

THE REFLECTIVE CITIZEN – GENERAL DESIGN EDUCATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

With the Norwegian 2006 curriculum, the thoughts of a global responsibility in terms of a wide understanding of sustainability was introduced in general education in Art and Design education from 1st grade through lower secondary school (6-15 years). The focus of individual expression that dominated the subject during the charismatic paradigm of self-expression has in the documents to some extent been replaced by the focus on citizenship and user participation. The introduction, or rather *reintroduction* of the concept of citizenship in the Norwegian Art and design subject, has led to a revitalisation of the previously prized concept of the useful, seen as lasting everyday objects that can enhance the daily-life without disintegrating environmental, social or cultural values.

Keywords: General design education, citizenship, sustainability, citizenpride and citizenspirit

1 INTRODUCTION

Design education in general education, 1st – 10th grade in Norway has suffered from being referred to as simply a ‘break in between’ or the ‘possibility of enjoyment’ rather than having worth as a knowledge area. This view of the practical design subject as less important than theoretical subjects such as mathematics or languages has to be challenged. As a consequence of international ‘audits’ of educational standards and student levels, politicians and educational milieus have during the last decade revived some of the more traditional educational approaches. This restoration thinking has combined the traditional conservatism and new liberalism to promote the competition aspect in schools [21]. Concepts such as quality, competence, product, and excellence and the ambition to rebuild the school with a common national knowledge base as its core mark this political direction [22]. The new demands in general design education can be explained from this restorative school politic [20]. The wish has been to strengthen the demand for knowledge and to support more traditional knowledge and skill content in all education, also the aesthetical fields. This restoration of traditional values and reintroduction of ideologies, where design is seen as a knowledge subject contribution to everyday reflectivity, participation, and citizenship enables a new approach to the area in general education [8].

2 RESTORATION THINKING AND QUALITY

“Sløyd (craft/design) should activate both the body and the mind, reason, heart, and hand. It should, through the child’s reality, point from childhood towards the grown person’s responsibility as a citizen” [5]. This quote though 80 years old promotes the concept of citizenship and resounds in the ideologies that guide today’s design education in general education in Norway. This focus on a common knowledge base as a steppingstone towards innovation, quality workmanship, and perspectives on sustainability issues is essential in today’s curriculum.

Knowledge about form, colour and composition is vital for the creation of products that functions, and to successfully communicate through visual messages. This knowledge can contribute to personal development, which is a requirement for resolute creative idea development, visual communication and production. Such knowledge can improve the opportunity to participate in democratic decision-making processes in a society where more and more information is communicated visually [6].

Design education is seen as a field that spans more than the charismatic tradition where free-expression was seen as the ideal. The former focus on individuality as the sole quality standard is fading. Emotivism within the subject, personification of the factual, where connecting evaluation standards to individual preferences becomes an instrumentalisation of individuality [7], is finally recognised as an invitation to unqualified taste judgements. The rejection of contextual quality or workmanship standards paves the way for market liberalism where media and market forces unchallenged by design education in general education becomes the biggest educator within the aesthetical subjects. The knowledge content and purpose of the design subject in general education has changed in recognition of this dilemma.

Quality discussions in a societal and sustainable perspective in the school subject are introduced to challenge media campaigns of fashions, trends, and constructed consumption needs. The contextual approach within design in general education demands a discussion into the quality also in relation to the pupils' work. This has never been, and will never be an easy discussion to venture into, as the aesthetical subjects in their educational practice still struggle with combining the polarity of the charismatic heritage where individual expression and personal development were the only ideals, and the craft tradition where workmanship, principles and elements of design, form and function, and usefulness are valued [8].

The restoration of the concept of citizenship provides the groundwork for a new ideal – that of the innovative, useful, lasting and sustainable product that is beneficial for a global community rather than the singular individual's personal emotions. The anthropocentric view is replaced by eco-philosophy, where the individual is a part of the world rather than on top of it [9]. The restoration of the previous *sløyd*/design quality ideals, such as tangible values within materials, sustainable lasting objects as the end result, and workmanship and innovation in solutions are visible within white papers and curricula from the mid 90ies and onward. The restoration of knowledge based education rather than a charismatic focus on child art, promotes a focus on providing a design education for a qualification of future reflective citizen through general education.

2.1 Knowledge networks and ideological change

Lars Lindström addresses how some research and knowledge hubs influence the development of school curricula in his introduction to the anthology *Nordic visual arts education in transition: A research review* [10]. He highlights how the context for the research community influences the research outcome, and shows who are the important contributors to the surrounding designdidaktikk debate. In Norway the research network *DesignDialog* is mentioned as central. It has its point of origin in the doctoral program at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO) and The Art and Design Education at the Oslo University College (HiO). With its focus on design education in a wider perspective – from primary level to university, and as dialogues of design in society, *DesignDialog* has been influential on the direction of research within design education.

The structure in general education in Norway, where design education is mandatory as a part of the subject Art and Crafts for the first ten years (6-15 years), also allows for a continuous education until university by choosing *SSP - Formgivingsfag* (Art and design) in upper secondary school (16-18 years). The 13 years continuous school became a reality with the Norwegian curriculum of 2006 [6]. *SSP - Formgivingsfag* can qualify for education at university level. By choosing design related subjects in combination with advanced mathematics, students can i.e. qualify for the engineering, design and architecture educations at Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU).

In Norway the discussions concerning the legitimisation and quality in design education are therefore not restricted to professional training at university level, but have to include discussions on general education as a starting point for a common knowledge basis. *DesignDialog*'s visions that aims towards a strengthening of democratic participation, innovation and constructive dialogues of design throughout all educational levels and in society at large [11], can be seen in several sources in regards to design education and can be read as an introduction of the new vision for the ideological foundation for general design education. Some of the leading figures in the network have been involved with authoring former, as well as the present design curriculum for both higher and general education.

3 A VISION FOR A NEW IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

The subject area in Norway has throughout its 120 years long history in general education been recognised as important enough to be listed as mandatory. The traditions in the classroom practice are

strong, and in the history of the school subject, the curriculum philosophy has not always been the same as the paradigms that guide the educational day-to-day practice. To show how a vision for a new ideological foundation has been shaped by changes in philosophy as well as continuity in practice, a short history of this complex subject area in general education is necessary.

3.1 Back to the Roots

In 1889, when the subject area was introduced into Norwegian general education the subject area in general education was divided into textile craft, sløyd (woodwork and metal), and drawing. The purpose was to enhance economy and provide better social situations for the future citizen. The collective perspective on maintaining self-sufficiency at the local level was a basis for a better life for the many in society. The focus that could be found in the first curriculum for the subjects was that of the lasting objects and the knowledge and skill that was useful for everyday life.

Sløyd (craft/design) should: [...] train the mind, determination and judgment, further the sense of 'good form and colour' and familiarize them with making the work thorough and beautiful. The subject Sløyd should help to create happy, determined, and enterprising people [12].

This was particularly strong in the craft curricula of sløyd and textile [13]. However, in Norway the introduction of the charismatic view of *child art* that influenced drawing became the ideal that saturated the next three curricula when the subject area became one subject – *Forming* [4]. However the practice tradition emphasising skill and knowledge of the useful was prevailing in classroom education in design.

The practice gap that existed between the tradition of design and drawing has to some extent begun narrowing. Design education in general education has removed itself from the expressive and romantic ideals that were the former dominating ideology and as a result a new debate was launched that has had an impact on the understanding of the subject in school. User participation has been highlighted, and the collective perspective has been reintroduced alongside a discussion of useful knowledge in terms of understanding the new visual world and reclaiming the concept of skill towards a reflective citizen. The contemporary debate can in light of this be seen as a more level debate than previous in the history of the subject in general education. Collective values and societal anchoring is replacing some of the expressive ideals, and as such revitalises the concept of citizenship that was raised in the Sløyd and Textile tradition from before the war.

3.2 In Higher Education

Some of these trends that are clearly evident in Norwegian general education can also be seen in higher education within design and architecture. The focus on design efforts is found in the UN - Millennium Development Goals [14], The Kyoto Design Declaration [15], and UK Royal Society of Art Manifesto [16]. An example of the international movement towards the vision of the new ideological foundation is seen in the Kyoto Design declaration from Cumulus – the International Association of Universities and Colleges of Art, Design and Media. It specifies under the headline *From Education to Global Responsibility*, that:

In order to fulfil its declared mission to contribute to sustainable social, environmental, cultural and economic development for current and future generations, the Cumulus members will commit themselves to accepting their part in the further education of our youth within a value system where each of us recognizes our global responsibility to build sustainable, human-centred, creative societies [15].

The UN – Millennium goals also highlights a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty and secure sustainable development, and has resulted in projects such as the Base of the Pyramid at TU Delft [17], where design is done within this wide sustainable perspective.

What this common new ideological base within the knowledge content from 1st grade to professional practice might entail is as yet not addressed in research. The reason to address this as a vision for a new ideology rather than a new paradigm is that it is not as yet dominating the *practice field*. It is in a phase where it is competing with the existing practice and philosophy. Research into the resulting practice will be valuable in ascertaining whether the practice continues unchanged, or if the new purpose and ethical discussions leads to a revision of the education at different levels.

3.3 Introducing Citizenspirit and Citizenpride

The concept of the citizen is as mentioned previously not a new one in design education within general education in Norway. It can be traced back to the subject roots, where the capability to contribute to economic self-sufficiency or societal growth was important. This short description of the history of design education in compulsory education shows the introduction, or rather *reintroduction* of the concept of citizenship in Norwegian general design education [4]. The renewed focus has again led to a revitalisation of the previously prized concept of the useful, seen as lasting everyday objects that can enhance the daily-life without disintegrating environmental, social or cultural values.

The perspective of the citizen has changed along with societal needs, and related to the school subject also in concert with the larger design field and how it is interpreted into the educational thinking at different eras. The concept in discussions concerning design and education seen in a pre-war setting brings the legitimate taste of the middle class to mind. In early educational literature it was explored in relation to being qualified in designing your new home.

Every person should wish to have their own home, solidly built and handsomely furnished and fixed and located at a place in bright light and clear air. And when the houses are grouped together in towns, every person should have as much citizenspirit that they want to make the whole gathered group of human dwellings a beautiful sight, and not a sight so repugnant that it is hard to bear for those who has an eye for beauty [18].

The spirit and pride of a citizen can here be understood as tied to conforming to a more rigid view of good or bad taste. Criteria for participation were more clearly articulated as the ability to conform to a set of standards that was seen as the ruling taste. Today however, the concept of citizenship is coloured by individuality as well responsibilities, and signifies a lot more than the conservatism of good taste in design.

To discuss the concept of citizenspirit as well as the concept of citizenpride in a new societal perspective opens up for interesting avenues to explore in relation to new design content in general education. While it previously was closely connected to the 'good taste' it can now be more relevant to discuss it in terms of the reflective citizen that is capable of promoting a sustainable future through choices and actions. Just as important as the aesthetical ramifications, are the environmental, cultural, social and economical ramifications of the choices that are made. Citizenpride and citizenspirit in this light can be claimed to be just as much a global as a local endeavour. It is not enough to consider whether your house is suited to the next in terms of aesthetical qualities, but rather how it also incorporates the ethical demanded i.e. in terms of energy consumption, a legal workforce, non-damaging materials, and universal design.

These concepts are very important in general design education. This is where the ethical aspect of consumerism can be addressed at a universal arena. Everybody has to attend compulsory education, and as such the values and knowledge achieved in design education at this level is the basis for the adult life and all the choices that will follow. To be a reflective citizen also includes the aspect of being the ethical consumer, the aware user, and democratic participant. While the higher education institutions can educate the responsible design professionals, the market is still in need of the reflective consumer to make qualified choices in relation to ethical considerations. General education as a whole, and design education in particular is concerned with this development.

In light of this it can be claimed that these concepts – thought not formally spelled – can be recognised in the Norwegian *Principles for education* that was authored for Primary and Secondary school (6-18 years) with the Curriculum of 2006. The schools mandate is to: "stimulate the pupils and apprentices in their personal development and identity, towards developing ethical, social and cultural competence and ability to understand democracy and democratic participation".

With *Nordisk kurs* (Nordic course for Art and Crafts teachers) within design that was held at Drammen in 2009 [19], it became visible that citizenship, the useful and questions of quality in everyday objects has been reintroduced in the debate of general design education across borders. The course theme sustainability was connected to the development of the local environment. Pride in the local community and real influence in design processes was highlighted as important components in shaping artefacts and surroundings. Instead of being old-fashioned concepts related to the middle-class taste, today's restoration of concept such as citizenpride and citizenspirit results in the critique of an amputated understanding of democracy as one person's rights, in favour of democracy as one person's responsibility for societal development through being a qualified participant [20] [21] [22].

4 THE RESTORATION OF THE CITIZEN AND THE USEFUL

The new direction in higher education, in research and also in Norwegian general education curriculum thinking, reintroduces concepts and issues relating to citizenship and responsibility for the common environment. The previous thoughts of the subject in general education as simply a 'break in between' or the 'possibility of enjoyment', is no longer compatible with the new visions for the subject. Design rely on the thoughts of the useful, the lasting products, democratic participation, and social responsibility through a global focus on local sustainability. It is individual knowledge at a local level with global consequences.

Questions of quality in light of perspectives on sustainability and growth are not solely the responsibility of the designer, but of the consumer and client with a developed *citizenspirit* and *citizenpride*. The Art and Design education societies are responsible for the development of global sustainability through the creation of products, while general education is responsible for the development of global sustainability through the education of qualified consumers to choose these products.

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