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Reconstructions of Nordic Teachers: Reform policies and teachers’ work during the 1990s

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This article deals with the question of how the restructuring of educational systems in Nordic countries affects teachers’ working conditions. It is based on results from the project “Restructuring in Education: Reform policy and teacher professionalism in different Nordic contexts” in which the construction of the “New Teacher” in Nordic countries was described and analyzed. In the paper we will relate the results from an analysis of steering and policy documents to an analysis of teacher interviews concerning how they experienced the changes during the 1990s. According to several scholars in the field, the consequence of restructuring has been a growing instrumentalism. Teaching is said to be increasingly managerial in nature, both as teachers are managed and, in turn, themselves manage others. This is, however, more a traditionalist than an obvious argument. Our ambition has been to qualify the discussion by more sensitive and nuanced descriptions of how restructuring affects teachers’ work.

Keywords: Curriculum reforms; Nordic teachers; Professional space; Restructuring; Teachers’ work

Introduction

There is growing evidence internationally that the professional life of teachers is undergoing profound and dramatic changes. Curriculum demands are broadening. Accountability, assessment and the paperwork this creates is increasing. Teachers are being urged to extend their role as professionals and assume more responsibility beyond the classroom doors; as curriculum planners and leaders, as mentors for new teachers, as collaborative planners and decision makers along with colleagues.

These changes are intertwined with international, as well as national, tendencies of what has been called “restructuring in education”. Restructuring in education includes a wide range of phenomena. Often, it is connected to state legislation and new forms of bureaucracy and control. Carnoy and MacDonnell (1990) state that: “Restructuring is a governance or management reform” (p. 51). But restructuring in
education is also associated with a cognitive, constructivist approach to learning and teaching (see Elmore, 1989).

In Nordic countries the restructuring of schools can be identified in various ways. A new model for governance in the educational field, shifting from a model located in a bureaucratic centralised state to a highly decentralised and locally-based model rooted in goal steering and constructions of professionalism as a steering mechanism, illustrates one of these tendencies. The effort of making teaching a more collaborative task by focusing on team teaching and collaborative planning among teachers, can serve as another example. Marketisation, consumer orientation and different types of voucher systems, both within schools and within communities, might illustrate a third tendency of restructuring in education in Nordic countries.

Restructuring in education involves new demands on teachers, such as making of local curriculum plans, collaborative decision making, new ways of communicating with parents and others outside school, discussing the ground for didactic choices, etc. The design aspects in teachers’ work, as well as demands for evaluation, are growing (Carlgren, 1999). In short, we might say that restructuring in education redesigns teachers’ roles, rules and responsibilities both inside and outside schools. Restructuring includes efforts to expand “…teachers’ roles and responsibilities beyond their regular classroom assignments” (Smylie & Denny, 1989, p. 4).

As a part of, as well as a consequence of, restructuring efforts, the teacher is “reconstructed”—and the meaning of being a teacher, as well as what a teacher is expected to do, is changed. The focus of this article is how restructuring in education affects teachers’ work and contributes to the reconstruction of Nordic teacher(s) in terms of expected tasks, competences and responsibilities and their space for professional autonomy and judgement.

Although many of the tendencies in restructuring efforts point to a long history, the starting point of this paper is the reforms of the 1990s in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. It is based on the work within the project “Restructuring in Education: Reform policy and teacher professionalism in different Nordic contexts”. The aim of the project was to analyse restructuring in education from the perspective of how it affected the work of teachers in comprehensive schools and contributed to the “construction” of the teacher in four Nordic countries. We wanted to understand the process of restructuring by describing it from two different perspectives: on the one hand, how teachers and teaching are described, defined and ascribed qualities in policy texts and, on the other, how teachers themselves describe ongoing changes. In the research project we have carried out case descriptions of each country as well as comparisons between the countries. In this article we will focus on similarities and differences between restructuring efforts in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden and the implications for teachers’ professional autonomy. The analysis is based on two different sources of data. First, we looked into the policy documents that formulate the tasks, expectations and regulations of teachers (see Klette, Carlgren, Rasmussen, Simola, & Sundqvist, 2000). The second source is the perspective of the
teachers as it is expressed in interviews carried out with a dozen teachers in each
country (Klette, Carlgren, Rasmussen, & Simola, 2002).

The Policy Analyses

We have concentrated our analyses on what might be defined as national policy
texts. We have chosen documents that, according to their status, should have a
ruling/steering input on teachers’ work. Teachers have to relate to them in one way
or another. Simola (2000) makes a distinction between authoritative policy
documents and steering policy documents. Steering policy documents refer to texts
that possess an ordering and constraining character. They are “…genuine steering
documents saying in the most official level what are the tasks and qualifications of
the teachers” (p. 117). Typical steering documents will be legislative texts or
curricula texts. Authoritative texts also contribute to the inscription and construction
of the teachers but in a less formalised and more discursive form than steering
documents (see Klette et al., 2000). Although both authoritative and steering policy
texts may be referred to in the case descriptions our systematic comparisons were
restricted to steering policy documents.

Our concern was how the teacher is constructed and modelled through policy
texts. What we actually did was to ask the policy texts two rather simple questions:
(1) What are the teachers’ central tasks? and (2) What are their central competences
and qualifications? We tried to describe how the texts, through statements of tasks
and qualifications, inscribe the teacher(s). Interpretation of textual meaning refers to
how we, as recipients of the text, see and interpret the text, which means that there
are no straightforward, single, true interpretations of the policy text. The focus is on
how the different texts designate the teacher(s) and their tasks and qualifications:
what the teachers must do and be and how they must be qualified. What sorts of
teachers are inherent in the different texts’ designation of the teacher? National
policy texts might vary in the degree of detail with which they describe the teacher(s).
In Sweden, for example, deregulation efforts imply a new role for national policy
documents. National documents designate frames and general goals and leave it to
the local level to make things substantially and methodologically explicit. This means
that the national policy texts in Sweden may say little about what the teachers should
do, in what order, at what level, etc. However, the way the steering documents are
constructed presupposes that the teachers do certain things. One can therefore talk
about an implicit teacher in the texts (Carlgren, 2000) as well as the explicitly
formulated ideal teacher.

The Interview Study

The aim of the interviews was to describe the restructuring period (the 1990s) from
the point of view of teachers in comprehensive schools. How are ongoing reform
efforts perceived by teachers? How do teachers define and see their job during a
period of restructuring? What do teachers talk about when they are asked questions about their tasks, demands, competence and changes in their job? The same types of questions were posed to both sources of data, policy texts and teachers: what are the teachers’ central tasks, demands and competence today? The teachers were, in addition, asked about how their work had changed during the last decade.

Twelve teachers from comprehensive schools in each country were interviewed. They were selected to cover a variation regarding number of years of teaching, male and female, primary and lower secondary education, urban and rural areas, small and large schools and different subjects. These 48 teachers cannot, of course, be considered as representative of all teachers in the four countries. They can, however, be treated as four different groups of teachers to be compared. The differences between the groups can then be contextualised in relation to the national reforms in order to raise questions regarding national differences rather than generalising.

Restructuring of Education

Restructuring of education was introduced to cope with educational problems of today’s society. The existing school system seemed too rigid, too bureaucratic and too inflexible, it was argued. What was needed was a more flexible, more change and result oriented system, which empowered all educational stakeholders: teachers, parents, pupils and administrators.

Restructuring in terms of deregulation, accountability, increased consumer choice, new professional demands and roles for teachers and administrators, points to a global movement happening in England, New Zealand and France as well as the USA, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway. The impetus was closely related to a growing criticism of an expanding welfare state. The criticism focused specifically on an inflexible and growing state bureaucracy, expert ruling and “remoteness”, leaving the civil society with small possibilities for intervention and participation.

Restructuring is, thus, rather an answer to problems related to a late modern society than a point of departure for social change, and can be understood as an adjustment to what is often described as a “new” situation. Social institutions are rebuilding themselves as a response to societal changes. An important part of those changes comes from within the systems themselves—as consequences of previous solutions. Restructuring is, in this respect, an aspect of modernisation—a denomination for qualitative changes in how modern societies are organised. From such perspectives, restructuring is not firstly a political phenomenon (for example, the result of a conservative or neo-liberal political programme), but implies new situations, arenas and frames for political actions and strategies, and it is in relation to the ongoing restructuring efforts that the political struggles go on.

Neo-liberal ways of thinking have got a hold on much of the restructuring rhetoric, for instance in the fact that education and schooling has been referred to in terms of better efficiency or greater excellence and implies what scholars have described as “an economization of the language of schooling” (Dale 1989; Smyth 1998; Telhaug
This aspect of restructuring has been heavily criticised within educational research. The criticism can be summarised as follows: restructuring mechanisms are introduced within education; these mechanisms are on a system level above all about *marketisation* of the educational sector, which also includes introducing *new forms of governance* (steering by goals/objectives and results). On the level of school and teachers’ work, the mechanisms that are used are *accountability, competitiveness and performativity* (targets as well as standards). As a result, teachers become deprofessionalised and oriented towards performance indicators; education looses its social meaning and becomes commodified.

However, implicit in many critical studies (see for example Ball 1994; Lawn 1995) seems to be an assumption that restructuring is starting the processes, that restructuring is an effect of certain social groups becoming influential—as if another power balance would make restructuring unnecessary. If, instead, education restructuring is seen as “...part and parcel of transitions to late modernity” (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 1999, p. 5), the reform strategies are more to be understood as responses to societal changes than causes. What is happening in schools is not an effect of this or that restructuring reform but an effect of an interaction between reform policies and other changes taking place. How the restructuring is designed is an effect of context, history, power and strengths among different stakeholders, as well as more or less occasional circumstances. It is not possible to avoid restructuring measurements. If restructuring is a response to social change, then it is not restructuring as such that leads to one thing or the other but the very ways the restructuring is formed—including the construction of the teacher. The question, then, is how restructuring is designed and accomplished. This may be partly an effect of national context and history and partly a political aspect. Through studying variations regarding this in different national settings, dimensions that vary may be discerned, that is, dimensions of the new situation that can be politically formed and acted upon.

Restructuring seems to be a global phenomenon. There is, however, an obvious risk for overgeneralisation. Since the rhetoric used in the different national reforms is often impregnated by the global discourse, it seems as if the same things are going on around the world. However, education is to a large extent contextual—each country has its own history, political situation, traditions and conditions. Even if all countries are somehow affected by, and taking part in, the ongoing changes, it will not mean the same things everywhere.

**Nordic Countries as a Context for Restructuring**

The case of Nordic countries is especially interesting since it corresponds with international tendencies and movements and at the same time represents a Nordic alternative with quite distinct and specific national patterns and outfits. Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden all put through thoroughgoing reforms during the 1990s that are to a large extent similar and yet different in several aspects. The tradition of a longstanding comprehensive school system is of special interest here.
How does, for example, restructuring, in terms of marketisation and consumer orientation, correspond with the ideal of the Nordic compulsory comprehensive school? Part of the long tradition of comprehensive education is a system with a National Curriculum (NC). While England, for instance, got its first NC in the 1980s, Denmark got its first NC for the comprehensive school at the beginning of the twentieth century, Norway in 1939, Finland in 1952 and Sweden in 1962.

Because of their partially common history and traditions, it is possible to compare Nordic countries. All four countries carried through curriculum reforms during the 1990s in connection with a change of governance system to some kind of goal and/or result steering. While in Denmark the reform started with a new National Educational Act, Sweden has just recently finished the reworking of the Education Act. The accountability theme was not so obvious in the beginning of the 1990s, but it has grown during the last decade and, towards the end of the decade, all four countries have seen quite elaborate systems for evaluation and assessment. There are a great number of similarities between Nordic countries, but with specific national differences. In Norway, restructuring, in terms of goal steering and a redistributed economical system, is combined with a highly specified, detailed and centralised NC giving detailed instruction for teaching and learning at each and every grade. In Sweden and Finland, goal steering is implemented through a rather open NC in combination with a system of government formulated criteria for grading. Marketisation in terms of competitiveness (for example, through a voucher system, profiled and free schools) is emphasised in Sweden but not at all in Norway at the beginning of the decade. Denmark has a longstanding tradition of a decentralised school system, which is now being centralised in a way through goal steering and evaluation strategies. In Sweden, with a long history of a centralised school system and national tests and standardisation of marks, the restructuring measures appear as decentralisation and deregulation, while in Denmark quite similar phenomena appear as centralisation. Descriptions of restructuring, therefore, must be not only factual—there are contextual and historical aspects that give meaning to what is happening.

Similarities and Differences in Restructuring Efforts Between the Four Countries

Every educational reform redefines the role of the educational stake-holders. The decentralisation aspect of the 1990s reforms meant a redefinition of the relationship between the state and the municipalities, schools and teachers. In the following discussion we will first describe the differences regarding curricula and steering documents in relation to responsibilities for different educational stakeholders. After that we will characterise the tasks, demands and qualifications asked for in the curricular texts as well as from the teachers’ point of view. Finally we will discuss these findings in relation to professional space and autonomy.
Curricula Texts Across Countries

Apart from the Education Act, all countries have one or more centrally formulated curricular document. In Norway, curriculum areas are prescribed at the central level. In Finland all schools are supposed to formulate local curricula. In Denmark schools must formulate local curricular plans if they choose not to follow the centrally produced syllabuses. In Sweden, schools must produce local plans including goals for all subjects and the municipalities must produce school plans. In Finland and Sweden, there are also centrally produced criteria for student assessment. In Finland these are contained in a separate document, whereas in Sweden they are added to the syllabi.

Some differences between the documents should be noted. The most obvious difference is between the heavy Norwegian curriculum book (like a “bible”) and the pamphlet-like Swedish curriculum. The different documents ask for different responses from teachers. The Norwegian curriculum must be delivered. The NC is a heavy, authoritative text that makes it unnecessary to talk about the selection of content. It also includes guidelines about how to organise teaching and ways of working. Teachers do not have to spend time deciding about the selection of content. Instead, they must plan for it so that all elements are included in their teaching. Norwegian teachers are asked to organise adaptive teaching, connect the content to the experiences of the pupils and carefully design for thematic- and project-organised work.

Swedish teachers are supposed to discuss and decide on the selection of content, as well as the organisation of teaching, methods and ways of working. This means that the content of school knowledge is not taken for granted or formulated in an authoritative text—teachers have to become authoritative by themselves. In Sweden teachers are also required to get “all” pupils to pass and to be able to communicate the grounds for their assessment of pupil knowledge.

In Denmark, where teachers, by tradition, have been free from control, they are now asked to follow the central guidelines and also the syllabi if they do not formulate alternative local syllabuses. The demand is, thus, to follow what is centrally decided or to formulate their own plans. But there must be some visible plan or account for activities in school. Danish documents are not detailed like the Norwegian ones—at the same time they are not written as goals as in Finland and Sweden. Danish teachers are asked to teach with “modern methods”—cross disciplinary, thematic and project-organised. Another request concerns the demand to involve the students in the planning of teaching. This demand is strong in Denmark and also in Sweden.

Finland started the restructuring reforms with the frame curriculum giving a lot of space at the school level—asking teachers to make their own curricular texts. In this they were given more open space than Swedish teachers. The emphasis has, however, been more and more on evaluation, with a culmination, in 1999, of criteria that are greatly specified. Apart from this, The Finnish teachers are asked to teach students to become self-evaluative—just as the teachers are expected to be self-evaluative.
In all four national curricula there is a formulation on the central level of the aims of education, as well as the content of schooling. However, the kind of content of school knowledge that is formulated on the central level differs between the countries as well as how the centrally formulated content is supposed to be transformed to the local level. Ideas regarding the relationship between the central and the local can be described as:

**Denmark—**the state offers a model that can be copied. The state produced curriculum texts that the municipality and school levels could use if they did not choose to develop their own. Targets and criteria were to be formulated at the local level. For those who did not want to do it themselves, the state offered “ready made” formulations. However, the centrally produced “Laeseplaner” were not very detailed or prescriptive. Municipalities are in charge of schools, including decisions about the schools’ local curricula.

**Finland—**the state offers frames. The state curriculum is a frame curriculum. Based on this, the school produces its own curriculum. However, it is the municipalities that set up schools and, in principle, accept the local curriculum plans. Different curricular documents on the municipality level may interfere with the production of local curricula. Goals for subjects are formulated at the state level but goals for different age levels are not prescribed.

**Norway—**the state describes in detail. The state delivers overall educational aims as well as very detailed, prescriptive content in the NC—which should be implemented at the local level. Teachers in schools are to organise teaching so that it constitutes a whole.

**Sweden—**the state decides on goals that must be concretised on the local level. There are many similarities between Sweden and Finland. The overall label for the steering system in Sweden is called “participatory goal steering”—implying that the state formulates open goals that must be interpreted and given a specific meaning by schools. The emphasis is on teachers as professionals taking decisions as well as responsibilities.

**The Ideal Teacher in Policy Documents: Tasks, demands and qualifications**

In the steering documents a teacher is no longer someone who teaches classes a certain number of hours per week, but someone who designs learning environments where he/she is leading and supervising individual learners on different learning
paths. The teacher is also expected to co-operate with others in working teams. Figure 1 is an attempt to summarise the main aspects of tasks, demands and qualifications as they come out in the steering documents across the four countries.

Although there are great similarities in what is asked of teachers in the four countries’ steering documents, there are also obvious differences:

**The Danish teacher.** The ideal Danish teacher is “goal conscious”. He/she knows how to formulate goals for teaching and pupil learning and how to evaluate the activities in relation to the overall educational aims. He/she has a good grasp of many subjects and masters different teaching methods—especially project-teaching and how to teach thematically. He/she is a reflective teacher and works together with other teachers as well as the students.

**The Finnish teacher.** The ideal Finnish teacher is a curriculum entrepreneur with an evaluative attitude working in a learning-centre. He/she is a curriculum maker and evaluator—of her/his own activities as well as of the students’ progress; an academic with a knowledge-base in educational science. The ideal teacher supports, gives advice and inspires pupils in their learning process. He/she is a designer of learning environments, result producer and a scientifically legitimised professional.

**The Norwegian teacher.** The ideal Norwegian teacher plans and carries through teaching in order to realise curricular objectives. He/she is also a role model with a robust personality. Further, she knows her subjects well and also didactics—she is

![Diagram](image)

Figure 1. Tasks, demands and qualifications required from the teachers within the steering documents.
able to co-operate with others and adapt her teaching to different needs among the pupils. The ideal Norwegian teacher works in teams and is a teacher as well as a counsellor and advisor to the pupils. He/she is also a school developer.

*The Swedish teacher.* The ideal Swedish teacher makes pupils feel responsible for their own learning. He/she takes part in local curriculum making, interprets the goals and selects the content of schooling as well as methods based on his/her professional knowledge. He/she is also a participant in many different discussions with colleagues and he/she involves the pupils in the planning of teaching. He/she formulates criteria for giving marks and is accountable, together with his/her colleagues, for how the school work is organised.

*Teacher Narratives: The 1990s from teachers’ perspectives*

Following our interviews, all teachers described the 1990s as a decade of huge changes. While some of these changes were ascribed to the reforms, others were due to changes outside of school, leading to new demands from pupils and parents. Interestingly enough, all teachers in all four countries emphasise how pastoral care and the social and emotional aspects of teaching have come to dominate teachers’ work more and more.

From the teachers’ perspective new tasks and demands have been added to the previous ones and many of these new tasks are not considered to be tasks teachers should do. Teachers have to spend more time in school, where their job has become more hectic and bothersome. They are expected to co-operate—with other teachers as well as with parents—to take part in meetings and spend time on documentation.

While all teachers talked about an increased workload, especially in terms of new tasks besides teaching, some differences can be noticed. The Danish and Norwegian teachers, particularly, talked about increasing demands from parents, as well as pressure from the steering documents. The Swedish teachers talked about a qualitative change in teachers’ work—from an emphasis on teaching to being more focused on the learning of each individual. Teachers have become responsible for their pupils to passing exams. In contrast to this, the Finnish teachers considered marks to be the responsibility of pupils. The Finnish teachers did not seem to experience strong pressure from the steering documents.

While the Finnish teachers did not seem much shaken by the changes and stayed firm in their traditional teacher role, the Danish teachers seemed more disturbed by the pressure to change, although they also appeared to shake off the new demands, sticking to teaching in a more traditional sense. In contrast, the Swedish teachers showed more willingness to accept the new obligations, as well as the fact that they were not able to fulfil previous tasks as well as before. The Norwegian teachers somehow appeared to balance and synthesise the traditional and the new demands. The Norwegian teachers gave the impression of being more in control of the changes, while the Swedish teachers seemed more like victims. However, two
opposing tendencies can be discerned in the Swedish interviews. On the one hand, the Swedish teachers described a closing of their professional space—as a result of more external influence, and on the other, a wider space was opened—due to the organisation of work teams.

**Restructuring and Professional Autonomy**

Redefining the work of teachers is partly asserted as being a way of empowering teachers and schools and partly asserted as being a solution to efficiency and accountability problems in the public sector. This redefining has been described as changing the teaching profession from an implicit, tacit, craft-oriented and oral working culture to an explicit, discursive, theory informed and literate working culture.

There are, however, different opinions about whether restructuring is enlarging or restricting the scope for professional autonomy. On one hand, we get an image of professionalisation of teachers, school development and empowerment of teachers: “…the most powerful dynamic of restructuring of today is the shift from a technical to a professional view of teaching” (Murphy, 1993, p. 15), what Rallis (1990) describes as “…an elevated conception of teaching” (p. 15). On the other hand, the focus on targets and results implies a “technical rationality”, turning education into a technical process. Teachers are reconstructed from being well-informed with a professional code of ethics, into classroom technicians who deliver and assess a curriculum that has been developed elsewhere. Stephen Ball (1994), for example, describes how restructuring efforts in UK in terms of NC, national test banks and standardisation of teachers’ work all point to “… an increase in the technical elements of teachers’ work and a reduction of the professional” (p. 49).

In this section we will discuss this theme in relation to our two sources of data. On a rhetorical level the reforms are connected to a discussion of teachers becoming more professional. This is most obvious in the Finnish and Swedish policy documents. More interesting regarding teachers professional autonomy, however, is to look for what kind of tasks, demands and qualifications that are asked for across the different steering documents, as well as what kind of responsibilities and decisions that are left to the teachers in each respective country.

**The Implicit Teacher in Policy Documents**

The steering documents do not only explicitly make demands and give directions to teachers. The way the documents are constructed influences teachers’ tasks in that they are asked to do different things. The teacher is thereby constructed in a more indirect and implicit way. The implicit teacher is not the teacher asked for in the texts but the teacher needed to manage the texts. What kinds of “assignments” are given to the teachers? Are the teachers responsible for delivery and implementation only or for formulation of intentions and selection of content as well? Below we will
discuss these aspects of professional autonomy related to tools of governance and inscription of curriculum areas across the countries.

Two dimensions in how the teachers are being governed can be discerned. First, we find a difference between the teacher as a deliverer versus the teacher defined as a “maker” of the curriculum. In Norway the steering documents tell the teacher what he/she shall deliver. In the other countries, teachers are more or less invited to take part in the selection and construction of the content. Second, there is a difference between direct and indirect governing. While Norway is an example of direct governing (the teacher is told to do certain things, such as cover certain content areas and teach by certain methods), Sweden is an example of an indirect governing (the teacher is told to accomplish certain things). How this is fulfilled is up to the Swedish teachers to decide as long as it is in accordance with the basic values of schools.

Furthermore, the curricula texts differ in the way they express the content of schooling. One aspect is the level of detail—another points to whether the content is expressed as goals for the pupils or knowledge areas to teach. Yet another difference is between the formulation of goals/objectives for learning and expected results from learning. School subjects are also treated differently—as hybrid knowledge areas, disciplines or qualities of knowing. The four countries vary in these respects. The Swedish documents express goals for pupils to reach, while the Finnish documents define criteria for expected learning results. The Norwegian curricula texts identify knowledge areas the teachers are supposed to cover but say little about expected learning results.

All these differences give different tasks to teachers and ask for different qualifications. To deliver a pre-packed, specified content is something different to selecting and organising the content to teach on the local level. To see to that the students are exposed to certain content areas is something different to making sure they learn certain content areas. To teach a school subject as a discipline is different to teaching based on questions formulated by the pupils. Thus the different tasks ask for different kinds of knowledge—not only in terms of knowledge areas to cover but also in terms of how the professional knowledge is organised. Once again, the most obvious difference is between Sweden and Norway. In Sweden, the teachers’ knowledge base is defined in professional qualities, such as being able to interpret goals, select content and methods to go with it, while the professional knowledge for Norwegian teachers is defined as the capacity to realise and fulfil teaching so that it is in accordance with predefined curricula objectives.

**Professional Space from the Teachers’ Perspectives**

In the interviews the teachers talk about changes in the profession in a different way compared with the steering documents. They express the opinion that they are increasingly being asked to do things that go beyond their “real work” as teachers. Upbringing and social tasks take more and more of their time as well as new tasks related to school development. In that way the professional space is diminished,
since the teachers have to take the time to do things that do not belong to their professional core activities. This, of course, depends on what are considered to be their core activities. The teachers seem to advocate a more "traditional", ideal teacher—a teacher teaching a class. The Swedish teachers, however, point out that they now are responsible for individual students' learning, in contrast to their previous task of teaching. The Norwegian teachers also seem to be more inclined to take on the responsibility for the learning of their students.

From the teachers' perspectives it is partly an issue of a shrinking space for doing the "real teaching job" and partly an issue of what it means to be a teacher. In the interviews, the teachers deliver different opinions about the meaning of professionalism. It seems as if the Danish teachers are in favour of traditional teacher professionalism and, therefore, do not care too much about the new demands. They seem threatened but fight back, so to speak. The Finnish teachers also give an impression of keeping to the traditional teacher role—and they do not seem to experience a pressure to change that. In that sense the Finnish teachers do not seem as late modern as their documents. The Norwegian teachers, on the other hand, seem less traditional than their steering documents. The Norwegian teachers integrate the new demands into their teaching role, while the Swedish teachers seem to redefine their jobs.

Restructuring and Space for Professional Judgement

It is impossible to answer yes or no to the question of whether restructuring implies a professionalisation or deprofessionalisation of teachers. Regarding the space for professional decisions, it has been opened in some respects and closed in others—and in different ways in the different countries. Another aspect is the redefinition of the meaning of professionalism. We will illustrate this complexity by comparing the situations in Sweden and Norway representing two different restructuring strategies on a policy level while at the same time the two countries seem quite close in teaching traditions.

The Swedish teachers are constructed in the steering documents as *curriculum makers* (they are expected to formulate goals for teaching, select content as well as methods and formulate criteria for giving marks) while the Norwegian teachers are constructed mainly as *curriculum deliverers*. The rhetoric of professional empowered teachers is almost lacking in the Norwegian documents. However, the Norwegian teachers seem the most content with the reforms. The Swedish teachers, who rhetorically have been given an important part in the restructuring of the Swedish school system, do not seem to experience that. They seem to be uncertain and ask for help and further education in order to handle the situation.

In the case of Sweden, the starting point was a situation determined by a quite long history of centralisation—where the state has formulated not only the content of schooling but also what is considered to be "good" teaching. The evaluation of the pupils' knowledge has been governed by national standardised tests within the frame...
of a relativistic marking system. Against this background, restructuring in Sweden has created a situation where the teachers are supposed to discuss and select content as well as methods, to formulate goals as well as criteria for giving marks. Quite a large space for professional judgement is thus opened up against a background of a history of a rather restricted space. It is not surprising that the teachers are not prepared for this “shock-professionalisation”. Besides, the Swedish teachers are not only asked to perform all these new tasks, they are at the same time exposed to external pressures, like, for example, competing with other schools, raising their individual salaries and helping all pupils to get a pass. All this interferes with the teachers’ possibilities of using the space for professional judgement and decisions.

The situation in Norway seems to be in many respects the opposite. Teachers are not given a large space for judgements and decisions. They are “given” the content and methods—but the space for evaluation seems to be quite large. The state prescribes—in detail—the content of schooling. Although the Norwegian teachers talk about the pressure from the NC, it does not appear to interfere with their professionalism. It is more like a support. However, the price for the situation in Norway is a strongly centralised curriculum that is somewhat difficult to combine with the increasing demands for flexibility and individual solutions within the school system.

Concluding Remarks

The results from the project show similarities as well as differences in the ways restructuring efforts inscribe the teachers both in the policy documents and from the perspective of how the teachers see and define their professional role. The project has been exploratory. It is based on a restricted selection of policy texts and interviews. The results should, therefore, be considered as tendencies for further investigation and not as proven “facts”. Having said that, we will end this argument by making a few reflections concerning the results.

The policy texts inscribe extended professional responsibilities for teachers in all four countries. Teachers are requested to skip their traditional classroom teacher role and become curriculum planners and entrepreneurs inside and outside classrooms, able to communicate their priorities, goals and results vis-à-vis colleagues, parents and others. The teacher interviews give a more nuanced and varied picture of, on the one hand, a traditional teacher resisting a growing pressure from parents and other external sources and, on the other, a “modern” teacher, more oriented towards the individual pupil and issues of up-bringing. The extended demands for results and performance indicators are not strong in the teacher interviews (except for the Swedish teachers, who describe a new responsibility for the pupils’ learning). This result may be an effect of the selection of teachers, but also of the time when the interviews were done.

While restructuring seems to have implied a narrowing of the teachers’ work and an increased control on the one hand, it also seems to have opened up new
possibilities for the teachers’ professional space. The restructuring measures must be seen in relation to the national contexts and the interaction between the different parts of the reforms and teaching traditions. An interesting question is, for example, how one should understand the fact that the Finnish steering documents are so “late modern” while Finnish teachers seem so traditional. And, likewise, why the Norwegian steering documents carry so many “early modern” traces while the Norwegian teachers seem so late modern. Along the same line, we could reflect on why the Swedish teachers most strongly express the view that they are given the task of accomplishing learning among the pupils. Although differences in national contexts are probably more influential than differences in the reform constructions, the meaning of the differences regarding how the relationship between state, school and teachers has been redesigned should be considered. Did the frame curriculum in Finland allow for teachers to continue as before to a larger extent than in the other countries? And although the Swedish reforms did not ask teachers to do certain things, they were obliged to decide for themselves, which seems to have resulted in a strong sense of obligation.

The main difference between tasks given in the steering documents and teachers’ responses seems, however, to be the difference between the sharpened demands concerning learning outcomes in the steering documents and the teachers’ emphasis on social questions and up-bringing in the interviews. This demonstrates the limited significance of the steering documents as compared with tradition and other circumstances. Societal and social changes put the teachers in a situation that makes certain responses unavoidable.

Notes

1. The project was organised as a collaborative research project between four senior researchers from Nordic countries and was funded by the Joint committee of Nordic Social Science Research Councils (NOS-S). It lasted for a period of three years. For information about the project see Klette et al. (2000) and Klette et al. (2002).
2. The comparisons were based on case descriptions and more systematic comparisons of steering documents and teacher interviews in each country. As examples of steeering documents, see, for example, Note 8.
3. This does not mean that we see teachers as obedient servants of the state, implementing whatever the state level decides.
4. In educational research, school reforms have often been treated as a starting point for school development and, as a consequence, what is happening in schools is seen as an implementation process. We prefer to see reforms just as much as responses to social changes as starting points for changes.
6. There are different ways to characterise this phase, such as reflexive modernity, post-modernity, high-modernity or second-modernity. To avoid the discussion of whether this phase means the end of modernity or modernity coming to its peak or something else, we want to use what we consider a more neutral designation, namely “late modernity”. By this term we simply refer to highly differentiated and complex modern societies.
7. For the case of Norway our analyses were based on the 1997 Curriculum plan. A new national curriculum “Kunnskapsloftet” [Knowledge Promotion] was, however, launched in 2006/2007 giving a larger space to the professionals to define knowledge areas as well as teaching methods.

8. Curricula documents in the respective countries:
   Denmark (1994): “Aims and central knowledge and proficiency areas”, which must be followed.
   Denmark (1995): “Curriculum Guidelines”, which the schools may follow if they do not choose to make their own local curriculum.
   Finland (1994): “Framework Curriculum for basic education”.
   Finland (1999): “The criteria for graduating evaluation in the basic education”.
   Norway (1996): “National Curriculum for 10 years’ compulsory schooling”.
   Sweden (1994): “National Curriculum for compulsory schooling”.
   Sweden (1996): “Syllabuses and grading criteria”.

9. The responsibility is on the municipality, but, as a consequence, teachers seem to “take over” this responsibility. There has been quite a lot of worry that teachers, as a result, will lower the demands for passing, although that does not seem to be the case.

10. Ongoing analyses of restructuring efforts reflects of course prior history, national context and political situation in the respective countries analysed. The global discourse tends, however, to be held on a general level indicating that restructuring mechanisms have the same implications all over the world (see, for example, Ball, 2000).

References


