a juridical document, including measureable definitions on how children’s educational rights can be fulfilled. Indirectly the curriculum also defines quality and how quality can be secured and controlled.

At the same time these changes made it important to work on the identity of Waldorf pedagogy. Waldorf pedagogy could no longer be identified from what is taught, its methods and how the teaching is organized. These were all themes that had no relevance to “Kunnskapsløftet” because they were up to each teacher or school to define. Descriptions of practice were therefore not useful to make visible either Waldorf pedagogy as an alternative or the levels of knowledge and skills.

Now the Norwegian Waldorf School Association slowly arrived at the understanding that this transformation was requested for the Waldorf school curriculum as well. At the same time it became very clear that the government would not accept negotiations with separate Waldorf schools. The request was to come up with a national curriculum that could include all Waldorf Schools in Norway from level 1-13, pupils from the age of six to nineteen.

Up to now, the individual Waldorf schools had been able to approach the authorities and bring forward applications on variations of the existing curriculums, or brand new curriculums based on Waldorf pedagogical principles understood in a new way. These variations had been developed for upper school, and they had by no means materialized without internal opposition. These schools either established programs for young people that were more directed towards a profession, or had developed a Waldorf curriculum that allowed the pupils to go deeper into some subjects on behalf of other areas. This meant that there was not one curriculum that had to be updated, but many different plans had to be coordinated and renewed.

The experience, thoughts and knowledge of the people who had developed each of these varieties were needed. At the same time abilities to put aside old conflicts and misunderstandings in order to cooperate in a new way were of great importance.

## What was the task? How was it to be approached?

The request was twofold and expressed at the same time the challenge of combining polarities. The curriculum should make visible

- that the Waldorf curriculum requires a level of skills and knowledge that is “as good as” “Kunnskapsløftet”
- that the Waldorf school curriculum is a complete pedagogical alternative that cannot be accomplished within the state school curriculum, “Kunnskapsløftet”

Rather quickly the idea of a coordinated project between the Waldorf Association, the Waldorf schools, the Rudolf Steiner University College, Oslo, and the Norwegian Pedagogic Section was found. In March 2006 it became clear that the Association had to take on the coordinating role of this process. Some central decisions were made:

- this project should be looked upon as a possibility to express the essence of Waldorf pedagogy in modern language; the overlying ideas, leading methods and didactics should be described in a way that could communicate and exchange pedagogical issues with anyone interested
- the Waldorf curriculum should be restructured and contain a description of intentions and missions for each subject as in “Kunnskapsløftet”, whereas the main challenge was to formulate competences pupils should achieve at chosen levels for each of the described subjects
- a coordination of the different types of Waldorf curriculums for upper school had to be accomplished

A group of people that were both highly competent and representative for various parts of the Waldorf education in Norway met regularly during spring 2006 and exchanged thoughts and perspectives on the task and the process: Oddbjørn Birkeland, Svein Bøhn, Aksel Hugo, Rune Kilander, Jakob Kvalvaag, Erik Marstrander, Arve Mathisen. Three different parts of the project were identified:

1. to write a general curriculum, describing basic pedagogical ideas, didactic guidelines and representative methods for Waldorf pedagogy
2. to rewrite and restructure the Waldorf curriculum and formulate the competences pupils should achieve at certain stages, and to rewrite and add the kindergarten plans
3. to arrange this work so that it could become a waking up – a conscious process in the Waldorf schools, involving the teachers in developing and articulate suitable competences for each subject – competences that are clear, that support the main themes of the pupil’s development, and at the same time give teachers enough freedom to form their teaching in an individual and creative way.

A project description was written during the summer holiday and was accepted by the Association board in the early autumn 2006. The work was structured as a normal project and started immediately. Apart from the project leader, that happens to be the author of this paper, there were only a couple of people who were paid for their efforts. The result as we know it today consists of:

- a general part, 27 pages
- a kindergarten plan, 43 pages
- curriculum class 1-10, 82 pages
- curriculum class 11- 13, 233 pages

The curriculum was handed in to the authorities in the beginning of October 2007, and in the middle of July 2008 it became clear that apart from some small, but important details, the curriculum was accepted. The Waldorf curriculum was accepted both as a complete pedagogical alternative - and as equal in terms of its subject level. In other words we had been able to show that Waldorf education was both different enough and equal.

## The status today and in a future strategy:

Today there are still a few things left unsolved. These questions have that just been passed on to the Department of Education. They are small issues, but of importance:

- Is it possible to accept a curriculum for Norwegian Waldorf Schools that do not oblige them to teach children information knowledge technology (IKT) before the age of nine?
- Is it possible to accept that Waldorf Schools guarantee that their pupils will have more time at school than the total amount of lessons at state schools, but that the number of lessons are not specified and fixed to certain subjects (for class 1-10)?

When it comes to upper school, pupils from the age of 16- 19), there are only small details left to agree upon, and for these parts we are rather optimistic about the final decisions. The final decision will be taken before Christmas, and in the mean time we will have to work continuously to keep politicians and bureaucrats awake and conscious about the big questions that often are hidden behind the small issues, issues that we easily can adapt to if it seems convenient or necessary.

## What were the essential questions?

What is unique in Waldorf pedagogy? What is essential?

The main lessons? The period booklet? Water colours? The morning verse? The architecture of the school buildings?

Fundamental questions were raised as well as rhetoric and provocative questions that were meant to start up a rethinking process. There were many discussions about the essence of Waldorf pedagogy, its practical consequences and how they became visible.

There were answers like:

- The view of the human integrity as a spiritual being.
- The importance of recognizing a seven-year-old child as fundamentally different from the ten-year-old, or the teenager, according to learning, motivation and useful methods.
- The knowledge of stages in learning processes as based on senses, experiences, adventures and emotions before the mental activity can be supported by representations and models – and then - be lifted up to abstract thinking.

The struggle was to find the words and formulations that held the appropriate level of precision, to fight prejudice and protectionism. It was to be able to keep sight of the important and essential differences between “Kunnskapsløftet” and a Waldorf curriculum and to safeguard that listed competences would be natural results of typical Waldorf learning processes. The competences should also express a logic and natural stage in its context.

## The external challenges

The external challenges were basically on two fields:

- The National School Administration is responsible for putting the politicians’ decisions into practise. The people we met in negotiations were
  - lawyers, experts on educational laws, school laws, who have their main interest in securing the children’s rights in education, and to make it possible to measure whether their legal rights are fulfilled or not.
  - bureaucrats, educated in pedagogy for state school and experienced curriculum makers, all of them had been deeply involved in “Kunnskapsløftet”

This meant in fact that we faced negotiators with limited or no competence on Waldorf pedagogy and education. They had no experience in evaluating other curriculums than the various state school plans. Waldorf schools have been the only pedagogical alternative to the state school in Norway. There have been other private schools, but they have all based their education on the state school curriculum.

Their task was to compare the Waldorf curriculum to “Kunnskapsløftet”, to decide whether it was a complete pedagogical alternative that held an adequate academic level at the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade and the end of upper school. However, their evaluation was based on juridical aspects and a view of human development, on learning and on knowledge that did not belong to Waldorf pedagogy. The challenge was to state this fact and make sure that their evaluation should be held back until they understood the background for didactic choices that differed from “Kunnskapsløftet”. The conversations and dialogues were numerous, and at last we were able to achieve an understanding of context and consistence which is essential in Waldorf education and its curriculum. The word ‘equal’ was understood in its extended version, as *of the same quality*, not as identical.

- The other main challenge towards the authorities was to extend the room, make the dancing floor as big as possible. This meant to answer detail questions in a simple way, and rather consequently bring up the connected principal themes. For instance, if they were concerned about the pupils’ right to learn how to work on a computer at the age of nine, we would raise the question of parents’ right to chose an education and upbringing according to their own values or conviction, an education that held other values and aims than the state school. We fought for the right to be compared only at natural ends, like after 10<sup>th</sup> grade and the end of upper school. The policy was outspoken: We would work continuously to secure as much freedom as possible in any field. Abstract and general terms were used instead of more specific terms and detailed obligations.

## The internal challenges

The main internal challenge had to do with identity, identification and ownership. The national Waldorf curriculum had visions and compulsory aims, but lacked life, lacked pedagogy and guidelines. It had become minimalistic and dry. Many teachers in Waldorf schools did not feel that this was their plan, and it could by no means give them the necessary nourishment and inspiration.

This was partly true, because descriptions of methods and didactics were not asked for in the curriculum, and the policy had been to give the authorities only what they asked for. All the rest we wanted the freedom to develop internally. In this way there would be fewer obligations to fulfil towards the state and more room to develop in our own direction. It was important to meet these issues, to inform both in meetings and in writing, how we would have to look upon these things, how our pedagogical discussions and reasoning had to be taken into the conference, to parents meetings and so on. These parts of Waldorf pedagogy still existed and were valid examples of the education in practice even if they were not described in our national curriculum. Each Waldorf school was encouraged to work out and describe their profile, the choices in pedagogy and methodology they have made for their school. The need for an internal horizontal and the vertical curriculum was recognised

and planned, but this curriculum we could develop over time, and there would be no need to authorise it. The development and collection of good practice and texts have started as a part of our new project that I will describe later on.

## A description of the process

The project was as mentioned before, structured in three main parts. The first part, to write a general curriculum, describing superior ideas, didactic guidelines and representative methods in Waldorf pedagogy, was taken on by Arve Mathisen. He wrote the text and consulted a reference group that represented different parts of Waldorf education in order to include a broad understanding of the essential themes and values. The text was then distributed to all schools for comments and corrections.

The next part of the project was to make sure that the Waldorf schools and teachers were invited and encouraged to participate in this ambitious project. Some guidelines for the work were formulated. We wanted to design an open and including process that focused on the task, respected the very limited time schedule that was set up and recognized individual people's efforts in order to articulate important views or values in Waldorf pedagogy. Diversity is strength, but critic has to be constructive, and therefore followed by new tries, better descriptions or formulations. Clear and short information about the crucial points in the process should be sent regularly to the schools, and any expectations of involvement or themes to discuss should be spelled out.

The last part of the project was by all means the biggest and most complicated part. Luckily the Norwegian Waldorf movement happened to have a couple of very competent and early retired teachers that both had lead curriculum processes before. They were not only competent; they also had the time and opportunity to take on the task. Their names are Svein Bøhn and Jakob Kvalvaag. Besides being good writers, both of them know the Waldorf pedagogy, the schools and most of the experienced teachers.

Good teachers were asked to bring about a first try on formulating introductory texts and central competences after 4<sup>th</sup> (3<sup>rd</sup>), 7<sup>th</sup> (6<sup>th</sup>) and 10<sup>th</sup> (9<sup>th</sup>) level for the different subjects. These texts were distributed to all Waldorf school, and a deadline for comments was given. Comments were worked into the texts and they were rinsed and edited before next phase.

For upper school the process was even more difficult, but within the different schools there were an explicit will to cooperate and find solutions. All the schools had teachers that took part in describing and formulating the central competences of their subjects. At the same time there was a continuous work towards the authorities in order to get enough room to be able to include and coordinate the variations in profile and structure without washing out the differences. This was obtained by emphasizing the final competences and the total number of lectures for each subject. At the same time the schools were challenged to structure the plans in new ways. When the competences were

formulated and the different subjects were described, the curriculum was literally speaking chopped up and reorganized. This made them more flexible and easier to rearrange in ways that took care of the variations.

As described before, teachers made great efforts to formulate the competences that the education aimed for in each subject at different levels. There were many problems, especially because there is so much Waldorf teachers aim for that is hard to define. These aims are closer connected to human growth, not only to knowledge of subjects. Still, we all experienced this pain in our more or less helpless first tries to formulate essential competences for the subjects. It was very difficult to make them precise and clear and at the same time general enough. A tendency was to formulate the aims of competences too close to limited sources and habits in teaching. We also experienced that the texts should pass more than one hand, but still get their final touch by one person; - and that they became better and more universal at the seventh try than the second. The responsible project group felt a bit shy about the results, about the choices that had been made, the flaws and essential themes that we had forgotten or not been able to communicate. The curriculum was a good start, the best we had been able to make so far under the given circumstances, but it could not be seen as final or ultimate. This understanding made it clear to the project group that the work had to be continued.

## **How should the work be developed and researched further so that the curriculum can continue to be a living document in tune with the times?**

The trying out and evaluation of the new curriculum was planned as a cooperation between the schools, the Association of Steiner Schools in Norway and Rudolf Steiner University College. The first step was to organize a meeting for the pedagogical leaders in the Steiner schools which will take place October 14<sup>th</sup>. They have been asked to lead the process in their own schools. At this meeting the first experiences in working with the new curriculum will be discussed. All schools will present plans for the year, and how they have worked to bring about these plans. Did the teachers experience the new curriculum as too narrow, as a reduction of their pedagogical freedom? Did the changes bring about new ways of working or cooperation?

Three national meetings are planned, and the schools and the individual teachers will in different ways be involved in evaluation and improvement of the curriculum based on their experiences and reflections.

The work is to be seen as a heightening of conscious involvement in deepening and improving the work of the individual teacher and the Norwegian Waldorf movement as a whole by systematically assessing experience and researching into the content and methods involved in building competence. The essence of Waldorf pedagogy is to build a competence that is not subject orientated, that means

knowledge and abilities, but based in a set of universal human faculties that combine to bring about a form of creativity in a specific meeting with the world.

## What is the outcome of the efforts so far?

A short summary of the effects of this process:

- A new consciousness of the character of Waldorf education – not only as practice, but as overlying ideas and experienced knowledge
- Cooperation and cohesion within the Waldorf movement
- A national curriculum that includes the existing variations, and from which new types of Waldorf schools can be shaped and materialised
- A professional presentation of a coherent pedagogical alternative