

Concerning "Present State Doc".

## **Suggestions for establishing a common working-base at the international kick-off conference**

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### **I. Check list concerning legal framework**

- 1) How is individualized teaching and learning in heterogeneous groups defined in your country?

Law states that permanent groups in schools (classes) should reflect society in the respect that pupils from all walks of life and with different abilities should mix. This could be named the Socialist or Social Democrat approach. It's a mixed-ability/heterogeneous school in the sense that no matter how rich your parents are or whatever your academic skills, you are put into a class according to your age and that's it. Since Norway has very few private schools (and no nobility!) this has worked for as long as 50 years in primary schools. In comprehensive schools (13-16 year old) this was introduced in the 1960'ies.

#### Definitions added Dec. 2004:

**Mixed ability:** heterogeneous grouping of pupils of the same age. There is a certain weighting of gender (equal number of boys/girls). Care is taken to consider the number of SEN pupils in the group.

**Individualized learning:** the term adapted teaching/learning was introduced in the NC-97 and is repeated in the new Curriculum coming in 2006: pupils should be taught on the academic level they are or which is right for them according to their learning capacity.

**History:** The term adapted learning must be considered in relation to two terms: *integration* and *inclusion*. During the 80'ies handicapped pupils were integrated in the local schools. They should no longer attend special schools. Time showed that the law (National Curriculum called M-87) which recommended mentally and physically handicapped pupils to be integrated in the local schools was no success. The new National Curriculum of 1997 therefore opened for a new concept: *Inclusion* of all pupils in the local schools. For this to come true, the local schools were expected to provide a place of belonging to *all pupils*. Not everybody agreed to this and it is still debated.

Another discussion is about the law's concepts of Special Needs Education which secure handicapped pupils' legal rights. Then we have the concept of *adapted teaching* which says that *all* pupils have the right to be taught according to their level of mental and physical abilities/capabilities. Why should we need a law for pupils with Special Needs when everybody has the right to be taught according to their individual level and abilities? This is debated in the area of mixed ability and individualized learning in Norway these days.

## **Strong points in dealing with mixed ability and individualized learning:**

*Strong:*

-Adapted teaching/learning which is a concept in the NC-97 and also in the new reform.

-We also expect Individual Teaching Plans to be introduced with the new reform - for all pupils.

*Weak:*

-No special programme for talented pupils. The law says everybody is expected to be taught according to their needs, but the talented are often forgotten.

-PISA 2004 results must be analyzed properly before we jump to conclusions, but it certainly doesn't put us in an ideal position!

*National Tests* were introduced in 2004. We're not sure if this is a strong or weak point, but we're following the European trend. Reading skills, Maths and English are tested on forms 4 and 7 in primary school, form 10 in lower secondary and the first or second year of upper secondary school.

## **What is of special interest in the exchange with other countries and their practices?**

- Size of groups/classes
- Teaching load
- Teacher training: content, focus on teaching techniques, tools for dealing with mixed ability and individualized learning for teachers.
- Talented and gifted pupils
- Inclusion of behaviour problems among pupils (ADHD)
- In-service training: how is it secured?
- School-owners responsibility
- Autonomy of schools
- Support of the LEA/ Town Hall to schools
- Head Teachers' role and responsibility
- Parent –cooperation/support to schools

## 2) Which legal overall guidelines and targets do exist for individualized teaching and learning?

### **Added December, 2004:**

*Legal:* NC-97 will rule for another year; meaning 2005/2006. Gradually they introduce resolutions from the new reform called **Culture for Learning** and by 2006/2007 they have introduced all the reforms, including new teaching plans.

Right in the middle of this paper being written, we've had the results from another PISA-round. They don't give much credit to our school system when it comes to proficiency in Maths and Science. Once again Finland is on top! The conclusion given by the Ministry is that NC-97 was not good enough.

*Material framework:* Owners of the schools are expected to follow up closely. This means the Town Hall and the school administration there. They report to the regional level which again check on the status of students collectively and statistically, as well as the pedagogical platform and organisation of the school.

Concerning the "ordinary" pupil:

According to our National Curriculum of 1997 (from now on named NC-97), every pupil has a right to receive and be met in teaching and learning on the level that is right for them. This is a particularly difficult demand on teachers! Coming up is another aspect that will make it even more demanding: every pupil should have his/her own individualized/adapted teaching/learning plan= ITP. It will probably be introduced by law in 2005 To make this possible, our school laws have got a new paragraph: the old *class* concept does not exist any more; instead they call it *group*. Instead of a *form teacher*, they have introduced the concept *contact teacher*. The idea is that 2-3 teachers will share the old class and they are each responsible for maximum 12 pupils and their ITPs.

Concerning special needs pupils :

The Norwegian school-law states that pupils with special needs have the right to be taught according to their ability, just like everybody else. But to secure this, they will need extra attention. To integrate these pupils in an ordinary class/group, our system grants them the right to a certain number of extra lessons which in practise means that an additional teacher is responsible for coordinating and adapting NS-97 to their needs. This teacher will write out the *IEP - Individual Education Plan* - together with parents, with the contact teacher/other teachers and with the pupil if necessary. In this plan social skills/objectives are often as important as the basic skills.

3) Who is responsible for the realization of these targets and to what extent are they compulsory?

Concerning the ordinary pupil:

The teachers are responsible for the realisation of the annual goals given in the NS-97 on every year/level. The school administration must see to it that a plan is made for each subject – according to these annual goals. The NS – 97 gives a specific content specification for every subject. From those specifications, the teachers are expected to make objectives. They have to be concrete.

The marks/grades given by the teachers indicate at what level the goals have been reached. All this work is compulsory!

Concerning special-needs pupils:

The IEP is a legal document written and updated yearly. It can be used as documentation by the school and the local education authority (LEA) if later on the parents find faults with the teaching/education the student has

received. Indirectly the school, represented by the headmaster, is responsible. To secure that laws are followed, a rather bureaucratic and time consuming system has been established:

- The teacher team at school writes the IEP in collaboration with the parents. When they are agreed, everybody signs.
- It's checked by our special education coordinator at school according to what kind of handicap/learning difficulties the pupil has (diagnoses).
- Headmaster signs.
- The local agency has advisers that have defined the special needs and given directions as to how the pupil should be taught. They check the IEP.

4) What kind of support for individualized teaching and learning is given?

Concerning ordinary pupils:

When in college, teacher-students will be taught how to differentiate their teaching. There are also a number of in-service courses given in schools arranged by the local school authorities. Many text-books are also written with this in mind. Mathematics is a good example: colour coded tasks according to abilities. Pupils are encouraged to decide on which level they belong - under guidance of the teacher, of course.

Concerning special-needs pupils:

- Psychologists and educational specialists in the local agency offer support to teachers. They are responsible for the diagnosis after referral and know the pupil. There is a written report available at the school and the student has his/her own file where everything is kept.
- Co-teachers are often special needs teachers and their education secures support to other teachers.
- Special education coordinator is there to help. He/she often has a university-degree in pedagogics.

5) How are the results assessed?

We are not quite sure of what you put into the term *assessment* here. Do you have in mind the school's own assessment like evaluation of methods? That is a continuous process which teachers perform during the term and if they are good at their job, they'll change methods, speed, organizing students in classroom etc. according to evaluation. The teacher teams are doing this.

## II. Concerning assessment

1) Which forms of students' assessment do exist (and what is their function?)

General procedure for all students:

- Formal assessment: end-of-term marks given in the school report. The marks given in June are the ones given according to annual goals in the NS-97 (curriculum-based).

- Two informal parents' conferences with the contact teacher where the pupil is also present. Conversation about the school situation.
- Portfolio assessment is in use in some subjects and in the context mentioned above.
- Student-teacher talks twice a year.

#### Special-needs students

They follow the procedure mentioned above with a few exceptions:

- Twice a year there is a formal meeting with a set of participants from the teams around the student: teaching team, headmaster/special education coordinator, parents, psychologist, advisory staff from local agency, other specialists. They check the IEP, evaluate progress and monitor changes. A written report is made from the meeting and put into the student's file.
- Schools are expected to write a report on the IEP in December and June. Here methods, progress and achievement of objectives are evaluated. This report is signed by teachers and sent off to local authorities and parents. It's also put in the student's file.

#### What is their function?

- Curriculum based assessment is the context in which a student can compare himself to everybody else in his group. They are the formal assessment which is the same all over the country. For a majority of students, this is a motivation. If teachers are good at their job, the individual goals/objectives are the result of personal talks with the student and will be perceived as realistic/right for them.
- These marks are the entrance-ticket to secondary schools (16 years).
- For special-needs students the situation will differ a lot. Some of them will leave comprehensive school without marks. Others will sit for the exams in some subjects. Constant counselling and talks with parents will protect the students from the feeling of defeat.

#### 2) How does assessment affect individual teaching and learning?

As long as we have all the informal assessment as listed in II 1), we feel we are taking care of motivation and the individual abilities. Positive feedback on work that goes well is an important part of it. We evaluate the process as well as the result. This the students know. If you have worked diligently, you are rewarded.

#### 3) What are the consequences for failing students?

First of all: in our comprehensive/lower secondary school, students can't fail in the meaning that they have to repeat a year. (Failing mark is 1 on a scale from 1-6 ). It's been like that since the 1960'ies.

So, what happens if they want to get into secondary school?

Naturally failing marks will prevent students from starting an academic career, but counselling will be applied to find suitable choices of vocational training after GCSE (first national exam at 16 years of age).

The point is that no student should go on for years with the feeling that "I am a loser and nobody cares". Accommodations must be made as quickly as possible and the feeling of mastering your life nurtured!

If a student all of a sudden comes up with '1' in several subjects, the teaching team should get into action. What are the reasons? Social? Parents? Bullying? Abilities? Which measures must be taken? Teachers must inform the school administration who will assist.

4) How is each school and the system as a whole assessed (and in what way does this affect the individual teaching and learning?)

- Each school has national exams at the end of comprehensive school. Students sit for a national exam in one subject; Norwegian, English or Mathematics. In addition they are tried in one other subject orally: an oral exam organized by the school but with external examiners.

Results are published as from now, and not everybody is happy about that. (PISA has affected Norway too!)

- Pupil inspectors - a new national programme only recently introduced in comprehensive schools. Pupils in lower secondary schools answer questions about their school and teachers:

- Pupil democracy
- Methods of teaching
- Prosperity/satisfaction with school situation
- Bullying
- Parents' involvement in school

How does this affect individual teaching and learning?

The school is in no way punished- teachers aren't fired; how could they, when our system is a mixed ability one?

What worries us is that we are perhaps developing a system of evaluation now that points in the direction of good schools and bad schools according to the marks pupils are obtaining.

The gravest of all criticism against this school system is that we haven't been good enough on taking care of the clever students and giving them the challenges they need. This is a topic that teachers often debate. School in Norway has become a school for the average pupil and not adapted to the very different individual pupils. In that way the Norwegian government could be right in introducing stricter methods of evaluation.

5) What is the role of teachers, students and parents in the process of assessment?

Teachers:

- Evaluation of curriculum goals: marking
- IEP-objectives in reports
- Portfolios

Parents:

- Meetings/conferences with teachers

- Being presented with and discussing portfolios/reports
- Evaluation on quality of school's social objectives.

Students:

- Participation in the choice of objectives
- Use of portfolios as a means of self-evaluation.
- Making sure they know the criteria for evaluation which is a very difficult process: Sometimes they believe marks are given totally at random.....
- Teacher/student conference twice a year.

### III. Concerning teacher training and in-service training

What is regarded as a strong point in one sense can be regarded as a weak point in another sense.

#### 1 A) Strong points in the education of teachers:

- Based on National Curricula – one for each type of teacher education.
- Broad scope, value based on the idea of a pupil centred unitary school system.
- Strong on educational theory (pedagogics). This is valued at least as much as teaching methods .
- Extensive teaching practice in schools – under mentorship – as an integral part of the programme.
- Students themselves experience many different forms of evaluation used during their own teacher education: oral presentations/examinations, written examinations, practical examinations, portfolios – digital as well as paper based.
- Strong on building competence in using ICT as a tool for organising and individualising learning.

#### 1 B) Weak points in the education of teachers:

- General teacher education: Scope is too broad, not enough in-depth study of school subjects. The generalists will manage in primary teaching, but in lower secondary the demands on subject knowledge are tougher. Most teachers working there have at least two subjects in which they have In depth knowledge (one year college/university training).

#### 2) The importance of individualized teaching and learning in

##### a) teacher-education

- The pupil centred school is a central concept. Educational theory (Pedagogics) plays an important role in teacher education programmes. However, if you ask newly-educated teachers, they invariably answer that the significance of this topic is not taken seriously. It is dependant on the various lecturers and their real experience in teaching.

##### b) In in-service training:

The Ministry of Education expects the regional university colleges to follow up all reforms by arranging in service training. These last 3 years, proffers have comprised a wide scope of topics within individualized teaching and learning, also in Halden!

### 3) Available material with regard to individualised teaching and learning

The Norwegian Board of Education is responsible for publishing material on individualized teaching and learning, and ever since the last NC was introduced (1997) a steady flow of publications has reached the schools. This material is available to all teachers. School administrations are responsible for the implementation.

- Available material in English?

NC-97 (general, introductory part) is available in English and German.

(We will continue searching for publications in English concerning 'MAIL'.)

### 4 Who is responsible for teacher education programmes?

Two main roads to becoming a teacher for primary (years 1 - 7 / ages 6 - 13) and lower secondary school (years 8 - 10 / ages 14 - 16)

A) Regional university colleges - 4 years programme based on a National Curriculum for General Teacher Education.

Years 1 and 2 common for all: Norwegian, Mathematics, Religious education, Pedagogics (pedagogy?) and a course on Starting to teach reading, writing and mathematics.

Years 3 and 4 of programme school subjects of students' own choice. At least one full year spent on one subject.

B) Bachelor programmes (3 years) + a one year programme on educational theory /practical/pedagogical education.

Bachelor programmes constituted by 2 - 4 subjects of students' own choice.

The programme on practical/pedagogical education is based on a National Curriculum.

Bachelor programmes offered by both universities and regional university colleges.

### 4 B) Who is responsible for programmes, their organization and evaluation in service training?

-Programmes:

The Ministry of Education defines what they want implemented in teaching according to their reforms. NC-97 is a good example.

-Organization:

University colleges/Regional colleges are expected to arrange/organize these courses. Private businesses catch up and proffer similar courses, very often ICT-based.

School owners/LEAs buy their competence and invite/send teachers to locally arranged "In-service-training days". ICT courses run for a full year, normally.

-Finances.

School owners pay the cost. For the last three years, the Ministry of Education has spent 900 mill. kroner on courses in special fields and School Owners can apply for some of this money. Individualized teaching and learning has been one of the more important topics for courses.

Organization:

-Evaluation:

The colleges themselves evaluate as a part of the course (they ask participating students to answer questions at the end of the course).

The demand of the courses is also a indication.....  
School owners/LEAs also have systems for evaluation and the results are sent back to the colleges.

#### IV. Concerning the cultural and political climate

- 1) Which attitude and spirit dominate the interaction between school administration, head teachers, staff, students and their parents?

I choose the keywords "interaction" and "attitude and spirit"  
-General sense of wanting the best for our customers, the students.

- Parents accept and trust the competence of schools when it comes to our competence on subjects and methods.
- Parents are very concerned about their children's social life in school and always ask about school atmosphere, bullying and so on.
- Teachers accept that most parents are the experts on their child-their knowledge must be used in a positive way so that we seek their help and cooperation.
- School administration stresses the importance of not intimidating the parents.
- The rules and regulations of our school must be accepted and we expect support on all important issues. Here information and communication is vital: phone calls to check facts, meetings and other means of communication.
- Most conflicts can be avoided by communication. Our experience is that we help the students by being honest about academic abilities instead of supporting unrealistic goals. This is a process that takes time.
- It must be mentioned that the demands on teachers concerning individualized teaching and learning are quite heavy. Especially the last 4-6 years through implementing all the requirements in NC-97, I have as a head teacher noticed a certain unwillingness to get started on the topic. The younger teachers are often the best on this. The older despair: How can I possibly include all 30 students? I am responsible in the respect that I must support them; find material, make it a topic for an "educational" discussion in school.

- 2) How does school autonomy and cooperation influence the interaction and the forms of communication, especially when there are conflicts?

Are we talking about forms of communication with politicians?  
Or with parents? Or within the schools?

I assume we are on the local arena here, where the conflicts often occur when the economy of schools is in a poor condition. School autonomy is often non-existent when budgets have to be cut, because politicians decide: nearly always on wages for teachers. Indirectly this means fewer teachers inside the classrooms. Consequences for individualized teaching and learning is obvious.

Parents as the school's customers are very active when budget cuts are on

the agenda, which they are every year. Sometimes their influence prevents cuts. Marianne says: *'As a head teacher I have very little influence. I can tell what will happen if they cut the budget, but have to comply, of course. I'm not supposed to communicate my opinions through the local newspaper...'*

And she continues: *'Can I interpret the question as to how much autonomy we really have? Very little!'*

3) In what way are questions and aspects concerning individual teaching and learning communicated?

In schools:

Among teachers?

In meetings and through daily co-teaching. See also point IV 1, last dot, on the reluctance to take in the serious business of individualised teaching/learning.

Towards parents?

Methods are discussed and amount of teaching load for students.

In educational magazines: Nearly every issue something on the topic.

In Teachers' Union publications.

On the Web: The Norwegian Board of Education.

4) Which factors are considered to be favourable or unfavourable for the future development of individualized teaching and learning?

We assume that we are on a national level here.

There has been a "Quality development" programme since the year 2000. 900 mill.kr. has been spent on this.

The following topics have been given priority:

- ICT in education.
- Competence development in some subjects: Norwegian language, maths, natural sciences.

In June 2003 a Commissioned Report was published. The government wanted reforms in primary, secondary and tertiary education.

No doubt the PISA ghosts are turning up here too!

This commissioned report outlines some general aspects. I feel it's very difficult to decide now whether they are favourable or unfavourable. But here are a few of the intentions:

- more autonomy to schools
- more openness regarding the results of the sector.
- steering by objectives rather than by specification (NC).

In 2004 there will be a White Paper and by 2005 the new laws will be introduced and compulsory.

Favourable:

- ITP is coming up: individualized teaching plan for every student. This will become compulsory.

- Fewer students per contact teacher is good.
- New national plan for schools coming up.
- Assurance that resources will stay in schools.
- More emphasis on literacy and numeracy.
- Increased physical activity, more time is to be used for Physical Education.

Unfavourable:

- Second foreign language is introduced in addition to English. On the aspect of individualised teaching and learning, we can ask whether this will make schools even more academic.
- The Government is introducing private schools that bring down the old philosophy about mixed ability schools. Religious schools have popped up. Soon rich parents will be able to start their own schools. The conservative government favours academic skills and accuse us rightly of not having taken good enough care of the clever students!

Uncertain: favourable or not?

- National tests on more levels.
- In primary schools there will be an increase in the total number of school hours.