

Chapter 8

Progressive Education and New Governance in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden

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8.1 Progressive Education at Risk?

A School for All rests on both political visions and educational ideologies. The history of its development throughout the twentieth century is not only one of political reforms in education but also involves new educational discourses, new practices, and new teaching and learning content in school. The revival of schools was partly motivated by a need for new kinds of competence in a society experiencing rapid technological and economic development. The educational system should serve the needs of the society and had to be changed from within if it was to fulfill the political ambitions of *a School for All*. Another important motive for school renewal was that of solving the new pedagogical challenges faced in the classroom that structural reforms had brought about. A school that was to embrace all pupils confronted a quite different kind of pedagogical challenge than that of the old, segregated school consisting of relatively homogeneous student groups.

The educational reform movement and, in particular, progressive educational ideas spread over most parts of the western world at the same time as a comprehensive School for All pupils was introduced in the Nordic countries. Progressive

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education became an important ideological platform for internal, pedagogical reforms within schools. It supported the vision that a School for All could actually be realized, as it inspired new ways of organizing classrooms to make them inclusive for large student groups. Progressive education has been a controversial ideology from its origin at the beginning of the twentieth century, as it has been contrasted to the subject-centered, whole-class teaching method. Not surprisingly, it came into the line of fire when new, transnational governance systems urged schools to obtain increasingly high test-based results at the end of the century.

Against this background we will pursue three questions:

1. What is the status of progressive education in Scandinavia today? In what ways is it expressed at the formal document level, such as national curriculum plans, and what is the status of progressive education in school practice?
2. What happens to progressive education when it is confronted with neoliberal technologies that build on competition and rational choice (see also Chap. 1) within national educational policies?
3. Which aspects of progressive education seem to cohere with neoliberal elements of educational policies, and in what ways do they contradict each other?

The Scandinavian educational systems have in many ways experienced development in parallel as regards structure and content, but there are also differences. A fourth question to ask is therefore:

4. What similarities and differences do we find between Denmark, Norway, and Sweden when it comes to progressive education, and how can we relate recent developments to neoliberal elements in their respective national governance systems, like New Public Management (see also Chap. 1)?

8.2 Progressivism as an Ideology for A School for All

The educational reform movement in Scandinavia at the beginning of the twentieth century was an amalgam of both continental and American influences that was brought about by educationally pioneering schools that broke with “tradition” and developed new programs. Well-known European contributions included Georg Kerschensteiner’s “Arbeitsschule” (labor schools) in Germany, the reform schools initiated by Otto Glöckel in Vienna, Makarenko’s experimental democratic school in the Soviet Union, and Ellen Key’s child-centered ideas about the “Child’s Century” in Sweden. From the USA, John Dewey’s progressivism has been the main inspiration for the school reform movement in Europe, as well as the project method developed by his student William H. Kilpatrick. All these reformers have, to different degrees, inspired new teaching and learning methods, new ways of organizing student groups, and new educational content in schools. John Dewey’s philosophy has undoubtedly had the most long-lasting impact, in particular, his belief in activity-based pedagogy and the slogan of “Learning by doing.”

This became an important ideological foundation for a comprehensive school system embracing all children throughout most of the twentieth century.

The target groups of both the American and the European traditions have involved a wide spectrum of students; they have aimed at problem-solving, practical life tasks, and home- and life-related responsibilities and have placed emphasis on social community, independent work, and active methods for learning. An important issue has been the fact that students in a School for All have different interests and abilities, and that it is important to design the learning environment in a flexible way so that the needs of individual students could be met in meaningful ways. According to the American curriculum researcher William F. Pinar (Pinar et al. 1995), there were several scholars that made the way for John Dewey and his ideas. Already at the end of the nineteenth century, Lester Frank Ward argued against the social Darwinist view which holds that social differences are “natural,” based on the principle of “the survival of the fittest.” Social differences were, in contrast, considered to be the result of social circumstances and could therefore be altered. The school system held significant potential for ensuring a more equal distribution of knowledge and for improving each individual’s ability to participate in the growth of society.

There are some core characteristics within progressive education that operate across societal conditions. The child is at the center for teaching and learning, and education should be based on their natural needs and interests. This also forms the grounds for the students’ motivation for learning. The child should participate in deciding upon learning content and how it should be organized in different activities, such as project-oriented programs. The child is active by nature; therefore, activity must unfold itself in the learning situation. Activity is also a prerequisite for *experience*, the main result of the teaching and learning process. Experience means recognizing the connection between one’s actions and the results they produce; this can be considered as the essence of Dewey’s concept of learning. Knowledge is never finished, it has no end, but is in continuous development and change, like development in nature. Acquiring knowledge is therefore an infinite process of growth, and learning and experience are never-ending endeavors. According to Dewey, progressive education, therefore, emphasizes the process of experience and not its outcomes. In Dewey’s view, the process of experience was more important than the actual achievements. Ultimately, results have value only when they can enrich and provide a structure for the ongoing process of reflecting on and learning how to reform society. This forms the core of Dewey’s concept of democracy: because experience is educational, trusting in democracy is tantamount to trusting in experience and education (Dewey 1939; here quoted from Vaage 2000). Individual learning does not result in community and democracy, but to unhealthy competition. This is expressed clearly in Dewey’s own words:

The mere absorbing of facts and truths is so exclusively individual an affair that it tends very naturally to pass into selfishness. There is no obvious social motive for the acquirement of mere learning, there is no clear social gain in success thereat. Indeed, almost the only measure for success is a competitive one, in the bad sense of that term ... (Dewey 1900, repr. 1990, p. 15.)

Progressive education reconciles both individualism and community by stimulating the child to develop in its own way and to learn from its own experiences and by concurrently organizing the learning process to encourage cooperation and social interdependence. This educational ideology is well suited for a school system that aims to embrace all societal groups and a wide variety of students. Unfortunately, Dewey's notion of democracy as a way of life is an aspect of progressivism that has been overshadowed by recent neoliberal and user-oriented claims for adapted teaching and effective learning for the individual child.

Educational reform initiatives, and especially progressive programs, have consistently met with resistance and been confronted with competing ideologies. In the USA, from the outset progressive education has been considered to be in opposition to the Herbartian, subject-matter-oriented tradition; in subsequent years, it has encountered disapproval on the one side from the social efficiency movement and from psychological child-centered pedagogy on the other (Kliebard 1985). According to Eisner (1994, 1996), several competing ideologies struggled for hegemony in the development of the American public school. Progressivism has incorrectly been considered as the leading ideology in the USA, which it was not, although it flourished in some small, independent schools. In general, progressivism was object of more talk than practice.

Progressivism met many challenges in the second half of the twentieth century. The Sputnik crisis in the 1960s directed attention toward programs oriented around mathematics and natural sciences, while since the 1970s, American school policy has focused on effectiveness and high standards: national tests have held a strong position in the USA for a considerable time. From the 1990s, neoliberal strategies such as accountability, competition, and choice were introduced as the main motivating powers in forming educational policies. The destiny of progressivism is summed up by Eisner (1996): "Hence, since the late 1960s public concerns about the quality of American education have grown, and as a result, interest in progressive practices, often seen as antithetical to what is truly educationally substantive, has decreased" (p. 321). The American preference for achievement tests can also be an explanation of its fate, according to Kliebard. The values that Dewey sought to promote through his curriculum were difficult to measure and therefore resisted fitting into a system that depended on "that kind of external inspection which goes by the name of examination" (Kliebard 1995, pp. 74–75; quoting Dewey 1901).

Three elements in the American curriculum tradition posed a particular challenge to progressivism. First, the idea of curriculum objectives, originating from among others Franklin Bobbitt (1924); second, the conception of "learning outcomes" as an entity that can be measured objectively; and third the technological means-end model formulated by Ralph Tyler (1949). These three elements have all contributed toward seeing education as an end rather than a process, such as Dewey proposed. They serve as important tools in the neoliberal governance systems that have been developed from the 1990s onward, both in the USA and across the world.

In Europe, progressive pedagogy had a less ideological character than in the USA, being directed more toward providing normative advice about how to organize teaching and learning programs. Often, we find a mixture of visions from

several sources, partly supported by research about good practice. One of the most famous initiatives for progressive education in Europe was the English Plowden Report of the 1960s (Central Advisory Council for Education 1967). It exerted considerable influence in Scandinavia: some of this report's proposals are still being implemented in practical pedagogy, not at least in schools where a form of open education is practiced. One of its central features involved increasing the freedom for teachers to form their own judgments about learning content and methods. The learner should be the main focus, not the subject matter. Centralized prescriptions on what to learn should be avoided. Progressive education also served as a tool to meet the challenges belonging to a system in which compulsory schooling was extended to 16 years of age, and where respect for individual differences was considered to be of considerable importance. The differences in students' ability and cultural background made it impossible to fix standards for what they should learn. Like progressive advances in the USA, the Plowden Report also fuelled strong debate and also lost much of its influence. When the English National Curriculum was implemented in 1989 and was later followed by new regimes of testing, accountability, and Ofsted inspectors, the Plowden Report's idealism was rendered moribund (Sugrue 2010).

The destiny of the Plowden Report may serve as an example of what can happen to the admirable intentions involved in placing students' learning at the center of an educational system when political, structural, and cultural frameworks for school practice are changed and new governance regimes are introduced. Is it possible to say that there has been a parallel development in Scandinavia?

8.3 Progressivism in Denmark

Looking back on a hundred years of school development in Denmark, one gets the impression that this has been a cyclical century: one cycle involves a move from individualized teaching through to classroom teaching then back toward individualized teaching. Another cycle can be seen in the focus of education: in the early 1900s, there was a focus on basic skills (learning the text of the Catechism by heart), followed by an increased focus on furthering student reflection and the acquisition of knowledge and insight, then back toward teaching for basic skills (focused on obtaining good test scores). Those patterns should, of course, be read cautiously: individualism and basic skills in 1900 and in 2010 are not identical; the actual content of those concepts differs from one epoch to another. In the midterm, progressive forms of education and teaching are clearly discernible.

A general picture of teaching in small, rural, basic schools can be characterized as involving poorly built school houses with almost no learning materials and poorly educated teachers who only taught one student at a time or relied on senior students to instruct their juniors according to the "mutual instruction" method (Nellemann 1965). As a reaction against this huge waste of students' time, Ernst Kaper, leader of a Gymnasium and later a school major of Copenhagen, introduced

the “class teaching” model (Kaper 1903/1923). At its core was the special way in which teachers should address the whole class: pose an unaddressed question, wait for some seconds and then pick a student to answer, leaving some time for all students to speculate over and find an answer to the question. This model has been adapted and adjusted in numerous Danish classrooms since then but has also sometimes been replaced by other teaching methods.

Parallel to this development, since the mid-1800 s, many Grundtvig-Kold Freestanding Schools have been established and run by groups of parents with state funding; these are built on the theories and experiences of the Danish philosopher N.F.S. Grundtvig and the Danish educationalist Christen Kold, who believed in the “living word,” in narrative and dialogue as the best way to reach out to children (Nørgaard 1977).

8.3.1 Consolidating and Challenging “Class Teaching”

Following the First World War, many Danish educators found inspiration in Germany and other continental countries. Two prominent influences were George Kerschensteiner and Maria Montessori. Kerschensteiner developed the concept of the “Labor School” (German: Arbeitsschule). One core aspect of his theory was that he considered children to be active by nature, a characteristic which should be given room for further development in school. This is in line with contemporaneous psychological and philosophical trends geared toward building education on children’s nature, sometimes called “child-centered” education or, in German, “Vom Kinde aus.” The other main aspect of Kerschensteiner’s theory was that learning in schools should take place in peer groups and student communities so as to strengthen social education (Kerschensteiner 1928/1980).

The second major inspiration came from the Italian physician and educational theorist Maria Montessori. In line with Kerschensteiner and psychological theories of the time, she believed that children were perfectly able to learn if they were allowed to act according to their own needs and interests. While Kerschensteiner inspired teachers of children at lower secondary level, grades 8–9, Montessori was more influential upon preschool and first-grade teachers at the basic school. The impact her ideas exerted is most evident in the Vanløse experiment of the 1920s and the School Act of 1937.

The “Free Classes” in Vanløse, a district of Copenhagen, were established with inspiration from progressive, child-centered theories and practices. Classrooms were furnished like private living rooms and children were encouraged to take up activities of their own choosing. Teachers did not teach, but sought to inspire children to explore new activities: one found that it would be a good idea for children to learn knitting, so she sat on a chair and started knitting; soon after, one or two children asked her what she was doing and whether they could do the same (Nørgaard 1977). After 4 years, the school major of Copenhagen, who was Ernst Kaper, closed down this experiment.

The ideas of the “Labor school” survived a bit longer, as they inspired educationalists and politicians to propose a new level of “the practical middle school” in the Act of School of 1937 (Schacht 1971). This involved a smooth movement from grades 8–9 with no exams and with the introduction of more practical activities (such as woodwork) and of thematic, cross-disciplinary work inspired by the students’ everyday life.

8.3.2 New Inspiration After World War II

For obvious reasons the inspiration from German educational models vanished in the early 1940s; as a result, Danish educationalists looked more toward the USA for inspiration more than they had done before. Some visited the USA and found them to be “the Educational Laboratory of the World” (Øland 2011). What they found harmonized with current philosophical, educational, and political trends in Denmark. Many people were looking for ways and means to avoid repeating the undemocratic dictatorship experienced under National Socialism. Therefore, they looked for and found ideas about how to raise new generations of citizens who were willing and able to participate in democracy. The major inspiration was Dewey (Dewey 1916, 1937) who insisted that “the route to democracy lay in a democratic educational system.”

A number of experimental schools were established. The Experimental School in Emdrupborg tested how to include all children in the same class without streaming. Another important experiment was undertaken with support from the Marshall Fund: The Bernadotte School, which taught many creative subjects in workshops and promoted student participation in decision making at all levels through the Student Council.

The trend toward a welfare state and a participatory democratic school was emphasized by the School Act of 1956 and the “Blue Report” that accompanied it in 1958. This Act advanced the comprehensive school with late or no streaming and so minimized the focus on exams and on learning by heart or memorizing. Thus, thematic studies across subjects (history, geography, and biology) and broad integrated studies, as well as creative and art subjects, were introduced. Many schools and teachers also experimented with experience-based teaching, which takes students’ everyday life experiences as the point of departure for learning activities. The Act also brought decisions on curriculum and school life closer to individual schools and parents.

The same educational trends were followed in the education acts of 1973 and 1993, although by the 1970s, economical-political legislation had already changed from being driven by social democratic welfare ideology to that of the neoliberal competitive state. In Denmark’s case, there has been a clear development over the past century from a highly segregated educational system toward a more comprehensive school with no streaming whatever.

8.3.3 *The Class/Form/Grade*

One concept seems to have gained sacred status over the past century in the Danish Folkeschool: the “class.” This is a group, mostly consisting of around 20–25 students of the same age, that remains consistent from grade 1 through grade 5, and later on through grade 9. The “class” normally lives in the same classroom for a year: it is the students’ home, which teachers visit when they give lessons. This tradition could well remnant from the progressivism of the 1920s: it is designed to make students feel at home in school.

The importance of social relations in school is underscored by the “class-teacher” model that was introduced by legislation in 1918 but had been a part of municipal custom for 50 years (Coninck-Smith 1990). In the beginning of this period, there was a need to look after children’s health and nutrition because their families were often poor; later, however, the 1975 Act stipulated that the “class teacher” was expected to take care of a number of tasks: social and general educational activities, teaching so-called lesson-free subjects such as traffic and sexuality, facilitating student council work in class, coordinating the liaison between colleges and leaders, and school-home collaboration.

In order to facilitate these activities, a special weekly lesson, the “class lesson,” was introduced in the same Act of 1975. This was often seen as the room for student voice and argument and for dialogue between students and between students and teachers.

In a survey of 1998 (Harrit et al. 1998), we found that one third of class teachers stayed on in the same class from grade one through grade 9, one third left after grade 6 or 7, and the last third changed for various reasons at other levels. According to the report (*ibid.*), this has contributed to stability and a sense of belonging to the community. Over the first decade of the second millennium, we have seen that demands on class teachers are changing from facilitating participatory processes toward managing classes (Krejsler and Moos 2008).

8.3.4 *Leaving Progressivism?*

One particular educational method, project work, was developed in line with the active, participatory trend: teacher and student decide on a problem they want to investigate, and groups of students conceive ways and means of doing so. They implement their ideas and display the results to the whole class. This method was made a national standard, involving a special exam, in an Act of 2005. This took place at the same time as individual student plans were legalized and national testing was expanded from applying only to school leaving grade to all grades.

One could speculate whether those two initiatives are still signs of progressivism or whether they have been used as methods for the competitive state to educate willing, competent, and employable students because they are implemented in a school that places a greater emphasis on national standards, testing, and basic skills:

literacy and mathematics. At the same time, there is a greater focus on individual students through the student plan and also on individual, national tests, not least the “teach to the test,” that seems to be unavoidable.

8.4 Progressivism in Norway

The ideas of the reform movement were brought to Norway from the European continent at the beginning of the twentieth century by practicing teachers, mostly female primary school teachers. They constituted a well-educated group with good resources and appeared as pioneers when the comprehensive school was developing at the political level and when child-centered ideas began to become widespread. They were enthusiastic, excited about the revival of classroom teaching, and went abroad to gain inspiration from new international ideas. They tried out their ideas in practice, especially in the lower grades, where female teachers were in the majority. Unfortunately, we have little systematic knowledge about how comprehensive the experimental attempts actually were.

8.4.1 *Progressivism in National Curriculum Plans*

The first formalization of progressive ideas in the Norwegian educational system appeared in the national curriculum plans of 1939 (Normalplanen av 1939). They did not restrict themselves to advising about the subject knowledge to be taught at each age level – they also gave advice and directions about teaching and learning methods. The principles of reform education were clearly formulated and emphasized student activity, individualization, and group work. The intention was partly to counteract the significant social differences in school learning that had been empirically demonstrated a few years earlier (Ribsskog 1936a, b; Ribsskog and All 1936). The research also revealed that students remembered very little of the subject matter they had been taught in social sciences and natural sciences over a period of time. The school years should be spent pursuing more useful activities than that of saturating students with knowledge they would not even be able to recall, it was claimed. More active ways of learning that promoted initiative, independence, and strength of character should be privileged. Individualization of teaching and learning processes was suggested as a guiding principle aimed to solve the challenges connected to differences between individual students, both socially and in aptitude. Every child should work with tasks that was interesting and at a pace that they could master. The aim was to give students an education that was in accordance with their strengths and abilities.

This radical plan probably existed more at the rhetoric level than in reality. At the same time, it set minimum academic requirements for all students, and there are strong indications that the traditional whole-class teaching method continued for several decades, emphasizing oral instruction and overloading subject matter. At the

national level, attention continued to be directed toward the pedagogical challenge of conducting a comprehensive school that embraced all students.

The next national curriculum plan of 1960 was in many ways similar to its predecessor, except that the obligatory period of schooling was extended to 9 years. The problem of differentiation was solved by streaming students in mother tongue, mathematics, and English. The main pedagogical method remained whole-class teaching. Individualization was more a theoretical ideal than a practical reality.

It was in the next curriculum plan, the Model plan of 1974 (Mønsterplan for grunnskolen 1974), that progressivism took fuller hold on school practice. This did not determine minimum requirements in different subjects, but indicated frameworks for subject matter that teachers could supply with different content of their own choice. At the same time, the Anglo-American movement of school-based development, emphasizing the school as an organization and the importance of school leadership, became widespread in Norway. The ideas of the Open School movement were again on the agenda, and the M74 gave the teachers the flexibility needed to try out new methods and introduce new subject matter. Streaming at the upper levels was replaced with new pedagogical methods, such as team teaching and project work, both in open school buildings and in more traditional schools. Until the 1990s, school-based developmental work in the spirit of progressivism was flourishing, both in the organization of teaching and learning and in the choice of subject matter. There was very little central control over these activities, no inspectors, no national tests, and no results-based benchmarking.

An evaluation study of the 1974 curriculum plan undertaken in the early 1980s confirmed the well-known truth that schools change rather slowly. The freedom that teachers had been given to choose subject matter was not exercised to any great extent. Teacher-directed whole-class teaching with the textbook at the center was still the most widespread way of directing the learning process, and there was limited variation in subject matter for students of different abilities. Variation in group size, i.e., lecturing for large groups and more detailed explanation within smaller groups, was seldom used. At the same time, teachers were positive toward non-streamed classes and adapting teaching to the students' abilities. Research on students' knowledge showed stability over time (Grunnskolerådet 1983). This paved the way for a continuation of the progressive-oriented strategy which started in 1974. The national curriculum plans were revised in 1987, which marked a strengthening of locally based development work (Mønsterplan for grunnskolen 1987). It is no exaggeration to say that the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s were a golden age for progressive ideology and for school-based development work, where emphasis was placed on the democratic, social, and caring aims of schooling.

8.4.2 New Legislation for Progressivism and Project Work

New national curriculum plans implemented in 1997 (Læreplanverket for den 10-årige grunnskolen 1996) marked a change in the liberal curriculum tradition initiated in 1974. This plan decided what students should learn at each grade and

went some way toward regulating methods for teaching and learning. Management by objectives was introduced, but only in terms of the process, and a very moderate system of evaluating schools' practice and their results was still in place. The compulsory school period was extended to 10 years by lowering the starting age from 7 to 6. This was a controversial decision, both politically and pedagogically. Among preschool teachers there was much concern that, for the youngest students, whole-class teaching would harm their learning and development. The compromise was reached that the whole comprehensive school, especially at primary level, should implement some of the traditions of preschool pedagogy that emphasized play, cross-disciplinary themes, and project work. Ironically, progressivism was the winning ideology in a curriculum plan that was overloaded with subject matter. A certain percentage of school time should be used for project work, from 50 % at the lower levels to 20 % at the upper. Because national curriculum plans ranged as statutory regulations, it was no longer possible for schools to escape progressive practices. Behind this, however, was a preschool, child-centered ideology and not an explicit progressive ideology aimed at enhancing democracy and reducing social inequality. The plan tried to compensate this by emphasizing a balance between individualized teaching and community in the classrooms.

The 1997 Reform was evaluated a few years later (Haug 2004; Imsen 2003). This was the first large-scale investigation of classroom practice in Norway. The results showed, among other things, that one fourth of the teachers held that specified learning objectives were difficult to combine with cross-disciplinary theme and project work, and that every fifth teacher realized that the amount of project work was not fulfilled (Rønning 2002). This implied that 80 % of teachers carried out a considerable amount of project work in their classes. In spite of this, the textbook still had a strong position in the classroom, often in combination with computers.

It was also investigated to what degree progressive elements were present in ordinary, discipline-centered lessons. Teachers expressed strong support of adapted education, but observations revealed that that far less variation was discernible in practice in relation to students' different abilities. Group work was widespread according to the teachers, but the study's observations did not confirm this. Constructivist approaches and inquiry teaching varied among school subjects, with mathematics proving to be a particularly isolated and textbook-driven subject. Generally, teachers expressed strong support of progressive teaching methods, but did not practice them to the same degree (Imsen 2003).

Individualized teaching and the realization of community in school may be conflicting principles. Klette (2003) showed that individualized classrooms differed from other classrooms by extensively using written tasks, i.e., reducing use of the whole-class community as a learning arena. Adapted teaching was carried out by letting students work independently according to their own written work programs, often following tasks supplied by the textbook. This, of course, runs counter to the principle of community. Individual variation was restricted to fulfilling different numbers of tasks, or a few more difficult tasks for the brightest students.

To summarize, before the new millennium, there was a slow, but steady, development in the Norwegian comprehensive school in a progressive direction, both rhetorically and in teachers' attitudes. When it came to carrying it through in

practice, the old, textbook-driven tradition lingered. In addition, the teachers' interpretations of individualized teaching were realized in ways that Dewey would never have approved. Dewey's idea of democracy and the notion of community promoted by the national curriculum plan were about to be sacrificed on the altar of individualization.

8.4.3 A New Era After the Millennium

From 2001, a new era in Norwegian education policy began. Its models were taken from a neoliberal, commercial world and not in that of educational idealism. The three most prominent elements were decentralization, result orientation, and an individually, right-leaning legislation. These trends in educational policy are evident in a considerable number of countries and are to a great extent inspired by supranational agencies like the EU and the OECD.

The Norwegian comprehensive school has traditionally been governed relatively strongly at the national state level, which may be a benefit in a small country with only five million people, but with 430 municipalities, some of which are small and remotely situated. Vital parts of school policy were decentralized to the municipalities after the millennium, including giving them the right to form their own, municipal curriculum plans and their own systems of quality control. This has resulted in a reduction of the professional influence of the teachers; an increased constraint on school leadership by contracts requiring certain achievement targets from the students; and, in many municipalities, greater pressure on tests and control mechanisms.

The shift from process to results in education was decided by new national curriculum plans in 2006, which emphasized result objectives in all school subjects (*Læreplanverket for Kunnskapsløftet 2006*, L 06). It was called "The Knowledge Promotion," but in reality the very concept of knowledge was abandoned and replaced with competence aims. These are behavioral objectives, describing what students should visibly display from their learning. The progressive spirit of 1997, with its emphasis on process objectives, was disintegrated. The same objectives applied to all students, except those that had formally been granted special education. The teachers were given full freedom to choose their teaching methods and ways of organizing them, and the demand for project work was removed. National tests were introduced in the mother tongue, English, and mathematics; mediocre results on PISA created forcible media pressure and a high degree of benchmarking. Evaluation of the "Knowledge promotion reform" indicates that teachers' planning has become more technical, with emphasis on effective learning strategies, textbook orientation, and increased attention on the evaluation of students' learning. Progressive learning methods seem to be on the decline. This is indicated by teachers who express their relief that they can drop project work and reestablish the traditional, teacher-directed whole-class approach (Hodgson et al. 2010). This is not entirely surprising, considering the immense pressure caused by the emphasis on quantified learning results.

8.4.4 From Welfare to Individual Rights

The Norwegian Education Act of 1998 placed a stronger emphasis on individual rights in education compared with former acts, which put greater stress on education as social welfare. This increased the parents' ability to claim certain benefits for their children. One consequence of this is that the principle of individually adapted education has acquired a new meaning: from being a progressive, educational principle it has obtained status as a legal right for the individual child. This may, of course, support adapted education and the progressive agenda, but it may also turn in the opposite direction when parents claim tailored, individual education for their child. This implies diminishing the educational community and promoting new, neoliberal individualism. According to this logic, which originates in social economics, students are considered to be customers and the school owner a provider, a relationship in which the customer is always right. An important progressive principle may therefore become the worst enemy of a School for All when it is managed by new governance systems formed on an economic basis. An early indication of the negative consequences of this approach is that teachers spend a considerable amount of time documenting their plans, activities, and results, so as to avoid being sued for not doing their jobs properly. Another consequence is that greater emphasis is placed on written tasks that follow textbook-driven work programs which are forwarded to parents by internet-based communication platforms. Cooperation between home and school is, of course, very important. At the same time, in this writing and objective-oriented regime, education can become chained to linear result-based planning and deprived of the flexibility, creativity, student participation, and spontaneity that characterize high-quality teaching and learning.

Progressivism was introduced in the Norwegian comprehensive school to develop a pedagogy that could help to solve the practical challenges that a School for All groups of students entails. The educational reform introduced in the millennium has resulted in a development in which the individualization of progressivism has been disconnected from its societal mandate and where learning is torn away from its social context. The neoliberal meaning of individualism takes center stage once more, in which freedom is decoupled from social responsibility. The important balance between individualization and community that has underpinned the development of the comprehensive school throughout the twentieth century is being displaced by a kind of individualism that is alien to the basic ideals of a School for All.

8.5 Progressivism in Sweden

8.5.1 The Development of a State Progressivism

Carlgrén (2011c) observes that the emergence of interest in Sweden for progressive ideas coincided with the political struggle for a comprehensive school. In the early twentieth century, political ideas that reacted against earlier approaches toward

organizing education that separated rich people from poor gradually took hold. Egidius (2001) describes how the ideals of the French Revolution inspired left-wing radicals such as Fridtjov Berg. Alongside liberals, he proposed a School for All children where each had the right to personal and intellectual development. These ideas were also accompanied by a new pedagogy, in reaction to previous authoritarian systems, which aimed to foster children to become democratic citizens. The political forces joined in a School Commission of 1946.

This investigation found that “The inner work of school” upheld by the German pedagogy, which had strongly influenced Swedish policy, was out of date (Egidius 2001). The report mentioned the American Dalton plan, which posited that students should work independently under the teacher’s supervision. However, they concluded that Sweden was probably insufficiently prepared for this as yet but proposed that integrated teaching should replace the current division of different subjects, which made learning an abstract undertaking for students.

When Carlgren (2011b, c) reflects upon progressivism in Sweden, she begins with Dewey. She (2011c) describes how Dewey’s texts were quickly translated into Swedish, read by the school reform supporters of the early 1900s, and soon integrated into Education Acts. The problems related to teaching different students in the classroom, which was a consequence of the comprehensive school reform, were supposedly solved with student activity. From this point, Carlgren (2011c) states, a curriculum language was created around notions such as student activity, individualization, subject integration, and students’ learning interests. Those curriculum texts developed into a kind of state progressivism. But, says Carlgren, this was accompanied with a psychological thinking which grew strengthened in the early 1900s and which focused the psychological development of the individual student, which was stressed in the curriculum texts; in the light of Dewey’s texts, this appears to be one-sided. For Carlgren (2011c), Dewey never decoupled the psychological functions of the individual from knowledge content, which was realized in the curriculum’s emphasis on individual capacities such as problem-solving, creativity, and collaboration. This implies that those capacities could be trained and improved separately without taking account of their relation to the individual’s understanding of specific knowledge content. Dewey opposes this dualism between knowledge content and psychological functions. Carlgren posits that it is therefore important to develop from henceforth teaching method that places content at its center and to which students’ psychological function and development relate. State progressivism was clearly visible in the curricula of 1962 and 1969 and also of 1980, in which the democratic aspect of education was a prominent feature.

8.5.2 The Opposition to State Progressivism in 2000

Does state progressivism still exist in Swedish schools? We would say yes. It still prevails in the text of the curriculum, where student activity and influence is stressed, but according to Lundahl’s analysis (2009), it is increasingly opposed by the administration of national tests and the regulation of individual development plans; these

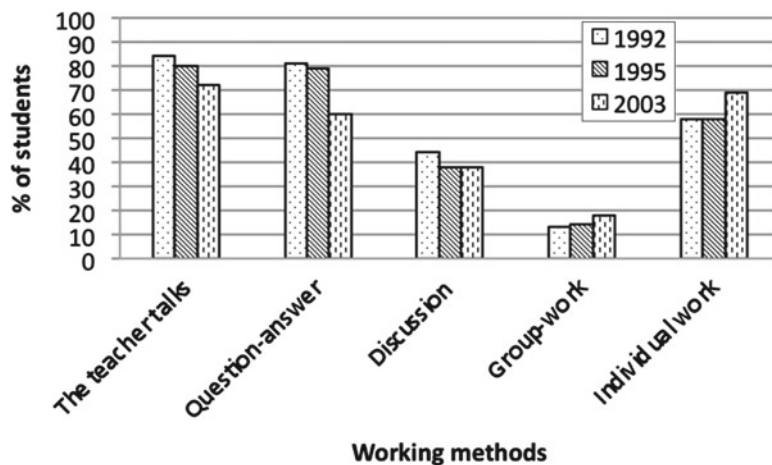


Fig. 8.1 Percentage of students that indicated that different working methods have been used every day. 1992 $N=8,771$, 1995 $N=10,249$, 2003 $N=6,788$

could be said to foster the traditional German values of student passivity and independence that the school commission once reacted against. The new liberals that came into power in 2006 quickly introduced official investigations to prepare for the “new school.” However, we hold that the new syllabuses’ emphasis on “clear goals and knowledge demands” (SOU 2007:28), on an investigation at upper secondary level that exacerbates segregation (SOU 2008:27, 2008:109), and on examining teachers’ training (SOU 2008:27, 2008:109) mean that these changes are entirely retrograde and lack any progressive qualities.

When the neoliberals have attacked the “old school” in Sweden, progressive ideas about the active role of the student role and the time management have been central to their arguments. Neoliberal politicians have labeled schools of the 1980s as “flummig,” or muddled, meaning that too much room was given to student activity and that teacher training had a low status, resulting in a lack of instruction for basic skills in schools. This is, in fact, the principal argument that Björklund, the education minister, used in 2012 to explain the plummeting results in Swedish schools as measured by international assessment bodies, such as PISA.

8.5.3 *Research on Working Methods in School*

Ekholm (2007) has compiled research data addressing how time is used in schools using the results of national evaluations that were undertaken in 1995 and 2003 (Skolverket 1993, 1996, 2004). These investigations asked students to think back over the teaching they had received over the past year in all subjects. A number of pedagogical methods were explained to the students, who then indicated how often they had experienced each type of approach. Figure 8.1 displays the percentage of students who identified particular methods as being used several times each day over a 3-year span.

Table 8.1 Percentages of observed 15-min periods. Observed 15-min periods in 4–6 $N=15,365$, 7–9 $N=9,193$

Working ways	Year 4–6	Year 7–9
Individual work	58	60
Listening to the teacher	23	20
Discussing with the teacher	7	10
Discussing to students and teacher	32	32
Working with students	19	13
Investigating	20	20
Working at computer	9	8

The students' answers form a stable picture of how different working methods were in use between 1992 and 2003. Ekholm (2007) observes that the lecture method, in which the teacher delivers a talk combined with a question and answer session, was used every day, but that fewer students identify it as a teaching method in use at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when marginally more students indicate that group work and individual work are used. However, according to the students, group work is not common practice during the 12 years investigated. Ekholm notices that discussion between teachers and students occupies a stable position and takes place on a daily basis, according to the one third of the students questioned.

Ekholm and Kull (1996) ask if the picture formed by the students' account of these working methods corresponds with that of the teachers. They found that more students than teachers identify lecturing as an everyday routine, while more teachers than students indicate that group work takes place every day. Concerning discussion, students' and teachers' experiences have almost coincided over the 25-year span. Approximately 50 % of students and teachers identify this as an everyday routine in 1994. These observations give the progressive perspective a more positive outlook.

Table 8.1 displays the total number by percentage of 15 min periods spent using different pedagogic methods as observed in two municipalities (Lindvall 1999a, b). As the observers used more than one category to indicate what happened in each period, the sum in each column exceeds 100 %.

Ekholm (2007) notices that the pattern of working methods used in years 4–6 is very similar to that of years 7–9. Individual work is the most commonly used approach, especially when compared with listening to the teacher lecturing, which stood out in the questionnaire investigations. Ekholm also observes that a substantial amount of time is taken up by independent student research, such as conducting laboratory work or finding out things in the library or on the internet.

From a progressive perspective, we can conclude that during the twentieth century and into the beginning of the twenty-first century, ideas about student activity have unquestionably made their way into the curriculum and, as research shows, into the classroom too, even though this development has been rather slow (Blossing and Ekholm 2008). It has placed the child in the center of the learning process and promoted students' activity and influence. Granström (2003) supports this conclusion but also complicates the picture. Using empirical research, he states that

whole-class teaching has given way to individualized student work. He concludes that this means that students miss out on important communication with the teacher, which could foster knowledge development, and moreover that they seldom get the opportunity to develop collaboration skills through group work with fellow students. To summarize, the working methods used in Swedish schools have increasingly assumed a more individualistic form, supported by the neoliberal belief that each person has the right to fulfill his or her own life project. Furthermore, Granström concludes that families with good economic and cultural capabilities benefit from this and so can follow their life projects to a greater extent than other, more disadvantaged families.

8.5.4 Institutionalization of Progressive Schools

Another indication of how the progressive movement has permeated the society is the extent to which progressive schools have been institutionalized.

The Montessori pedagogic model is the most widespread and institutionalized example of the progressive movement in Sweden. According to their website (Montessoriförbundet 2012), this movement in 2012 comprised over 250 associations and schools across Sweden, mainly consisting of preschools. The Freinet movement occupies a significant place within this context. Their website (Hemberg et al. 2012) lists only ten schools, but their pedagogy effectively coincides with ideas about student activity and student influence and (as they state themselves) with the national curriculum, too. Since the reform of independent schools in 1992, it has become easier to establish such institutions and therefore schools with a progressive orientation. However, they have to follow the national curriculum and take national tests, and they are also assessed by the School Inspection.

8.5.5 Criticism of Current Progressive Trends

Student activity is the one principle that has been manifested in the everyday work of students at both municipal and independent schools in the form of individual study. However, research (Skolverket 2009; Österlind 1998, 2005) shows that this has taken place at the cost of collective learning, and that the independent study does not necessarily nurture the student's ability to develop their own knowledge. Carlgren (2011a) suggests that it perhaps would be more accurate to promote student active *teaching* instead of student active *working methods*.

Carlgren (2011a) is also critical of another principle upheld by the progressive approach to pedagogy: subject integration. The main argument for subject integration holds that, as children do not experience the world divided into subjects, the learning in school should not be organized in such a way either. However, school

subjects are meaningless when detached from their context, i.e., from their relation to questions that have been formed in specific subject areas. According to Carlgren a one-sided focus on questions that have arisen out of students' everyday lives is insufficient. Research has shown that everyday knowledge and scientific or subject-based knowledge need not coincide to be meaningful for the individual. Subject knowledge is connected to the individual's circumstances and acquires practical meaning whether or not it is scientific. Instead of subject integration, Carlgren proposes leading the student into the specific sphere in which the questions and knowledge belonging to particular subject areas become meaningful.

Following Ellen Key's idea of the child in center, we conclude that the student in 2012 is at the center as never before, especially as neoliberals have emphasized the place of individual rights within legislation concerning schools. Yet, as Carlgren (2011a) suggests, the question remains what the child is at the center of. Independent schools have appropriated the idea of student activity from the progressive movement and transformed it into the concept of individual work, combined with a market-oriented goal-and-result perspective. Municipal schools appear to be developing in very much the same direction. In line with Carlgren, we ask: is a progressive knowledge movement what we need for the future?

8.6 Progressive Education on Its Way Out?

Progressive ideas were widespread across three Scandinavian countries at the beginning of the twentieth century. Interest in this new way of thinking about education was partly motivated by a psychological, child-centered ideology and partly by a social democratic strategy designed to realize the vision of a School for All children. Only after World War II were progressive ideas gradually implemented in school practice, at about the same time that a comprehensive school for children up to 16 years was introduced in all three countries. Central issues in school practice concerned student activity, democratic participation, cross-disciplinary curriculum, individualized instruction, and inclusion. The school should be a social community, embracing all children, regardless of ability, social class, and gender. The long-term political aim was to increase social mobility and to reduce social differences in society.

In Scandinavia, the social school community has been realized in different ways: the development of a comprehensive School for All with no streaming is the most significant, but another important feature is the organization of students in permanent groups or school classes to reflect all categories of children. Progressive activity pedagogy has been implemented within this class community, creating variation in the teaching and learning environment in order to afford meaningful learning for children of different abilities and cultural backgrounds. A participatory, democratic school has been formally implemented by different education acts and in national curriculum plans over the years and still exists on the documentation level in Denmark and Sweden.

In Denmark, Norway, and also in Sweden, we see that progressive ideas have been toned down in the latest school reforms for the benefit of basic skills, outcomes, national standards and tests, streaming, competition, and free school choice.

Evidence indicates that the individualization aspect of progressivism is gaining ground in school practice in all three countries, and that project work and more complex and developed forms of group work and pedagogic communications are declining. It seems that the dominant test-based concept of educational quality entails a backlash for the activity part of progressivism and a reduction in curriculum variation. This variation is paramount for the inclusion of all students and, in the long run, for the prevention of dropout in upper secondary school (see Buland and Mathiesen, Chap. 12, in this volume).

There are both similarities and differences between the Scandinavian countries in terms of how they implement progressive ideas in practice. A combination of whole-class teaching and individual work prevails in all three countries. Denmark is exceptional, as it has introduced project work as a national standard since 2005, at the same time as it was removed from Norwegian curriculum plans. It remains to be seen how project work will survive in Denmark, or if the test-based governance system will stimulate old-fashioned classroom teaching as it seems to have done in Norway.

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