# Chapter 2
# An Overture: A Historical Overview of Political and Cultural Antecedents of the Nordic School System and its Variety of Teacher Education Programmes


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**Abstract** Trade and contact between people in the northwest corner of Europe and other parts of the world can be traced far back in time. The attacks and raids of Vikings created terror in parts of Europe, but through Christianization, the people in the north gradually assimilated the values of the other European regions. The transnational Catholic church influenced the order of several societies. Schools in the Nordic region at first provided training for the priesthood. With the Reformation, the transnational influence of the Church was greatly weakened. In the 18th century, societal authorities introduced a new school model: mandatory public school for all. This public school helped spread literacy and more in-depth knowledge of Christianity. Over time, the idea emerged that schools should serve a broader purpose than spreading Christian knowledge; the need for teacher education was recognised as a logical consequence. Substantial improvements to the school system took place through trained teachers and the expansion of schools' content. The changes in Nordic societies laid the foundation for and were influenced by improvements in the school system, indicating a renewal of the school systems. Teacher education evolved from a seminary-based education with many general education elements, to an extended education.

## 2.1 Short Historical Overview

We cannot escape a historical explanation of the current situations in the Nordic region. This chapter is primarily written – without any academic pretensions - for people who do not know the historical development of the Nordic countries and autonomous areas (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands,

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Greenland, Åland and Sámi areas, Sápmi). I focus on some important political and cultural antecedents of the Nordic school system and the varieties of schooling and teacher education programmes. The purpose of the overview is to provide a broad, conceptual framework for understanding how five Nordic states grew over time and to discuss political and cultural antecedents of the Nordic school model.

The fact that most people in Scandinavian countries understand one another's languages came to be important for the idea of kinship peoples ("pan-Scandinavianism") in the nineteenth century, neo-Scaninavianism 1895–1905 and its significance for later bottom-up processes and initiatives of formalised co-operation between Nordic countries in the twentieth century. Although a broad-brush narration of history cannot detail the nuances of each country's educational history or account for the evolution of its school system as part of the development of society and the welfare state as we know it, the fact that *there are currently five Nordic countries is mainly due to the evolution of distinct national identities*. In addition, we can talk about distinct cultures and identities in the Nordic autonomous areas (among Faroe Islanders, Greenlanders and Ålanders) and in the Sami population. The reason for this is explained in this chapter and later chapters. The contours of the national identities naturally go far back in time, but the period from 1789 through the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 is important for understanding the ideas of freedom and independence that arose in Norway and Iceland. Before a nation can declare independence, it must develop a national identity and certain institutions; these are processes that can take time. The school became an instrument for building national identities in all Nordic countries. On the other hand, *the relations among the Nordic countries are also based on the idea of kinship peoples*, which makes their relations closer than is found in many other places in Europe. At the same time, it is important to see the development of Nordic culture as part of the common European culture.

The idea of kinship peoples, however, was not so strong that the pan-Scandinavian and neo-Scandinavian movements of the nineteenth century gained sufficient support. Those who worked for inter-Nordic co-operation experienced disappointments in the middle of the nineteenth century and at the turn of the twentieth century. A Nordic union could not be implemented in the same manner as in Germany and Italy, but the cohesion among the Nordic countries made it possible to establish deeper forms of interparliamentary and intergovernmental co-operation that were realised in the first decades after World War II.[1] This has meant, among other things,

[1] The Nordic countries followed very different strategies during the World War II (1939–1945). Great Britain invaded Iceland and the Faroe Islands while Germany invaded Denmark and Norway. The United States built military bases on Greenland. The Soviet Union attacked Finland in November 1939. The Winter War against the Soviet Union in 1939–1940 resulted in large Finnish losses and land ceding, and drove Finland over to the German side during the so-called Continuation War in 1941–1944. In the years 1941–1944, Finland was in a loose alliance with Germany to defend Finnish interests during the war between Finland and the Soviet Union. When the German withdrew fortunes of war in Europe had turned in the winter of 1943, and the Soviet armies began to approach Finland, a complex negotiation between the two was initiated (April 1944). Finland broke the initial agreement with Germany, and during the German retreat from Finland, there were

that the structural features of the school models in the Nordic countries and the curricula have significant similarities. While the evolution of these similarities must be seen in connection with historical conditions (for instance, social democratic parties have been involved in changing patterns of collaboration with liberal and socialist parties, Blossing, Imsen & Moos, 2014), the Nordic countries have long been inspired by one another, especially after World War II. The willingness to learn from one's neighbours is also significant for how teacher education in the Nordic countries is organised. The influence of the Finnish subject teacher education model, with its emphasis on school-based specialisations and master's-level education, is clear in some Nordic countries.

The most important task of the schools in the north was initially Christian education for priests, a task carried out first by the Catholic Church. The Protestant Reformation in Sweden began in 1527 (and was consolidated in 1593) and was implemented in Denmark/Norway in 1536/1537. With the Lutheran Reformation in Sweden, Denmark and Norway (and consequently Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands), the task of Christian education was taken on by the Lutheran state church. The state church was given responsibility for teaching. I mainly look at the orthodox practice of religion as part of an oppression of the vast majority of the population. The rise of pietism (the first decades of the eighteenth century), on the other hand, is more difficult to explain as part of a society-suppressing system. With the expansion of the curriculum, the goal of schooling was to embrace the interest in school's ability to improve social, economic and moral conditions and produce a qualified workforce. The influence of the church diminished in the nineteenth century. The early emergence of enlightenment in the Nordic region helps explain progress and mobility in societies and, later, the evolution of the modern school in the Nordic countries and their modern teacher education programmes (which are topics of the next chapter).

## 2.2 The Spread of Literacy

Little evidence remains of prehistoric times in the North (Coles & Harding, 2014).[2] Children learnt their mother tongue by listening, and acceded to social norms and their place in the hierarchy by observing and experiencing. The oldest source, Tacitus (98), tells that the people north of Rhine trained their youth. However, Tacitus emphasized peculiar cultural features that differed from what he was familiar with: "the women support themselves by hunting, exactly like the men;

bloody battles between Germans and Finns. In other words, the Nordic countries and their autonomous territories have very different experiences under World War II, but no common experiences (as claimed in Frønes et al., 2020).

[2] The knowledge of northern tribes is fragmentary. Archaeological material provides information about the material culture, but the findings are sparse. Tacitus (98) is the only written source.

they accompany them everywhere and insist on taking their share in bringing down the game". I guess he was interested in women?

What seems certain is that people of the north had some limited contacts with the rest of Europe, but they were outside the influence of the Roman Empire.[3] The Romans had a well-established written language. Literacy was widespread in many parts of the Roman Empire, and there were even libraries. Writing was used for political correspondence, storytelling, graffiti and later the spread of the Christian message, among other things. A controversial issue is the connection between runic writing in the north and the Roman writing system.[4]

## 2.3 The Emergence of Northern Regencies

The viking raids (about 800–1050) brought wealth, but the vikings also brought back cultural and political impressions that were important for the later evolution of the three Nordic regencies: Denmark, Sweden and Norway (Brink & Price, 2008). Population growth was important for the development from chiefdoms to regencies. However, these regencies were merely rudimentary and loose associations of communities. The Norwegian aristocracy was in the High Middle Ages more united about the monarchy with which it had common interests than was the case in Denmark and Sweden. The High Middle Ages was the formative period in the evolution of the typical Western and Central European state (Backman, 2003). This is also true in the north. A nationwide and strong system of government developed also in the Nordic regencies, where the aristocracy became a state-supporting and state-building elite (Moseng et al., 2007; Orning, 2008). The aristocracy consisted of both secular and clerical groups that could rival internally and externally, while the kingdom was a tool for the aristocracy to serve the interests of the aristocracy (Opsahl, 2008). Likewise, there was an occasional rivalry over time between the Nordic states.[5]

Although the high north remained a periphery in relation to Western European culture, the Catholic Church linked the three Nordic regencies more closely to a community of European political and ideological thinking of the twelfth century (Berend, 2007). Christianity became a culturally centralizing force. The church

[3] The border between Romans and tribes in what is now Germany was determined along the Rhine and Danube.

[4] However, runes (known from AD 150) were used to write various languages in the North *before* the adoption of the Latin alphabet and for specialized purposes afterward. No known runic inscription can with certainty be dated to be older than from the 200 s. The resemblance to the classical alphabets is so prominent that one must assume that the runic alphabet must originate directly or indirectly from them. Some assume that the runic alphabet was created in Scandinavia as a deliberate transformation of the Latin alphabet (Jacobsen & Moltke, 1941–42). In an indirect sense, we can say that cultural impulses from southern Europe were spread to the north.

[5] The Dano-Norwegian Realm was at open war with Sweden in 1471, 1521–23, 1611–13, 1643–45, 1657–58, 1658–60, 1675–79, 1700, 1709–20, 1788–89, 1808–09 and 1813–14.

under the leadership of the archbishop entered the political scene vis-à-vis the regents (in Denmark: 1104, in Norway; 1152, in Sweden: 1164). The church became a significant social power. The archdiocese was directly subordinate to the papacy in Rome. The universal ecclesiastical clergy reflect the contact between the high north and Western Europe. A Latin scriptural culture was introduced.

In the effective leadership and administration of a regency, written communication has always been necessary. Thus, a limited number of people who mastered the art of writing was required. The regent's administration needed writers. Literacy became important for the administrative apparatus to function in the Nordic states. The cathedral schools recruited men who could write, and some of these learners became employees of the administrative apparatus. Thus, the secular and the ecclesiastical elites had complementary interests. Together they could control the non-aristocratic population. The scriptural culture became more important for the governing body, and the royal power employed the men of the church in the administration. Indirectly, therefore, cathedral schools as a place of learning to read and write became important for the development of public administration. The relationship between regency and church was ambivalent, but both institutions came to expand their power side by side (until the Reformation).

The medieval education system[6] was imported unchanged from throughout Europe (Jaeger, 2013). During the fourteenth century, there was an increase in growth of universities around Europe, and some universities evolved from cathedral schools. Uppsala University, founded in 1477 by the Primate of the Catholic Church of Sweden, was the first university in Scandinavia and grew out of an ecclesiastical centre. The University of Copenhagen was founded in 1479 by royal decree which was approved by the Pope. The medieval university was mainly a school for theology, but with the increasing growth and urbanization of societies, a demand grew for professional clergy.

A common Scandinavian union was established in the late Middle Ages to prevent German economic and political expansion to the north (Gustafsson, 2006; Imsen, 2007). In this way, the Nordic societies managed to preserve their uniqueness and ensure political autonomy under pressure. However, the nobility in Norway was seriously weakened in this process (partly due to the lack of male heirs who could take over the throne, the Danish regent's neglect and partly due to plague epidemics). The common interests of power-seeking Danish regents and the Norwegian aristocracy unraveled, and Norway became a subject to Danish guardianship in 1537–1814 (Imsen, 2002).

[6] Lund Cathedral School, which dates to 1085, is the oldest educational institution in the Nordic region (Blomqvist, 1951; Pedersen, 2010). Later, Latin schools spread to Hólar (Iceland) in 1106, Nidaros, Bergen, Hamar and Oslo (Norway) in 1152/1153 and Uppsala (Sweden) in 1246, along with several Danish cities. However, the educational arrangements were limited and conducted by three bodies: the cathedral schools, the monasteries and the cities. The Latin school system came to the Finnish area and the Faroe Islands 200 and 462 years after Lund, respectively.

## 2.4 The Reformation

The Reformation is the term for the religious and cultural upheavals (originating via neo-religious movements) that took place in large parts of Europe in the sixteenth century and led to the division of Western Christianity (Cameron, 2012). The Reformation contributed politically to the breakup of supranational medieval structures in Europe, represented by the Pope (Chadwick, 1990). The Catholic Church had increasingly wielded power in northern societies. The Church owned great tracts of land and possessed vast fortunes, and monarchs perceived the power and wealth of the Church as a threat. For monarchies, therefore, the Reformation was an opportunity to remove this source of power and seize opportunities for themselves (Kent, 2008; Jespersen, 2011). Autocracy, orthodox Christianity and warfare fit into a holistic picture of oppressive states (Anderson, 2013).

The regent became the head of the Church. With nationalisation, the education of secular officials became more common (Johansson, 1977: Johansson & Graff, 2009). Priests were now given the responsibility of introducing the populace to the Christian faith. The school of the commons for both boys and girls was in its origin a subdivision of the Protestant church. However, for many lay people the teaching was a burden. The Reformation led to a sharp decline for the schools in the north, which lasted for most of the sixteenth century. Building a completely new infrastructure for the Lutheran school that replaced the Catholic institution took a long time.

The church's power over teaching formally existed in Sweden until 1859 when the state Board of Governors for the school system was formed. In Denmark-Norway, the situation was different. The Danish-Norwegian king Christian VI was a supporter of radical pietism and introduced confirmation as a measure to combat lawlessness. The influence came from the Prussian town of Halle (Engelhardt, 2019; Whitmer, 2015). Confirmation and later new ordinances in public schools in the composite country of Denmark-Norway were introduced in 1736, 1739 and 1741. These became key events and created a lasting effect through the establishment of a school system. The school was to spread and consolidate a pietistic Christian doctrine. Pietism introduced the common school, the frequent participation in worship services, hymn singing, devotionals in the home and reading in the devotional book. The confirmation scheme entailed new requirements for schooling; no children should be admitted to confirmation until they had gone to school and acquired the necessary knowledge of Christianity (Skovgaard-Petersen, 1986; Karlshøj, 1997, p. 123). Where there were no schools, priests and bell ringers were to remain in charge of teaching, but this ordinance specified general schooling requirements. In schools in small places, there were often 7 different year groups in the same room. First, children would learn to read; then they would use their new reading skills to learn good Christianity (Ydesen & Andreasen, 2014). However, throughout the eighteenth century and well into the 19th, the number of illiterate people was not insignificant as there were large regional variations. Despite this, the spread of literacy for large sections of the population was an interesting Nordic feature compared to other parts of Europe (Vincent, 2003).

Pontoppidan's Catechism (1737) was heavily used in schooling and influenced Danish and Norwegian children's religious thought and practice (memorization of questions and answers) for many years. In such a school, the teacher was primarily a person who was to check that the students knew their Christian teachings. The need for teacher's professional qualities was hardly perceived as necessary, and therefore the pedagogical part of the teacher's professional tasks was not emphasized either.

Pietism was challenged by rationalist theology in the late eighteenth century. This had an impact on the curriculum, which was broader. The one-room schoolhouse was a typical way of organizing schooling. Over time, this arrangement was replaced by age-graded schools. Teacher-centered instruction was the prevalent pattern of teaching.

The lack of skilled teachers was a major problem in schooling. The need for teachers who could practice the profession with something more than teaching the memorization of Christianity was significant. There were initially no seminaries to train the teachers, so that had to be taken care of by more senior students, bell ringers, retired soldiers and old craftsmen. The bishops supervised, and their visitation reports did not always give teachers a favourable review. However, those reports are evidence of an emerging – and important – school tradition; the need for qualifications to perform the teaching job was recognised.

The first teachers' seminary startet in 1781 in Kiel (the Duchy of Holstein, which belonged to the Danish king). The first institutionalized teachers' seminary in the Danish part of the Danish-Norwegian monarchy started in 1791 (Blaagaard Seminarium in Copenhagen initiated by The Great School Commission). This seminary became the first government-financed teacher education. The teacher seminary, inspired by the first seminary in Kiel, was a new type of institution in the Danish-Norwegian union (Markusssen, 2005). Other teacher seminaries (often seminars organized by priests) were mainly short-lived and not widespread, and the supply of trained teachers was unreliable and uneven. In parallel with the development of the public school, teacher education had to be intensified. Similarly, the public schools had to be improved and their curriculum broadened beyond preparation for confirmation and education in Christianity. In the nineteenth century, national school systems were developed over time. Both state and private teacher seminaries were started to meet a growing need. The state took more responsibility for schooling and teacher education while the influence of the church was reduced. The school was gradually liberated from ecclesiastical supremacy.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the school picture became more varied, with peasant schools in the countryside and civic and common schools in the cities, alongside the Latin schools. This was a parallel school system. The sons of the peasants became peasants, and the sons of artisans became artisans. The differences were reproduced through the education system. A debate on parallel school system versus comprehensive school system was intensified across parts of the Nordic region, but the realization and the pace of the comprehensive system were uneven.

## 2.5 The Contours of the Current Five Nordic Countries Emerged

Sweden was an emerging European superpower in the seventeenth century (Kent, 2008), but The Great Northern War at the beginning of the eighteenth century meant the end of Sweden's great power era. National feelings flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries: from the beginning of eighteenth century in Sweden, from 1740s in Denmark, from the 1770s in Norway, from the 1830s in Iceland, and from the 1860s in Finland. Distinct national identities emerged.

By the 1814 Treaty of Kiel, the King of Denmark-Norway was forced to cede Norway to the King of Sweden. A struggle for independence took shape in Norway. Norway became independence in 1905 after the dissolution of the Union between Sweden and Norway. A struggle for independence arose also in Iceland. Iceland received a constitution and limited home rule in 1874. The Danish-Icelandic Act of Union gave Iceland independence in 1918. This was followed by the severance of all ties to Denmark with the declaration of the republic in 1944. Although there were thoughts of Finnish independence in the eighteenth century, the Finnish desire for independence became much more urgent in the early 1900s (Lavery, 2006).[7] This meant that teacher education became a task for the national authorities in each country. Teacher seminaries arose, but the pace, the rate and the intensity of teacher seminaries varied across the Nordic region.

## 2.6 Waves of Scandinavianism

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, movements arose to promote associations between independent areas of Europe. This was the age of unification in Germany and in Italy. Similar ideas were emerging among Nordic citizens. Scandinavianism was a pan-nationalist movement that drew its rationale from the kinship among the Scandinavian peoples, and which from the mid-1800s influenced the policies of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, all of which tried in various ways to bring their

[7] In 1814, the king of Denmark-Norway was forced by the Kiel Treaty to cede Norway to the king of Sweden, but Denmark retained the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland. However, emerging national movements and the Kiel Treaty aroused opposition in Norway. A Norwegian independence movement arose, and a constitutional assembly declared the country independent. After a brief war, the Swedish king agreed to Norway's formal independence within a union with Sweden, known as the United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway (1814–1905). Norway gained full independence from Sweden in 1905 and founded a new monarchy. Finland was an autonomous part of the Russian Empire between 1809 and 1917. The powerful Finnish nationalism that emerged contributed to Finland being declared independent after Russia's October Revolution in 1917. After a bloody civil war, Finland became a republic in 1919. Iceland's struggle for independence culminated in independence in 1918 (though in a personal union with Denmark) and the founding of a republic in 1944. The contours of today's five Nordic countries had emerged at the end of the eighteenth century, but they did not settle into their present configuration until the mid-1900s.

populations closer together culturally and politically. The Nordic region became an imagined community. The question of a Nordic co-operation on school issues (Almqvist, 1846) and even political union (Hemstad, 2008) was central from the mid-1840s and decades after. After the Second Schleswig War in 1864 (when the United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway did not come to Denmark's rescue), it was impossible to convince Denmark to join the Swedish-Norwegian union. However, some co-operation arrangements arose and continued. The historian Ruth Hemstad (2008, 2010) has highlighted the "Indian summer" of inter-state co-operation that emerged afterwards: collaboration between voluntary organisations, including networks of schools, academics and experts, sports and leisure organisations and political groups. A strong Scandinavian wave arose among and the years after (with a peak in 1905 with a meeting of 7000 educators from the Nordic region, Grauers, 1961). Teacher educators as well as teachers attended these meetings. It is natural to see these phenomena as antecedents to the multisectoral, in-depth co-operation between Nordic countries in the last decades. Grassroots co-operation remains still a basis for formal collaboration.

## 2.7 Social Development and Education

The differences in social development in the Nordic countries and their autonomous territories are too broad a topic to be summarised in a simple history of common steps (see Chaps. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10). But some main features need to be summarized. The natural economy of the Nordic societies were gradually but unevenly transformed into monetary societies (Grytten, 2022; Myhre, 2021). The development of society had an impact on the school's development. Significant industrial growth took place especially in Denmark, Sweden and Norway in the first decades of the nineteenth century, with industry gradually replacing agriculture as the leading economic sector.

Intensive agriculture and quality processing became important in Denmark, which has a comparatively limited natural bounty (Persson, 1993). Prerequisites for industrialisation and economic growth were liberal laws that ensured predictability, the major investments of the states in physical and economic infrastructure, borders open to foreign trade, and better educated populations that provided access to more competent and flexible labour. This last point meant strengthening schooling for most people who thus had better opportunities to adapt to the changing situations in working life (Schmidt et al., 2018).

The academic content of the school was an important topic of consideration. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the need for more coherence in the educational system was emphasised, which led to the renewals of school systems at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the 20th. In the development of the industrial society, a tightly divided school was established, based on age groups (Persson, 1993). The school curriculum was divided into subjects, and timetables for teaching were developed. The school was organized with systematics and

standardization. A "grammar of schooling" emerged. The teachers established themselves as a distinct group with its professional organizations.

It took time before the comprehensive school system, for which the Nordic countries are so well known, became dominant (Blossing et al., 2013). The transition from a school that was to spread and consolidate a Christian culture to a common primary school with a broad portfolio of school subjects took place gradually. Industrial growth took place in diverse sectors and reflected the differences between the countries with regard to natural resources. Educational institutions emerged, which meant more specialised competences were required to practice professions. This led to an interplay between knowledge development and economic development (Telhaug et al., 2006). However, the great leap in mass education that went beyond elementary schooling towards the upper secondary and tertiary levels of education, took place after World War II, a topic for the next chapter.

One development common to all the Nordic countries was the mechanisation of agriculture and fisheries, which led people to move to the cities to take on wage labour to earn a living. Industrial development started later in Finland and Iceland than in the other Nordic countries (Blossing et al., 2013).[8]

Overall, then, we can say that development in the Nordic countries and their autonomous territories was uneven and cannot be easily described in overarching terms, despite the historical similarities between the countries.[9] The democratisation of the Nordic states took place, establishing the right to vote for all. National identities were strengthened. Class societies existed, with contradictions and conflicts between employers and employees. Labour movements broke through, and political parties were formally founded. However, tensions between employers and employees were eased through Scandinavian co-operation agreements (Sejersted, 2021).

Along the Arctic coast around Greenland and in areas of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, Indigenous peoples (Inuit and the Sámi people) had developed a way of life and techniques adapted to their very demanding natural surroundings. Their hunting of fish, birds, marine mammals, and reindeer husbandry, were driven by available resources at different times of the year and were geared towards natural households and a modest amount of barter. This knowledge base of skills, which was conveyed from generation to generation (biologically primary knowledge and skills, Geary, 2011), gave the Indigenous peoples the ability to survive under harsh conditions. Schools and Christianity were promoted to the Inuit and the Sámi

[8] However, since these countries have become independent, there has been some industrial expansion. Sheep products comprised a large share of exports from Iceland and Faroe Islands, but later fish products became more important. Mechanised fishing vessels and the fish industry became important. Ultimately, the fisheries became the main basis for the economies of Iceland, the Faroe Islands and the Åland Islands.

[9] Formal freedom of expression was constitutionally established in Sweden by 1766, in Norway by 1814, in Denmark by 1848, in Åland: 1922, in Iceland: 1944, in Faroe Islands 1948 and in Greenland 1979. Over time the Nordic region has continuously been expanded, democratized and seized by peasants, workers and women, to reform the societies.

people in the eighteenth century (Chaps. 9 and 10), but the schools and missionaries promoted values that often were disdainful for the Inuit and the Sámi societies. The significant cultural distance between these cultures and the influence of the state through school and mission created painful wounds for many.

## 2.8 School Development Towards the Breakthrough of the Comprehensive and Extended School System in the Nordic Countries

In the 1800s, the school picture in the Nordic region became more varied. The civic schools in the cities consisted often partly of free schools and partly of finer, fee-charging schools. The Nordic countries had several parallel school systems: one for the majority of the people, another for the elite or children from the citizens of cities. School reforms were legislated and implemented at different times, but demands grew across the region for common schools to be improved (Telhaug et al., 2006). Initially, that effort led gradually to laws on common schools. This happened at different times in the Nordic countries, but the succession of changes is quite similar. Compulsory schooling started at the age of seven or eight. The most able learners from the primary school could then transfer to a three-year secondary school. The evolution of a common coherent school system took place over a long period of time and in many stages (Telhaug et al., 2006). New subjects could be included in the subject area, and in many cities the teaching time was extended.

The structure and purpose of the school and teacher education became part of the political process in the nineteenth century. A number of teacher seminaries were established. The state was made responsible for teacher education; teaching was increasingly carried out by seminary-trained teachers. It is important to consider the evolution of schools in light of societal development in general.

The need for coherence in the varied school picture grew. Sweden is an example here. It was in 1842 that the primary school – for both boys and girls – was legislated in Sweden by the Riksdag. In 1919, primary schools in Sweden were coordinated into unified six-year schools. In 1927, the connection between the primary school and higher levels of education was strengthened. With that year's school reform, secondary school would be either four years and based on primary school. In 1962, the Riksdag decided on a new compulsory school as a replacement for primary and lower secondary schools. This school arrangement would last for nine years and be divided into three stages. As detailed in the next chapter, there was a breakthrough for the extended, comprehensive school system in the 1960s and 1970s:

A comprehensive school system in Nordic terms refers to a unified, unstreamed school system where all learners, despite academic and economic backgrounds and resources, are enrolled in the same age-based school (Carlgren, 2009, p. 633).

Some broad Nordic **trends of evolution for school during the first half of the twentieth century** must be emphasised (Telhaug et al., 2006; Richardson, 2010; Blossing et al., 2013):

- Quantitative expansion of schooling, through more learners, more academic work and more teaching, and an extended academic year.
- Qualitative development of schooling, through fewer learners per class, better trained teachers, better school buildings and more access to learning resources.
- Modernised curricula, such as modern languages replacing classical languages, and social studies becoming a school subject.
- A more flexible and coherent education system emerged through better integration between primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels, with easy passage between them.
- Secularisation of schooling by freeing the school from the influence of the church and replacing Christian education with teaching in religion and ethics.
- The influence of schooling on democratisation led to increased opportunities in education for all, schools which should be relevant for all, and education for democratic attitudes; the school was to prepare citizens to become active participants in democratic processes.

The school became an institution among several public institutions and part of the public apparatus. The school sorted students, and those who left school after the compulsory primary school got work as unskilled labour. It was functional that some left school, while others continued their education. The education maintained the labour market's hierarchy from unskilled to skilled labour, as well as education to occupations that provided particularly good wages (by the standards of the times).

## 2.9 The Nordic Route to Prosperity

The Nordic countries are today among the world's richest countries (Grytten, 2022; Myhre, 2021). But how did these countries' journey towards prosperity begin? In the nineteenth century, Western Europe and North America had the richest and most dynamic economies in the world. World trade increased between 1820 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914. As far back as 1800, the Nordic countries had been less developed than the most successful Western European countries (United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Portugal and France, Bairoch, 1976). The Nordic region was located on a periphery in the northwestern corner of Europe. In 1860 the continental European countries and the Meditarian countries had higher GDP per capita than the Nordic countries. Parts of the Nordic region also experienced significant economic development in the nineteenth century (Myhre, 2021). However, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the Nordic countries (except Finland) were above the European average level (Bairoch, 1976). At that point, they embarked on what may be called modern economic growth by dramatically improving the living conditions of most of their populations (Grytten, 2022; Henriksen,

2006; Cappelen & Larsen, 2005). The sensational growth took place somewhat unevenly. Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland made strides from being some of the least affluent areas in Western Europe in the first half of the twentieth century (Grydehøj, 2020; Johannesson, 2013; Laksáfoss, 2020). Iceland had a low per capita gross domestic product at the start of the twentieth century, but its economic growth since World War II has been much higher than many other countries; Iceland has over time been transformed from a poor country into one of the world's wealthiest (Steinsson, 2018). However, the economies of Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands were and are, however, highly vulnerable to short-term fluctuations in the volumes and prices of natural resources on the world market.

The Nordic countries benefited from their proximity to large, affluent markets, especially the United Kingdom, France and Germany. The region's thriving export industries had strong positive ripple effects and undoubtedly contributed to its increasing prosperity (Kristensen & Lilja, 2011). Economic freedom has also increased since 1800, with the development of free markets and much greater choice for both producers and consumers. An educated population, an efficient civil service with little corruption, a high degree of legal probity, and stability and freedom of expression, along with better allocations for infrastructure, all contributed to the development of Nordic countries as free and open societies (Grytten, 2022; Myhre, 2021). However, it was not until somewhat later that true Nordic welfare state systems emerged.

Strong economic growth after World War II was the financial foundation of school reforms, social reforms, reforms of teacher education and expensive welfare arrangements:

> Historically, the Nordic model of education has been based on a vision that schools should be inclusive, comprehensive, with no streaming and with easy passages between the levels. This concept of a School for All has been closely related to the development of the welfare state in the Nordic countries in the twentieth century (Blossing et al., 2013:1).

In Nordic schools, literacy and general access to information sources were patchy but improved over time (Vincent, 2003). Compulsory schooling with an emphasis on literacy came much earlier in the Nordic region than in most other places in Europe. The way in which schools have been operated in Nordic societies created the conditions favourable for the overall societal development, although there are nuances to consider. Indeed, the success of Nordic societies can also be attributed to other factors, such as a strong institutional framework, a skilled workforce, a high degree of economic freedom, a sound democracy and low levels of corruption. The idea of gender equality has gained a secure foothold in the Nordic countries. Women's entry into the market economy became an important factor for explaining economic growth (Myhre, 2021). The differences between different parts of society are less stark than in other parts of the world, where social divides are sharper. Education has been a key for those children who did not want to follow in their parents' career footsteps, but also a key to prosperity. The school system therefore became central, partly because people with different social backgrounds entered the teaching profession on an equal footing, partly because the middle classes

supported education beyond elementary school, and partly because education enabled upward social mobility.

Compulsory education was further strengthened to meet the increased demands that economic and social development was expected to place on future workers and citizens (Telhaug et al., 2006). Women's access to education improved. Education became a vital social good, helping to build a foundation for welfare promotion and the economic and technological restructuring of society. Its quality had critical implications for society's long-term well-being. A future of a nation depends on the education of its children and young people. Society was and is changing, and education was and is needed to prepare young people for these changes. Nordic society was and is based on the principles that young people should be given opportunities to develop and that the school is an important arena for acquiring the knowledge and skills that are valued in society (Blossing et al., 2013). The school became a meeting place for all children and young people, regardless of their backgrounds, and was and is therefore an important arena of socialisation. Thus, the school was and is one of Nordic societies' most important institutions. It is nothing less than crucial for young people's ability to realise their wishes for the future. Thus, the school contributes to the common effort to create a good society.

The quality of students' education is undoubtedly linked to the quality of their teachers' education; there are both theoretical arguments and empirical support for the claim that a positive relationship exists between teachers with adequate education and the student opportunities to learn (Boyd et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007; Gansle et al., 2012), although the evidence base for this claim remains controversial and even ambiguous (Mitchel & King, 2016) or based on lack of evidence (Goldhaber, 2019). It takes 45 to 50 years to replace the entire body of teachers; nevertheless, teacher education programmes provide new teachers to schools on a regular basis. Therefore, the quality of teacher education is important for the quality of the teaching that takes place in schools.

## 2.10 Summing Up

To understand today's school and teacher education and their challenges and opportunities in the Nordic region, it is necessary to adopt a historical perspective, but it is also important to consider the evolution of teacher education and thus student education in light of overall societal development.

Norwegians, Faroese, Danes, Swedes and Swedish-speaking Finns understand one another (Delsing & Åkesson, 2005). This is an important precursor, as is the idea of kinship peoples and its effect on social relations among the Nordic countries. The "pan-Scandinavianism" of the nineteenth century, the neo-Scaninavianism at the turn of the twentieth century and its significance for bottom-up processes also became antecedents of the more formalised co-operation between Nordic countries in recent decades.

We must, however, not ignore that nationalism was and is a force working in different directions. National identities were shaped early in the kingdoms of Sweden and Denmark and strengthened in the 1700s and 1800s in Norway, Iceland and Finland. The five current Nordic countries arose mainly due to the evolution of national identities. The contours of these national identities in Sweden and Denmark naturally go far back in time, but the period from 1789 until the end of the Napoleonic Wars is crucial for understanding the ideas of freedom and independence that arose in Norway and Iceland. Finnish nationalism gained a strong momentum in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Strengthening schooling for most people means that more people had better conditions for adapting to the changing realities of working life. It took some time before the comprehensive school system (for which the Nordic countries are known) became dominant. But the seeds of the evolution of a real comprehensive school system were sown in the eighteenth century and became stronger in the mid-nineteenth century. In parallel with the evolution of the public funded and comprehensive school system with equal educational opportunities for all children, regardless of social background, location, talent and gender, teacher education was strengthened. In the beginning, there were no seminaries to train teachers, so the positions had to be filled by untrained people. However, the need for qualifications to perform teaching was recognised, at least to some extent. A number of institutionalized seminaries were established in the end of the eighteenth century and later. The structure and purpose of teacher education later became a part of the political debates of the nineteenth century, and teaching was increasingly carried out by seminary-trained teachers. The teachers organized themselves into interest groups, which strengthened their position in society. Over time of the extended comprehensive school model and the modern profession-oriented education teacher education arose. This is the topic of the next chapter.

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