

# Assessment policies and cultural responsive assessment in Norway

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Compared to other countries in the Western world, Norway has been characterised as reluctant to the implementation of monitoring devices and accountability policies. One interpretation is that ideologies behind such policies represent a break with national values and the traditional notion of schooling. Equity is recognised as one of the distinguishing features of the Norwegian education model and the ideology has given rise to a comprehensive education system (Imsen, Blossing & Moos, 2016). This system emphasises equal opportunities and access to the educational system regardless of social background, gender, ethnicity and geographical location and no streaming according to abilities (Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006). More than 96% of Norwegian students attend the public school system and most private schools are Montessori primary schools (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017). Several national policies for educational assessment exist that are designed to assist schools in implementing equal opportunities for all students.

## Compulsory school

Compulsory school comprises 7 years of primary and 3 years of lower secondary school. Students with special needs receive special education or adapted education within the local school. There are no sets or streaming and students cannot redo a school year.

With respect to economic means, the municipalities receive funding from the state in terms of block grants.

Norwegian primary school children are not graded, rather, formative assessment should be used (Lovdata, 2006) to provide students, teachers and parents with information about students' learning and achievements. Grading is implemented at the lower secondary level. Students are mainly graded by their subject teacher with two exceptions; 1) national tests which are computer based with automated scoring implemented and 2) exams which are scored and graded by independent external scorers. Students apply for further schooling mainly based on teacher grades. In addition, student diplomas will comprise one or two exam grades.

## The Education Act

Public schooling is and has been (since 1936) regulated through an education act and a national curriculum. These define the overall purposes of public schooling, as well as for the individual subjects (Sivesind, 2008; Bachmann, 2008). The current education act represents a regulating tool and strong authoritative force, since it secures the individuals' right to public education and special needs education. It also includes requirements with regard to the formal qualifications of teachers and the responsibilities of the school, the municipalities and the governmental authorities to provide education for all students (The Education Act, 1998). Assessment for learning is a national policy in Norway, and is included in the Education act.

## **The national curriculum**

The national curriculum can be characterised as an informative tool, but has an authoritative force because it is legally binding. The general ideological basis for the national curriculum is provided by the Core Curriculum and Quality Framework for Primary and Secondary Education, while the Subject Curriculum gives directions for each of the subjects.

## **The Quality Assessment System**

The National Quality Assessment System (NQAS – later renamed as QAS) was introduced in 2003, identifying assessments that would provide information about student achievement at different educational levels from the individual student level, to the school level, school district level and national level (Elstad, Nortvedt, Turmo, 2009). National tests were introduced in 2004 and a few years later, national mapping tests were introduced. The international large-scale studies were identified as tools for monitoring the Norwegian educational system.

The development of QAS can be divided into two phases (OECD, 2011). While the main focus in the first phase was to make actors at all administrative levels accountable for achieved educational outcomes, the second phase accentuates data use for learning and improvement. In the policy rhetoric, formative purposes were from the beginning put forward, underscoring that the students outcomes of the national tests and other assessment tools included in QAS were to be used for learning and development purposes on an individual as well as a system level (Skedsmo, 2009; Skedsmo, 2011). Allerup and colleagues (2009) claim that national test results are used for control and accountability purposes, while mapping tests are used formatively.

## **Assessment for Learning**

Assessment for learning is a national policy, regulated by the Education Act. The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training is responsible for implementing national educational policies, and has developed a resource bank and offers extensive professional development opportunities (<https://www.udir.no/laring-og-trivsel/vurdThe ering/>). The Assessment for Learning Programme offered by the directorate has been evaluated by the OECD who found that, the implementation of assessment for learning as a classroom practice were less successful than anticipated mainly due to lack of support and local resources (Hopfenbeck et al., 2013). Both Hopfenbeck et al. (2013) and Nortvedt, Santos and Pinto (2016) propose that the uptake is delayed because training is too general, not focusing on and highlighting what is good assessment for learning practices in the different school subjects.

## **Migrant students in Norwegian compulsory schools**

In the school year 2015/2016 approximately 14.3% of the students in compulsory education have an immigrant background (The Directorate for Education and Training, 2016). This number has been stable for some years. (The large number of children seeking asylum, coming to Norway in the last part of 2015, will not be visible in the national statistic until the 2017 reporting.) . Two groups of students are captured by the categorization Norwegian governments are applying; 1) students immigrating to Norway and who are born in a different country, and 2) students born in Norway but who has parents born in another country. Approximately 43,000 students (7%) of the total student population have immigrant background and receive specially adapted Norwegian instruction (Norwegian as a second language). This number was expected to raise to 8% during 2016 when the newly arrived asylum seekers come to school and should be verified in the next round of reporting.

## Cultural responsive assessment in Norwegian schools

Literature searches for 'assessment' and 'minority student' or 'multilingual student' or 'bilingual students' or 'immigrants' and 'Norway' and 'school' revealed in total 10 relevant papers, book chapters and thesis, 8 in Norwegian and 2 in English. The papers all focus on students' linguistic or reading skills and how poor skills cause difficulties when assessing minority students.

Several of the papers refer to results from large scale assessment; either referring to results from national tests or to PISA samples (Randen 2015; Hvistendal, 2008, 2006; Özerk 2009; Engen & Kulbrandstad, 2004), others refer to tests of Norwegian linguistic skills (e.g. Ringeriksmaterialet) used to map students' comprehension of and reading abilities in Norwegian.

Further studies are classroom studies of how students and teachers interact in multilingual classrooms. Özerk, 2001 observed students and teachers verbal interaction and questioning in a classroom, while Tuveng and Wold (2008) discuss how students adhere to teachers expectations about subject specific vocabulary in Norwegian and how this masks problems with understanding (such as students not asking for help). Askeland and Aamotsbakke (2010) look at reading subject specific texts in religious education and natural sciences in second language classrooms, and discuss the use of pre-reading strategies and dialogue (feedback) about textual content to ensure comprehension.

In addition, our searches located one paper looking at pedagogical strategies for enhancing student performance on the national reading tests (Özerk, 2009). Özerk discusses how he developed a model – the NEIS<sup>1</sup> model – for enhanced understanding and participation in developing reading skills in students in grades 5 through 8, and how the application of this model in one school raised minority students' result on the national reading comprehension test in 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

The most surprising outcome of the review is perhaps what we have not found: none of the articles discuss how students with migrant backgrounds might be assessed. Nor how culture/cultural background/cultural ways of knowing might be understood in an educational context, or how migrant students might feel about the assessment situations they experience as part of their schooling. This highlights the importance of the ACRAS project, focusing on aiding culturally responsive assessment in schools for migrant students.

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<sup>1</sup> NEIS (Naturlig, Enaktiv, Ikonisk, Symbolsk) Natural, anActive, Iconic and Symbolic) representations to enhance vocabulary and reading strategies in 7-8 grade students.

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