



## Book Review

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Turid Løyte Harboe

«... dyktiggjøre til at danne mennesker»

*En kritisk studie av endringer i norsk*

*lærerutdanning 1930–2010*

Universitetet i Oslo (PhD diss.)

2024, 316 pp.

Turid Løyte Harboe has written a comprehensive dissertation on the history of Norwegian teacher education 1930-2010. Harboe takes her point of departure in the tradition of new cultural history influenced by Michel Foucault, which has a special interest in the linguistic and power-related dimensions of history (for a contextualization of this tradition, see Westberg and Primus 2023). The focus is on the political debate on eight basic teacher education reforms. In line with such a Foucaultian perspective, a special interest is given to the shifts and changes in the way in which teacher education is understood and discussed.

Harboe's thesis is based on extensive source materials. In line with many studies in this field of research, Harboe has chosen to study government policy and report texts to be able to handle a comparatively long period of study. This source material includes Norway's public inquiries (NOU), parliamentary material from the parliament (*Storting*), laws and regulations, as well as a wide range of other documents concerning various forms of investigations and evaluations. It is an impressive empirical investigation that Harboe has carried out.

After an introductory part, which consists of three chapters presenting the dissertation topic, its method and a historical background on Norwe-

gian teacher education 1826-1929, the results of the dissertation are presented in three parts. The first part (chapter 4) deals with the discussions of the 1930s on teacher education in connection with two teacher education reforms: LU30 and LU38. This chapter draws attention to the conflict that arose regarding the basis and function of teacher education. Traditionally, teacher education had been regarded as a public education institution, where concepts such as people, the people's culture and nation were central. Nevertheless, the debate during the 1930s shows that teacher education also began to be viewed in new ways. The international context was highlighted, and teacher education was linked to an international competitive situation between states. The scientific basis of teacher education also began to be noticed, and the development of science and psychology was used as an argument for a teacher education reform. Harboe describes this as an expression of an interwar optimism about science, in which, among other things, attention was paid to Wilhelm Wundt's experimental psychology, and where the importance of the teachers' scientific knowledge was emphasized. Science could both help to combat the bad reputation of the old teacher training institutions, and also make teachers more confident in their professional practice.

The question that thus arose was whether teacher education should be based mainly on a national culture, or whether it should be international. This debate also included the question of the position of the English language in teacher education and the development

of teacher education during the interwar period. International child psychology, European reform pedagogy and school hygiene came to influence the content of teacher education. With the interest of reform pedagogy and child psychology in children's natural development, Harboe also draws attention to how a conflict was created between the representatives of these ideas, and those who advocated a religious Christian understanding of education.

In this context, Harboe draws attention to the concept of "two-culture" (*tokultur*) that has been used to describe Norway's two-tier culture during this period: a Danish-oriented urban and elite white-collar culture, which was contrasted with a rural, Norwegian and hereditary peasant culture. Harboe sees the debate on teacher education as an extension of this discussion and as a struggle over what values the Norwegian nation should be built on.

An important issue that attracted attention during the 1930s was thus also the political role of teacher education. Harboe argues that regardless of political background, the relationship between public education and democracy was emphasized in connection with LU30: democracy requires enlightened citizens who can act as democratic subjects. However, Harboe argues in this regard that the debate had a Danish Grundtvigian starting point, where academic education was not required for taking the role of a citizen. Instead, everyone was equally qualified to participate in the public debate. In this respect, popular education was about realizing such an equal political vision.

As a result, Harboe argues that the purpose of teacher education during this period was that it should form teacher

personalities who could strengthen the people's culture through public information and popular education. The teachers were perceived as cultural personalities and mediators of popular national culture, who intended to develop the people by strengthening their own culture. Therefore, they should also be close to the culture that the children have come to know in their homes.

The second part of the dissertation deals with the period 1945-1987 in two chapters: chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5 has the appropriate title: the welfare state. The starting point is the emerging Norwegian welfare state, with faith in an efficient state administration, the modern social sciences, and the importance of a so-called educational society. The chapter thus deals with how teacher education became an important part of both the development of the Norwegian comprehensive school and of the Norwegian welfare state. Teacher education thus began to be interpreted in utilitarian terms, with an emphasis on the social function of education.

Teacher education thus became less a question of public education and *Bildung*, and more of a question of education and training. An important concept in the debate that Harboe draws attention to here is "general education" (*allmennutdanning*). It was a concept that emphasized that teacher education should convey objective knowledge that could form the basis for teachers' teaching methods in the classroom. This concept thus placed greater emphasis on teacher education as an education in methods and techniques – a vocational education, that is – rather than a teacher education that developed the teacher's personality.

Harboe draws attention to how the concept of class teacher became import-

ant in the debate. This concept reflected a development in which teacher education would contribute to the development of a socially equal and democratic unified school, where teacher education would develop teachers' work in school. The teachers should not only convey knowledge but should also be able to meet students with different social backgrounds. In this respect, attention was also paid to the recruitment of student teachers, and voices were raised for a broader social and geographical recruitment of these. Regarding this period, Harboe also analyzes the discussion around the question of whether teachers should be trained as class teachers or subject teachers.

In this quest to educate teachers who could stimulate the development of all students, regardless of social background, psychological and methodological knowledge became important, according to Harboe. She links this to a widespread scientific optimism in the post-war period, where scientific attitudes were linked to the democratization of post-war Europe. In this context, the concept of applied research, which had previously been used in the United States in medicine and technology, also became important, along with the notions of applied educational-psychological science.

Chapter 6 "Welfare State Criticism" deals with the discussion of teacher education from the beginning of the 1970s to the end of the 1980s. The historical background presented here is the culturally critical social debate related to the student uprisings of the 1960s, the criticism of the Vietnam War, and the emphasis on economic growth that characterized the welfare society in the post-war period. In relation to such a

socially critical debate, the question of the autonomy of teacher education vis-à-vis the state was discussed, but also the influence that teachers and students should have over the direction of teacher education. In contrast to a belief in scientific knowledge, a broader concept of practice was now launched, where the interaction between theory and practice was emphasized, and where practical experiences were valued. Concepts of reflective practice were applied, which Harboe links to a broader reflexive turn in the field of professional theory, represented by American theorists such as Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, where the latter's book *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (1983), came to have a major influence on Norwegian teacher education.

The third part of the thesis deals with the period 1988-2010. In chapter 7 "The Knowledge Society," the focus is on the 1980s and early 1990s. The background to the debate on teacher education outlined here consists of the increasing market ideology and the market reforms that are being implemented in Norway, and the discursive changes that are taking place in the public debate. Here, concepts such as the post-industrial society, the information society and the knowledge society gain entry, while at the same time issues of multiculturalism are being addressed.

Harboe also draws attention to a broader educational policy context, where inequality in Norwegian schools is discussed, and poorer learning outcomes in Norwegian schools are criticized. References are made here to the American school crisis report *A Nation at Risk* (1983), which influenced the education policy debate worldwide, and the OECD's criticism of the Norwegian school system.

As a response to this societal and cultural context, the discussion around teacher education changed. In relation to the national and international school crisis debate, and how this was understood in terms of quantifiable and testable knowledge that in accordance with American Human Capital thinking was linked to economic growth, the need to strengthen quality and performance requirements in higher education was presented. At the same time as this neoliberal vision of education and teacher training gained ground, the debate was also marked by a national-conservative turn that emphasized the importance of nation-building and common cultural traditions. Teachers became expected to understand the value of belonging to a culture and the value of passing this culture on to the next generation. Harboe again links this debate to a broader international context, where the importance of the cultural canon and a “back to basics” thought has been formulated by American neoconservative political thinkers, among others.

In this context, which emphasized knowledge and knowledge requirements, arguments were presented for teachers to be trained as subject teachers, with strong subject knowledge. It was also in this context that the exclusive right of teacher education to train teachers was questioned, and proposals were made that teachers in universities and colleges should also be allowed to teach in school. It was also in this context that the concept of “basic knowledge” becomes important: teacher education should educate teachers who can provide children with basic knowledge that gives students a basic and common cultural understanding.

This also provides an understanding of the changes in how the teacher and

its abilities were discussed. During the 1990s, concepts such as the good teacher became important. These were terms that described teachers with an ability to engage students through their personal qualities. Unlike the teachers of the inter-war period, this was not about the teacher’s education, but about the teacher’s teaching ability. Rather than emphasizing the teacher’s knowledge, Harboe argues that a kind of craftsmanship ideal was advocated. The teacher’s personality and teaching skills were primarily interpreted as a means for the students to achieve certain knowledge achievements.

In the concluding empirical chapter 8 “Kompetansesamfunnet” (The Competence Society), Harboe discusses the discussion of the teacher education reforms LU03 and LU10. Harboe points out how these discussions were shaped by concepts of higher quality and better governance, and the discussion that followed the Norwegian results of the PISA surveys. In line with an international debate, this meant that concepts such as knowledge promotion, quality, quality form, and knowledge school became recurring.

In this context, the debate around teacher education continued to change. According to Harboe, professional specialization became central, and the ambition was to create a research-based vocational education with professional weight. The teacher was described as the one who would lead the students’ learning, and the concept of the profession became even more central together with concepts of the teachers’ competencies. The teacher’s competencies – professional competence, development competence, professional ethical competence, didactic competence and social competence – could thus be presented as the core of

the teacher's professional knowledge. Again, Harboe places this in a broader international context, where the OECD-led project "Definition and Selection of Competencies" has developed a theoretical framework for conceptualizing key competencies for the twenty-first century.

As this summary of Harboe's thesis indicates, it is certainly a good PhD thesis. As with all such theses, critical remarks can nevertheless be made. Questions can be raised about what function the theoretical framework based on Foucault really has in this thesis, and whether other theoretical concepts would have been more useful and given the analysis greater precision. For example, would concepts taken from curriculum theory, history of knowledge, critical policy analysis or studies of educational transfer have given further depth to the analysis? This question is raised not least by the important role that both trade union and political actors are given in the analysis.

Above all, I would have wished that this thesis was placed in a broader international research field. Studies of, for example, Swedish teacher education and teacher debate (Linné 1996; Persson 2008; Ringarp 2011) would have been able to provide additional context and contribute to the analysis. Further references to international research, would also have enabled Harboe to show the important contributions that this thesis could make to international research on teacher training and education (for an introduction to this research, see Lefty 2019).

However, these remain minor remarks on a very well-executed piece of work. As this review has shown, it is a rich thesis, full of ideas for further study. It is also a thesis that is well-written and well-structured, and consequently easy

to read. The choice of a long period of study also appears to be successful: it allows the thesis to make real use of the opportunities for overview that historical studies can offer. This also gives us a better understanding of how teacher education and our way of understanding it has developed over time. Thanks to Harboe's ability for a precise and detailed analysis, we thus gain an understanding of the major changes in the public debate on teacher education.

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