



Reform Pedagogy Meets History Education in the Writings of Four Norwegian Gymnasium Teachers (1917–1954)

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Abstract • This article explores relationships between ideas of reform pedagogy and conceptions of history education in the writings of four Norwegian upper secondary school history teachers who worked at the same rural gymnasium, Eidsvoll landsgymnas (ELG), between 1936 and 1939. While expressing support for certain principles of reform pedagogy, their ideas of purposes, content, and methods of history education varied considerably. This article demonstrates diversity within Norwegian reform pedagogy. Although these teachers could agree in criticism of the “old school” and in support of more student-centred and active education, their conceptions of history, as well as their goals for societal development, differed greatly. While one of the teachers saw strengthening national identity as the main goal of history education, others emphasised history education’s role in education for democracy.

Keywords • reform pedagogy (progressive education), history education, gymnasia (upper secondary schools), teachers, Norway

Introduction

Principles of working school/activity school (*arbeidsskole*) were central when the Norwegian secondary school act of 1935 was passed. The committee in charge of preparing the implementation of the school reforms used the term *arbeidsskole* to denote ideas of reform centring around students’ productive activity. The committee emphasised that history was one of the subjects most in need of change, and that the name of the subject had been altered from “history” to “history and social studies” to strengthen social studies.¹ Suggestions that were later implemented in curricula for gymnasia (upper secondary schools) included individual projects, in-depth studies of certain periods, and the use of a greater variety of historical sources and educational resources.²

These ideas of activity school were part of a transnational phenomenon. From the end of the nineteenth century, different movements criticised “old” teaching practices and, under labels such as progressive education, activity pedagogy, new education, and reform pedagogy, promoted “new” ways of teaching and learning. In this article, I use the term reform pedagogy as a broad concept encompassing influences from European and American reform movements, and the term activity school as a translation of *arbeidsskole*. When referring to research on reform pedagogy and progressive education, I generally retain the terms used by the authors.

1 Kirke- og Undervisningsdepartementet, *Innstilling II fra Plankomiteen for den nye skoleordning* (Oslo: KUD, 1938), 3, 31–32, 52–54. All translations from Norwegian in the text have been done by me.

2 *Ibid.*, 5–7, 35, 38–39, 53–56; Anne Helene Høyland Mork. “The Why, What, and How, of History Education in Norwegian and Swedish History Curricula for Upper Secondary Schools (Approximately 1920–1960);” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 49, no. 2 (2024a); *Undervisningsplaner. Den høgre almenskolen etter lov av 10. mai 1935*, (Oslo: Brøgger, 1950).

The aim of this article is to explore relationships between ideas of reform pedagogy and conceptions of history education in the writings of four upper secondary school teachers. Through analysis of texts, primarily journal articles and textbooks, written between 1917 and 1954, I answer the question: Which types of ideas of reform pedagogy are present in the teachers' conceptions of history education? By conceptions of history education, I refer to ideas about purposes, content, and methods of history education. Educational ideas about teaching and learning and historiographical ideas about the nature and driving forces of history are important components of these conceptions.

Comparative studies have emphasised certain characteristics of Norwegian mainstream historiography. Firstly, there has been a particularly consistent emphasis on the nation. The "Norwegian historical school" that emerged in the 1830s was aimed at demonstrating the uniqueness of the Norwegian people. A combination of national and democratic ideas became highly influential in the late nineteenth century, particularly through historian Ernst Sars (1835–1917). In the grand national narrative, the events of 1814 and the Constitution were fundamental, and the dissolution of the union with Sweden in 1905 was seen as confirmation of a story about a struggle for national freedom and democracy.³ Secondly, Marxist materialist conceptions of history were integrated into Norwegian historiography early, foremost by historians Halvdan Koht (1873–1965) and Edvard Bull Sr (1881–1932), who were also politicians and government ministers for the Labour Party. Koht combined national and democratic ideas, inspired by Sars, with Marxist ideas of the driving forces of history, while Bull focused on society rather than nation.⁴

School reforms were carried out during the interwar years and after the Second World War. Following the work of several committees, new school acts were passed in 1935 and 1936. The German occupation (1940–1945) entailed attempts to Nazify the schools, and the collaborative party, *Nasjonal Samling* (NS), played a central part in this. In 1942, the NS teacher organisation, *Norges Lærersamband*, was established with mandatory membership for all teachers. Protests, against this and other Nazification attempts, resulted in the arrest of about 1100 teachers, but the Nazification efforts had little success.⁵ After the war, the reform work was resumed, and goals of democratisation were more explicitly stated in school policy documents than earlier.⁶

Processes of nation-building strongly influenced the development of schooling. In my study of curricular documents for gymnasia in Norway and Sweden (1920–1960), I found that, although the nation is very central in the Norwegian history curricula, there are no formulations about creating love for the fatherland, and no

3 Peter Aronsson et al., "Nordic National Histories," in *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, ed. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 261–75, 281–82; Jarle Simensen, "National and Transnational History: The National Determinant in Norwegian Historiography," in *Nordic Historiography in the 20th Century*, ed. Frank Meyer and Jan Eivind Myhre (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2000), 90–95.

4 *Ibid.*, 96–98; Aronsson et al. (2008), 268–70.

5 Nicola Karcher, "A National Socialist School for Norway: Concepts of Nazification During the German Occupation," *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 5 (2020).

6 Mork (2024a), 227, 231, 233; Rolf Th. Tønnessen, *Læreplaner i nasjonsbyggingsperspektiv. Ei sammenlikning mellom Norge og Tyskland* (Kristiansand: Høgskulen i Volda, 2003), 113–14.

clear shift in the attitude to nationalism during this period.⁷ As pointed out by Jarle Simensen, nationalism was not discredited by the Second World War in Norway, and the years 1940 and 1945 were inserted into the grand national narrative.⁸ However, Simensen also shows that Norwegian nationalism took various forms, and as illustrated by Øystein Sørensen, there were many different, contrasting and partly overlapping, nation-building projects.⁹

The teachers who are the focus of this article – Johan Fredrik Voss, Edvard Brakstad, Bjarne Svare, and Tønnes Sirevåg – taught history at the same public rural gymnasium, Eidsvoll landsgymnas (ELG), between 1936 and 1939. Gymnasia were theoretical upper secondary schools qualifying for university studies. Rural gymnasia were schools providing academically gifted students from the countryside a path to university studies. This school type, which existed from 1914 until 1964, was closely associated with “the Norwegian Movement” (*norskdomsrørsla*), which promoted the use of the written language standard New Norwegian (*nynorsk*, before 1929 called *landsmål*), based on Norwegian dialects.¹⁰ Rural gymnasia were placed in a tension between different traditions of education or Bildung. They were linked to an ideology stressing Norwegian history, language, and culture, but also to the classical humanistic ideals of gymnasia and universities.¹¹

Bildung (*dannelse/danning*) is a complex educational concept encompassing a notion of an indefinite process and of a goal.¹² This duality relates to questions about what to prioritise, the individual and their process, or the goal and its content. Wolfgang Klafki’s description of material and formal theories of Bildung illustrates this duality. Material theories focus on content, while formal theories focus on the student. Klafki divides material theories into an objectivist theory, where the ideal is to convey what one sees as the objective content of a culture, and a classical theory, where one focuses on material that can further certain human qualities. Formal theories are divided into functional theory, which stresses the development of character and powers, and method-based theory, underlining the learning of methods. Klafki’s concept of categorical Bildung is a dialectic combination of elements from the other theories.¹³

7 Mork (2024a).

8 Simensen (2000), 99.

9 Ibid., 94–96; Øystein Sørensen, “Hegemonikamp om det norske: Elitenes nasjonsbyggingsprosjekter 1770–1945,” in *Jakten på det norske: Perspektiver på utviklingen av en norsk nasjonal identitet på 1800-tallet*, ed. Øystein Sørensen (Oslo: Ad notam Gyldendal, 1998).

10 Reidun Høydal, “Upp og fram! Landsgymnaset vert til,” in *Landsgymnaset*, ed. Gudleiv Forr and Helge Vold (Oslo: Samlaget, 2007); Svein Arne Myhren, “‘Uppgaava ligg paa oss...’: Lektorliv og sjølforståing ved landsgymnaset i mellomkrigstida” (Master’s thesis, University of Bergen, 2001); Anne Helene Høyland Mork, “‘An ‘Acropolis’ in Miniature’ and a House that ‘Must be Filled with Spirit and Content’: Ideals of Bildung in the Building of Two Scandinavian Schools in the 1920s,” in *New Perspectives on Educational Resources: Learning Material Beyond the Traditional Classroom*, ed. Karl Christian Alvestad, Kari H. Nordberg, and Hege Roll-Hansen (London: Routledge, 2024b).

11 Høydal (2007), 38; Myhren (2001), 10, 114–20; Mork (2024b), 51.

12 Bernt Gustavsson, *Bildningens dynamik: Framväxt, dimensioner, mening* (Göteborg: Bokförlaget Korpen, 2017), 11–12.

13 Wolfgang Klafki, “Kategorial dannelse: Bidrag til en dannelsesteoretisk fortolkning av moderne didaktikk,” in *Om utdanning: Klassiske tekster*, ed. Erling Lars Dale (Oslo: Gyldendal akademisk, 2001). Mork (2024a), 220.

Sven Sødning Jensen applies Klafki's theories to history education. He stresses the authority of teachers and textbooks in an objectivist theory, as well as the promotion of ideals such as nationalism, in a classical theory of history education. Source criticism is at the heart of formal theories of history education. In functional theory, source criticism trains critical thinking, and in method-based theory, it provides a useful method in many or all situations.¹⁴ There are always combinations of material and formal aspects. Within reform pedagogy, for instance, emphasis was placed on formal aspects, but material aspects were also present.

Reform pedagogy

Reform pedagogy is a multifaceted phenomenon that changed over time. In Europe, Reidar Myhre distinguishes between an initial protest phase until 1914 and a phase of organisation and radicalisation in the interwar years, partly overlapping with a phase of moderation and self-criticism.¹⁵ A shift from more individualistic, child-centred ideals in the 1920s, to stronger emphasis on social aspects in the 1930s, has been indicated in the case of the United States.¹⁶

The ideas of American John Dewey were also highly influential in Europe. Key principles in Dewey's pedagogical philosophy were democracy, activity, growth, experience, communication, cooperation, and connections to students' lives.¹⁷ In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey emphasises the importance of educating members of democratic society to "personal initiative and adaptability" and underlines the individual and the social by presenting education as "a freeing of individual capacity in a progressive growth directed to social aims". As for history education, Dewey argues that the "true starting point of history is always some present situation with its problems", and that economic history, which deals with the common man, is more democratic than political history.¹⁸

European reform movements were diverse. Using the German term *Arbeitsschule*, Georg Kerschensteiner emphasised manual work and citizenship education, while Hugo Gaudig stressed intellectual work and character formation. Swiss Adolphe Ferrière's activity school highlighted growth, life, and activity. Austrian Elsa Köhler, who promoted the concept of activity pedagogy, conducted school experiments in Norway and Sweden in cooperation with Norwegian and Swedish educators.¹⁹ The international organisation the New Education Fellowship was founded in 1921. Among its principles were participation, cooperation, coeducation, and children's interests.²⁰

14 Sven Sødning Jensen, *Historieundervisningsteori* (København: Christian Ejlers' Forlag, 1978), 11, 55–56, 68–70, 79–81; Mork (2024a), 220.

15 Reidar Myhre, *Pedagogisk idéhistorie: fra 1850 til i dag*, 3rd edition (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1985), 40–98.

16 Tomas Englund, *Läroplanens och skolkunskapens politiska dimension* (Göteborg: Daidalos, 2005), 232–34.

17 Anders Burman, "Dewey och den reflekterade erfarenheten," in *Den reflekterade erfarenheten: John Dewey om demokrati, utbildning och tänkande*, ed. Anders Burman (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2014).

18 John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, ed. Patricia H. Hinchey (Gorham, ME: Myers Education Press, 2018), 93, 105, 227, 29.

19 Myhre (1985), 51–78; Elsa Köhler, *Aktivitetspedagogik: en vägledning* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1936), 17–18.

20 Willy Aagre, *Folkeopplyseren: Anna Sethne og den norske reformpedagogikken* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2016), 113–15.

There were political and pedagogical tensions and contradictions within these reform movements. In her study of progressive education in England and Wales, Laura Tisdall distinguishes between utopian progressivists who underlined the freedom of the child, and non-utopian progressivists who argued for the importance of adult leadership.²¹ Ronald W. Evans distinguishes between several strands of progressive education in the United States. Some emphasised the natural development of the child, while others promoted efficiency in education. Mainstream progressivists emphasised student activity and participation, while a more radical strand, reconstructionism, strove for a new social order, stressing social problems and critical thinking.²² In his analysis of progressivism in American schools, Larry Cuban operates with a continuum from teacher-centred to student-centred teaching that includes “hybrids of progressive teacher-centred instruction”, where teachers incorporated progressive elements in teacher-centred approaches.²³

Political affiliations within movements of reform pedagogy varied. Democratic and internationalist aspects have often been highlighted, and for many reformers the creation of more democratic societies was essential.²⁴ However, research has problematised an image of reform pedagogy as exclusively democratic.²⁵ Parallels between certain elements of reform pedagogy and totalitarian ideals of education have also been pointed out.²⁶ Martin Gutmann shows how the concept of people’s community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) provided a bridge between internationalist ideas of New Education and fascism for Swiss educator Alfred Zander.²⁷

The diversity of reform pedagogy is also evident in Norway. Fredrik W. Thue characterises Norwegian reform pedagogy in the interwar years as “ecumenical”, bringing together different actors, traditions, and values.²⁸ Harald Jarning describes “a

21 Laura Tisdall, *A Progressive Education? How Childhood Changed in Mid-Twentieth-Century English and Welsh Schools* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 1–4.

22 Ronald W. Evans, *The Social Studies Wars: What Should We Teach the Children?* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004), 48–52. See also Englund (2005), 229–43.

23 Larry Cuban, *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms 1890–1990*, 2nd edition (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), 6–10.

24 Hermann Röhrs and Volker Lenhart, *Progressive Education Across the Continents: A Handbook* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995); Johan Samuelsson, *Läroverken och progressivismen: Perspektiv på historieundervisningens praktik och policy 1920–1950* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2021), 39–41.

25 Jurgen Herbst, “Toward a Theory of Progressive Education?,” review of *Progressive Education Across the Continents: A Handbook*, ed. Hermann Röhrs and Volker Lenhart, *History of Education Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (1997); Emma Vikström, *Skapandet av den nya människan: Eugenik och pedagogik i Ellen Keys författarskap* (Örebro: Örebro University, 2021), 25–28.

26 Helen Roche, *The Third Reich’s Elite Schools: A History of the Napolas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 109; Sarah Van Ruyskensvelde and Marc Depaep, “Vlaamsche Paedagogiek: Progressive Educationalists and the Construction of a Flemish *Volksgemeinschaft*, 1922–1944,” *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 5 (2020); Anja Giudici, Thomas Ruoss, and Giorgia Masoni, “Nativist Authoritarian Far-right Flirtations with Progressive Education: Exploring the Relationship in Interwar Switzerland,” *Schweizerischen Zeitschrift für Bildungswissenschaften* 41, no. 2 (2019).

27 Martin Gutmann, “Engineering the European ‘Volksgemeinschaft’: Social Engineering, Pedagogy and Fascism in the Case of the Swiss Alfred Zander,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 1 (2016).

28 Fredrik W. Thue, “Reformpedagogikk i norsk skoleutvikling og lærerutdanning: ‘den profesjonelle lærer’ historisk belyst,” in *En forskningsbasert skole? Forskningens plass i lærerutdanning og skole*, ed. Sølvi Mausethagen et al. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2023), 276.

progressivist educational innovation system” with two clusters. There was one cluster in the capital, close to school leaders and leaders of teacher organisations, and a rural cluster mainly connected to the teacher seminar in Volda and supported by institutions promoting New Norwegian.²⁹ Kim Helsvig illustrates diversity through the leading figures of social democratic Anna Sethne in Oslo, who promoted more rational education, and value conservative Erling Kristvik at the teacher seminar in Volda, who emphasised the nation and Christianity.³⁰

Jarning points out that folk high schools have often been overlooked in Scandinavian research on reform pedagogy and demonstrates similarities between nineteenth-century Grundtvigianism and twentieth-century reform pedagogy.³¹ According to Martin Marciuch, reform pedagogy and Grundtvigianism were largely compatible in questions of pedagogy, even though they based their ideas on completely different traditions of knowledge. Common ideas included awakening interest and excitement in the students, as well as stressing the importance of the relationship between student and teacher and connections between school and life.³² Writing about Norway and Denmark, Afshan Bibi argues that one may tentatively see the reception of ideas of international progressive education as “a gradual process of evolution from Grundtvig’s educational philosophy rather than an abrupt break from it”³³

As for connections between reform pedagogy and totalitarianism in Norway, Andreas Bagås Lien shows diversity within the collaborative NS Party. While most NS leaders adamantly rejected reform pedagogy, others supported certain reform pedagogical ideas, with reference to German schools. While rejecting many of the ideals of Sethne, they could relate to some of the ideas of Kristvik.³⁴

It is difficult to define reform pedagogy, but it is possible to point out some common features. Firstly, these reform movements were united by wishes to change schooling and by criticism of what was often termed “the old school”. Crucial points of criticism were that students became passive in a system dominated by teachers and textbooks, that focus on memorisation, homework testing and exams did not contribute to meaningful learning, and that curricula were outdated, too theoretical, and detached from students’ lives. Reformers often linked their ideas to psy-

29 Harald Jarning, “Reform Pedagogy as a National Innovation System: Early Twentieth-Century Educational Entrepreneurs in Norway,” *Paedagogica Historica* 45, no. 4/5 (2009), 482–83. See also Rune Slagstad, *De nasjonale strateger*, 3rd edition (Oslo: Pax, 2015), 121–22.

30 Kim Gunnar Helsvig, “Norsk reformpedagogikk i historisk perspektiv,” *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift* 21, no. 2 (2004), 172–73.

31 Jarning (2009), 479–81.

32 Martin Marciuch, “Pedagogiske brytninger i mellomkrigstidens lærerutdanning: sekularisering, vitenskapeliggjøring, akademisering – frigjøring?,” in *En forskningsbasert skole? Forskningens plass i lærerutdanning og skole*, ed. Sølvi Mausethagen et al. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2023), 257–59.

33 Afshan Bibi, “Schoolteachers, Child-Centered Education, and the Nordic Education Model: Danish and Norwegian Experiences, 1920–1935,” in *The Nordic Education Model in Context: Historical Developments and Current Renegotiations*, ed. Daniel Tröhler et al. (New York: Routledge, 2023), 87–88.

34 Andreas Bagås Lien, “En ny ånd i skolen: Nasjonal Samlings skolepolitikk 25.9.1940–31.12.1942” (Master’s thesis, University of Oslo, 2013), 21–22, 35, 91, 105–6. See also Nina Beate Lyng-Vagstein, “Vi vil en ungdom som er sunn og sterk: Nazistisk oppdragslære i Nasjonal Samlings Ungdomsfylking 1940–1945” (Master’s thesis, University of Oslo, 2011).

chological research.³⁵ Many reform schools were founded and school experiments conducted.

Secondly, suggestions for new ways of teaching involved a move towards more student-centred and active modes of education. This included observation, varied educational resources, independent work, and connecting to students' interests. It often entailed more emphasis on formal aspects of *Bildung*, the development of the individual and their skills, and less on material aspects, the content. With stronger emphasis on social aspects of education, especially in the 1930s, student interaction was increasingly stressed through promoting group work, class discussions, and student participation.³⁶

Thirdly, suggestions of classroom reform were often linked to more overarching ideas of forming society, but the reformers envisioned different kinds of societies. While some emphasised strengthening the nation, others highlighted democratisation. Some stressed adapting to and strengthening democratic society, while others underlined the need for independent and critical individuals who could change society.³⁷

Previous research

The limited amount of research on the history of history education in Norwegian gymnasia before 1960, has concentrated on the national level and curricula. The main work is Thue's article about the role of history as school subject and integrative curricular perspective in secondary schools (1869–2019). Thue shows that, until well after the Second World War, there were close links between the university discipline and the school subject of history in the gymnasium, both conveying a liberal form of nationalism.³⁸ In my comparison of Norwegian and Swedish curricular documents, used between 1920 and 1960, I saw a clear shift from the 1911 Norwegian encyclopaedic curriculum, including long lists of topics, to later curricula with elements of reform pedagogy.³⁹ However, ideals expressed in curricula may differ considerably from those expressed in textbooks and by teachers, and as Thue points out, we need studies that shed light on teachers' and students' active roles in shaping history education.⁴⁰

International research shows that history education was widely debated throughout the twentieth century.⁴¹ Studies of the history of history education in Swedish secondary schools show complex processes of negotiation about purposes and con-

35 See Erling Lars Dale, "Dannelsesprogram og enhetsskole," in *Dannelsens forvandlinger*, ed. Rune Slagstad, Ove Korsgaard, and Lars Løvlie (Oslo: Pax, 2003), 167–72; Reidar Myhre, *Den norske skoles utvikling: Idé og virkelighet*, 8th edition (Oslo: Ad notam Gyldendal, 1998), 69–72.

36 Aagre (2016), 109–13; Cuban (1993), 6–8; Samuelsson (2021), 40–46; Röhrs and Lenhart (1995); Thue (2023); Mork (2024a), 231.

37 Evans (2004), 46–52; Gutmann (2016); Helsvig (2004); Englund (2005), 225–34.

38 Fredrik W. Thue, "Den historiske allmenndannelse: Historiefaget i høyere/videregående skole, 1869–2019," *Historisk tidsskrift* 98, no. 2 (2019).

39 Mork (2024a).

40 Thue (2019), 187.

41 David Cannadine, Jenny Keating, and Nicola Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History: Teaching the Past in Twentieth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Evans (2004).

tent of history education.⁴² In his work on the influence of educational progressivism on Swedish secondary schools and history education, Johan Samuelsson includes teachers' perspectives through analysis of journal articles and teachers' reports about their teaching. According to Samuelsson, ideas of progressive education were more present and appeared earlier than what has often been claimed in previous research.⁴³

Secondary schools and their teachers have been given little attention in research on Norwegian reform pedagogy. Both Erling Lars Dale and Thue show that there was substantial interest in pedagogical questions among secondary school teachers in the 1930s and that ideas of reform pedagogy could be linked to academic ideals, such as a scientific approach and self-activity.⁴⁴ However, after the Second World War, secondary school teachers generally put less emphasis on pedagogy, stressing their academic education in school subjects.⁴⁵

Teachers were often active in several arenas. In his study of primary school teachers in Sweden, Johannes Westberg shows that teachers were "knowledge brokers" with multiple roles, producing and circulating knowledge in various ways and for diverse purposes.⁴⁶ According to Svein Arne Myhren, rural gymnasial teachers worked in a tension between a popular and a classical bourgeois ideal of education. Through teaching, writing, and research, they represented a new group of academics.⁴⁷ Samuelsson describes some of the Swedish progressive secondary school teachers as "social engineers" who influenced policy and spread ideas. They wanted to develop schooling through experiments, scientific knowledge, and psychological and pedagogical theories.⁴⁸

There is some research which depicts Eidsvoll landsgymnas' teachers.⁴⁹ This applies especially to Voss and Sirevåg, who were at different times central actors in the educational landscape. Lien places Voss in a Norwegian-national fraction of NS, in contrast to a pan-Germanic fraction, and Voss' ideas are discussed in works on text-

42 Thomas Nygren, *History in the Service of Mankind: International Guidelines and History Education in Upper Secondary Schools in Sweden, 1927–2002* (Umeå: Umeå University, 2011); Henrik Åström Elmersjö, *En av staten godkänd historia: Förhandsgranskning av svenska läromedel och omförhandlingen av historieämnet 1938–1991* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2017); Henrik Åström Elmersjö, *Norden, nationen och historien: Perspektiv på föreningsarna Nordens historieläroboksrevision 1919–1972* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2013).

43 Samuelsson (2021); Johan Samuelsson et al., "Practice before Policy? Unpacking the Black Box of Progressive Teaching in Swedish Secondary Schools," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 53, no. 4 (2021).

44 Dale (2003), 167–71; Thue (2023), 278–81.

45 Thue (2023), 290; Åsmund Arup Seip, *Lektorene* (Oslo: FAFO, 1990), 164–70.

46 Johannes Westberg, "Multifaceted Knowledge Actors: Nineteenth-Century Teachers as Authors, Researchers, Administrators, and Politicians," in *Knowledge Actors: Revisiting Agency in the History of Knowledge*, ed. Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad, and Anna Nilsson Hammar (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2023).

47 Myhren (2001), 114. See also Lars Erik Larsen and Fredrik W. Thue, "Elitist Tradition and Democratic Reform: Norwegian and Danish Upper-Secondary Teacher Cultures in Transition, 1960–1994," in *Schoolteachers and the Nordic Model: Comparative and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Jesper Eckhardt Larsen, Barbara Schulte, and Fredrik W. Thue (London: Routledge, 2022), 175–76.

48 Samuelsson (2021), 233–35.

49 Jarle Simensen, "1956-kullet som sosialhistorie," in *Landsgymnasnet*, ed. Gudleiv Forr and Helge Vold (Oslo: Samlaget, 2007), 126–34; Helge Vold, ed. *Landsgymnasår: Eidsvoll 1957–1960* (Oslo: ELG-bok, 2006), 27–35, 62–65; Tønnes Sirevåg, *Kunnskap skal glede di sjel: Attersyn på tronge tider og vegen som gikk gjennom skolen* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1979), 224–30.

book criticism and on NS educational ideas.⁵⁰ In his book *The Strategic Pedagogues*, Dale writes that Voss represents ideas that contained “national dreams” from the time around 1905 until the early 1920s, frustration in the interwar years, and idealistic and naïve hopes under NS.⁵¹ Alfred Oftedal Telhaug writes about Sirevåg that he was open for “the best of progressive thinking, namely the line of activity pedagogy and education for democracy”, but only if it could be combined “with the best of the tradition of secondary schools, the conveyance of knowledge and culture”.⁵²

More research on the history of history education and on the impact of reform pedagogy on Norwegian gymnasias is needed. Given the variations within reform pedagogy, it is also important to examine specific cases in their contexts. Studying these ideas in relation to a particular school subject and teachers at a specific school is a valuable contribution. With their combination of democratic objectives of extending schooling and close connections to national movements, the rural gymnasias are interesting cases when studying history education in connection to democratisation and nationalism.

Methods and sources

The initial phase of the study was inspired by methods of collective biography.⁵³ Making an overview of teachers who taught history at Eidsvoll landsgymnas from the opening in 1922 until 1964, I recorded dates of birth and death, parents’ occupation, education, political affiliation, activity in organisations, employment, and published texts. Since including all these teachers would make the study too extensive, I decided to focus on teachers who had a long academic education in history and had worked at the school for at least three years. I then chose the three teachers who had written most extensively on topics relevant to history education, Voss, Svare and Sirevåg. The fact that they all worked at the school in the period 1936–1939, allowed for a more coherent study. I chose to add Brakstad who also taught history at the school during those years. The remarkably rich source material left by these teachers and their roles as active contributors to educational debates, make them particularly interesting to study.

My analysis focused on interpreting and comparing ideas expressed in the teachers’ texts. I started reading broadly, and subsequently concentrated on the texts most relevant to history education. The first main category were journal articles, primarily from the pedagogical journal *Norsk pedagogisk tidsskrift*, the journal of the secondary school teachers’ association *Den høgre skolen*, and the journal of the NS teachers’ association *Den Norske Skole*, which was connected to Nazification efforts. I supplemented these articles with autobiographical texts, especially in the case of Sirev-

50 Lien (2013), 66, 94, 101; Christian Sæle, *Den rette historien: Lærebokkritikk som historiepolitisk redskap* (Bergen: University of Bergen, 2013), 163, 72; Geir Kragstad, “Nazistisk oppdragelses- og skoleideologi i Norge 1940–45” (Master’s thesis, University of Oslo, 1980), 82–85.

51 Erling Lars Dale, *De strategiske pedagoger: Pedagogikkens vitenskapshistorie i Norge* (Oslo: Ad notam Gyldendal, 1999), 337.

52 Alfred Oftedal Telhaug, “Tønnes Sirevåg: Kunnskapsskolens mann som forsøksleder,” in *Pedagogiske profiler: Norsk utdanningstenkning fra Holberg til Hernes*, ed. Harald Thuen and Sveinung Vaage (Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2004), 280.

53 See Krista Cowman, “Collective Biography,” in *Research Methods for History*, ed. Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

åg, who authored autobiographical books and books on school history. Although including citations from earlier texts, these books were written far later. The second category of sources were textbooks. These books give an indication of how the teachers wanted to implement their ideas, although genre traditions and educational policy are essential in forming textbooks. I reviewed additional sources, including letters, speeches, meeting protocols, reports, trial documents, and texts describing the teachers and their teaching.

The texts were analysed following the didactic questions of why one should teach history, what kind of history one should teach, and how one should teach history. After the initial analysis, the question of history education and reform pedagogy emerged as a central topic, and combined with new readings of the texts, the results were related to this question.

The teachers

In addition to working at the same rural gymnasium and promoting New Norwegian, the four teachers had similar academic education and were active in several contexts. They each earned the cand. philol. degree at the University of Kristiania/Oslo with history as their main subject, including the writing of an independent historical thesis, and completed the six-month-long pedagogical seminar.⁵⁴ Acting as knowledge brokers, they participated in associations and committees, published textbooks and historical literature, wrote articles, and edited journals.

Johan Fredrik Voss (1883–1966) was the son of a priest and spent most of his early years in Bergen. As a university student he taught at Aars and Voss' school, which had been founded by his uncle. After starting a school in Volda, and working at Voss rural gymnasium, he was hired as the first principal of Eidsvoll landsgymnas. Voss was an initiator and editor of the pedagogical journal *Norsk pedagogisk tidsskrift*, and in the interwar years he participated in several central school committees.⁵⁵

Voss joined the NS Party in the autumn of 1940 and played an active role in attempts to Nazify the schools. In 1942, three ELG teachers, among them Brakstad and Svare, were arrested and sent to forced labour in Kirkenes for protesting against Nazification measures. Voss was arrested in May 1945 and convicted of treason. He later wrote texts defending his actions during the occupation and a booklet criticising the representation of the occupation in history textbooks.⁵⁶

The educational trajectories of Edvard Brakstad (1888–1982) and Bjarne Svare (1897–1973) illustrate the long road to university studies for boys of their generation from small farms in the countryside.⁵⁷ Brakstad graduated from the teachers' sem-

54 The cand. philol. degree, which took about six years, consisted of preparatory courses, two secondary subjects, and a main subject.

55 Helga Sverdrup Ekrheim and Olav Ekrheim, eds., *Norges filologer og realister* (Stavanger: Dreyer, 1933), 549; Jon Lid and Andreas Riis, eds., *Studentene fra 1901: biografiske opplysninger samlet til 50-års jubileet 1951* (Oslo: 1951), 202–3; *Studentene fra 1901: Biografiske opplysninger samlet til 25-års-jubileet 1926* (Oslo: Grøndahl, 1926), 347–49; Sirevåg (1979), 226–28.

56 Lien (2013), 66, 75, 86, 94; Simensen (2007), 130–31; Edvard Brakstad, "Krig og terror – siger og atterreiseing," in *Eidsvoll offentlige landsgymnas gjennom 25 år*, ed. Bjarne Svare, Edvard Brakstad, and Eirik Sundli (1947); Lid and Riis (1951), 202–3; J. Fredrik Voss, *Eidsvoll off. Landsgymnas 1922–1945. Attersyn og utsyn. Uppgjerd* (Rena: Per Nes, 1952); J. Fredrik Voss, *Okkupasjonstida i historielærebookene* (Oslo: Forbundet for Sosial Oppreisning, 1954).

57 Høydal (2007), 22, 30, 40–41; Myhren (2001), 2–3.

inar in Volda before completing his upper secondary school exams, and he worked as a teacher and school leader in several school types before completing his cand. philol. degree and the pedagogical seminar. He taught at ELG from 1931 and was principal from 1945.⁵⁸ Bjarne Svare attended a local folk high school and worked for three years, before moving to Volda to attend middle school and the gymnasium. He completed his university studies in 1927 and started working at ELG in 1928. In 1940, he attained the doctoral degree, and he spent several semesters as a substitute for the history professor at the Teachers' College in Trondheim. He was principal of ELG from 1959. Svare represented the Labour Party in local politics, after having left the Liberal Party.⁵⁹

Tønnes Sirevåg (1909–1994) had a working-class background and was politically active in the Labour Party. He worked at Eidsvoll landsgymnas between 1936 and 1939. During the occupation, Sirevåg participated in the resistance movement. He was member of the national board of education from 1948 and participated in drafting the 1950 curricula for secondary schools. Sirevåg was leader of the committee for educational experiments from 1954, and Director General at the Ministry of Church and Education from 1960.⁶⁰

Ideas of reform pedagogy and conceptions of history education

Voss, Svare, and Sirevåg published several articles about history education, and Svare and Sirevåg published textbooks. I have not found texts by Brakstad on history education, but I have included his article about new educational methods in the teaching of Norwegian. My analysis of the teachers' texts is divided into three. First, I examine ideas about objectives of history education, demonstrating a main division between goals of strengthening national identity and of educating for democracy. Next, I analyse the choice of material, focusing on differences between a nationalistic and a materialist conception of history. Finally, I discuss expressions of various ideas of reform pedagogy in the texts.

History education as a tool for nationalism or for building a democratic society?

The nation is the main theme throughout Voss' texts. In 1917, Voss claims that there is hardly a country in Europe where national history is more disrespected than in Norway, causing "uncurable damage, both to awakening proud national identity and patriotism, and to the education of the youth". Voss is confident that the "national sleep" in Norway is connected to history education and argues that it is crucial that the leaders of a people have "full knowledge of the fate of the people, and love for the forefathers and their deeds."⁶¹

58 Olav Ekrheim, Håkon Norås, and Helga Sverdrup Ekrheim, eds., *Norges filologer og realister* (Stavanger: Dreyer, 1950), 89–90.

59 Ekrheim, Norås and, Ekrheim (1950), 832–33; *Studentene frå 1919: Biografiske opplysninger samlet til 50-års jubileet 1969* (Oslo: 1969), 164; Ivar Svare, "Minner og opplysninger om barndom, ungdom og slekt," (Unpublished book, 2011), 36–37.

60 Ekrheim, Norås, and Ekrheim (1950), 755–56; Telhaug (2004), 268–75; Sirevåg (1979), 755–56; Tønnes Sirevåg, *Katedral og karusell: Streiflys på skole og politikk i krig og fred* (Oslo: NKS-forlaget, 1981).

61 J. Fredrik Voss, "Fedrelandssoga, det norske folk og den høgre norske skulen," *Norsk pædagogisk tidsskrift* 1, no. 1 (1917a), 3–6.

A specific form of nationalism appeals to Voss. In an autobiographical text, he writes that he became fully aware of the value of a national awakening in Norway when working as a teacher for a Norwegian family in northern Sweden in 1902–1903. He contrasts “the fully confident, proud national awareness” in Sweden with the “lukewarmness and mockery of everything domestic” in Norway, especially in the cities and among the higher classes.⁶² Comparisons of nationalism in Norway and Sweden around 1900 have shown that, although different forms of nationalism existed in both countries, Norwegian mainstream nationalism was more connected to the liberal left and demands for democratic reforms, while Swedish mainstream nationalism was more connected to the conservative right.⁶³

During the German occupation, Voss wrote in the journal of the NS teacher association. In 1942, Voss highlights history’s unique potential for moving imagination and affecting thoughts and will, and he argues for altering objectives and methods. The central objective should be to “create love for people and country in the young and increase their sense of responsibility for the duties they have towards the authorities and the future of the country”. Voss adds that all history presentation should be true, giving a versatile picture of life which shows the religious, ethical, and national building forces.⁶⁴ Voss prioritises formal aspects of education with emphasis on emotions and will. He writes that it matters less if the knowledge, the event, or the person, is half forgotten, because it has had its effect on our view of life and on the formation of character and will. It might also have contributed in an intellectual way, but that should not be the main goal.⁶⁵

While Voss prioritises emotional objectives over intellectual, Svare presents both as equally important. In 1938, Svare writes that, as with historical research, the intellectual function of history education is to give people awareness of the past and explain what they see around them. One must, therefore, prioritise the aspects of history that are the most relevant for today’s societal problems, so one can “see more clearly and judge more rightly”.⁶⁶ In 1946, Svare stresses the importance of history and social studies in a school that is to prepare students for prominent positions in a democracy. He suggests devoting more hours to the subject and making social studies an independent subject.⁶⁷

Svare connects an emotional or educative goal of history education to moral use of history and an evolutionary conception of history. He argues that history education should establish a moral view. One must teach the students to see “the life-line of our cultural development” and respect for the intellectual power and courage that have always been needed in the struggle against “powers that wanted to prevent people from freeing themselves and building a better society”. A democratic society must emphasise democratic virtues, according to Svare, and the central story is that

62 *Studentene fra 1901* (1926), 347–48.

63 Torbjörn Nilsson, “Sverige och 1905 – glömska eller förträngning?,” *Historisk tidskrift* 84, no. 2 (2005), 224.

64 J. Fredrik Voss, “Grunnsyn ved sogeopplæringa i skulen,” *Den Norske Skole* 1, no. 1 (1942), 9–11.

65 Voss (1942), 10.

66 Bjarne Svare, “Soge og soge-undervisning,” *Norsk pedagogisk tidskrift* 22 (1938), 244–45.

67 Bjarne Svare, “Tysken i den høgre skulen,” *Den høgre skolen* 45, no. 3 (1946), 86.

of humanisation. The goal is to create a social view and awaken a humane and democratic way of thinking.⁶⁸

Like Svare, Sirevåg emphasises education for democracy and citizenship as the central objective of history education. In the preface to his textbook *The Rise of Modern Britain*, he writes that he wants the book to provide an incentive to historical thinking and impart “a sense of the value of history as an education for citizenship”. He quotes Dewey saying that whatever history is for the scientific historian, “for the educator it must be indirect sociology – a study of society which lays bare its process of becoming and its modes of organization”.⁶⁹

When explaining why he chose to study history, Sirevåg writes that it was because history encompasses all subjects and, using the words of Cicero, “is the teacher of life”.⁷⁰ In an article about using filmstrips, Sirevåg writes that a sign that history education has achieved its goal is that the students have acquired a core of facts and concepts that have become alive to them. The material should, as far as possible, be presented in a way that stimulates students’ interest in the time they are learning about.⁷¹

Sirevåg adds a more practical reason for history education. In 1954, he discusses the individual projects in history. Students would choose a topic to explore under teacher guidance. Sirevåg participated in drafting the 1950 curriculum, and the text is partly a reply to criticism. He argues that these projects are a way of preparing students for adulthood. Quoting the book *The Teaching of History* from 1950, he writes that in adult life, people need to solve tasks within a given time, through planning, knowing where to find help, being able to use this help, and having the self-discipline to complete the work.⁷²

There are elements in the teachers’ views on the purposes of history education which can be linked to reform pedagogy. Svare and Sirevåg see the main purpose of history education as education for democracy. Sirevåg also stresses the students’ need to learn to work independently and refers to Dewey. For Voss, the nation is the main concern, and he puts great emphasis on formal aspects of history education for forming character and will.

A materialist or nationalistic conception of history?

A major challenge in reforming history education was the amount of material.⁷³ The question of prioritising content connects to ideas of purposes of history education, but also to different conceptions of history. There are fundamental differences between Voss and the other teachers, most notably Svare. Svare expresses a Marxist materialist conception of history, a view that Voss strongly rejects.

68 Svare (1938), 248–51.

69 Tønnes Sirevåg, *The Rise of Modern Britain: A Study in Historical Interpretation* (Oslo: Fabritius, 1945a), Preface.

70 Sirevåg (1979), 116–17.

71 Tønnes Sirevåg, “Biletbandet – ei styrking av undervisninga,” *Den høgre skolen* 53, no. 16 (1954b), 498–99.

72 Tønnes Sirevåg, “Serarbeid i historie og samfunnslære,” *Den høgre skolen* 53, no. 15 (1954a), 461; Sirevåg (1981), 82–83.

73 Kirke- og Undervisningsdepartementet (1938), 52–53.

Voss combines demands for more national history with criticism of historical materialism. He states that it should be completely unnecessary to ask whether national history or world history should be the foundation. In countries with fully developed national awareness this is not a question.⁷⁴ In 1917, Voss criticises “our modern ‘radical’ cultural leaders” for not having room for the great deeds of the Viking era in their “materialist and illusory peace conception of history”.⁷⁵ The tone is harsher in 1942:

It is therefore not very few who have let themselves be fooled by all the wholly and partly Marxist phrases in the teaching of history, of oppression by the bourgeoisie, workers’ revolt, class struggle as the guiding principle of development, and the dictatorship of the proletariat as the final goal – or the pacifist phrases claiming that now all wars are ended, or at least they will, if only democracy is fully developed and all secret diplomacy disappears, or if women get a greater say in the running of society etc.⁷⁶

A materialist conception of history is evident throughout Svare’s texts. In 1938, Svare writes that he has a feeling that those who criticise history education for being too abstract do not want to include too many economic or social questions, and that this is probably an expression of

the general bourgeoisie reaction to a teaching that concentrates on what can give knowledge of the structure of society, and of the power struggle that, hidden or in the open, is continuously present in it. There is a power of rebellion in such teaching, and the good bourgeois does not want to know of anything that disturbs the peace.⁷⁷

Svare adds that one must emphasise aspects of history that can shed light on current political, social, and economic problems. He explains that history education has focused extensively on the political sphere and forgotten so much of the history of the people. Although certain demands have been met, it is still necessary to give more room for economic and social aspects. This does not mean, however, that one should ignore political history, which gives chronology and is important for understanding cause and effect.⁷⁸

Svare argues that although more recent Norwegian history gives excellent opportunities for awakening a democratic way of thinking, the same is true for all history education. In all societies, one meets the struggle “between the classes that have achieved predominance and those who want to put an end to the privileges and realise greater equality and freedom”. Although class struggle is central, Svare also highlights individuals, arguing that one needs to write about men who led the struggle for freedom, justice, and increased humanism.⁷⁹

In a 1952 article on epoch reading, the in-depth study of certain periods, Svare connects historical materialism to a notion of history as sociology. According to Svare, history happens on two levels. The upper level is the biographical, the history

74 J. Fredrik Voss, “Nokre problem i sogeopplæringa,” *Den Norske Skole* 2, no. 4 (1943), 114.

75 Voss (1917a), 2.

76 Voss (1942), 9.

77 Svare (1938), 243–44.

78 *Ibid.*, 245–47.

79 *Ibid.*, 249–50.

of individuals, while the lower level is that of humanity as a totality, where one deals with the harsh objective laws formed by material conditions. On this level of sociological history, history can be an exact science. Svare claims that an intention in the 1950 curriculum, although not explicitly stated, was that history education should become more sociological. In that sense, epoch reading is progress, opening for working with the exact scientific aspect of history. More room for economy, social conditions, and their connections to moral and cultural conditions, can give better understanding. Individuals play their role, but they do not control the currents that move history, and their deeds are only crucial to the degree that they move in the same direction as the material historical forces.⁸⁰

However, Svare criticises epoch reading for only showing connections on a deep level and not over time. Skipping important time periods means that students are not given a coherent presentation and do not learn enough of the important facts.⁸¹ It is not easy to understand how Svare wants to combine more topics with more in-depth work, and he seems unwilling to compromise on the principle of chronology or remove content.

While sharing Svare's historical materialism,⁸² Sirevåg allows more room for pedagogical arguments. Citing historian G. M. Trevelyan, Sirevåg stresses the importance of presenting "historical problems" for students and working with causality.⁸³ In a 1941 letter to Svare, Sirevåg presents principles for prioritising and stresses the importance of independent thinking.

There must be a pedagogical objective behind the historical facts we present. They must be chains in reasoning or the foundations of points of view, so that the presentation inspires independent thinking. We should not be afraid of dragging historical science into the classroom. The argument that such things are too advanced for the age group does not apply, unless one thinks it is futile to educate students to becoming independently thinking, democratic people of society.⁸⁴

Emphasis on economic and social history, central to materialist conceptions of history, aligns with John Dewey's idea of the democratic nature of economic history. Highlighting the present and historical problems is also in line with Dewey. However, Svare's reluctance to reduce material is more typical of objectivist conceptions of history education. Voss, on the other hand, wants to prioritise through an emphasis on national history, in line with classical conceptions of history education.

Different ideals of reform pedagogy in history education

The teachers express support for more student-centred teaching. Voss argues for less emphasis on exams and more on students' development.⁸⁵ In a 1927 speech, he high-

80 Bjarne Svare, "Epokelesnaden," *Norsk pedagogisk tidskrift* 36 (1952), 12–16.

81 Svare (1952), 16–19.

82 Tønnes Sirevåg, *Byvokster og borgerkultur i mellomalderen. Opphavet til renessansen* (Oslo: Tanum, 1943), 32.

83 Tønnes Sirevåg, "Epokelesnad," *Norsk pedagogisk tidskrift* 26 (1942), 146–47.

84 Letter from Tønnes Sirevåg to Bjarne Svare, 11.2.1941, in Sirevåg (1981), 49.

85 J. Fredrik Voss, "Framgangslinor i skulen, mindre eksamen, meir pedagogisk utdanning," *Norsk pedagogisk tidskrift* 9 (1925), 8–15.

lights progress in pedagogy and science, and contrasts the old school of memorisation with the new school where it is more important to know where to find information.⁸⁶ However, Voss also emphasises the importance of discipline and order and is sceptical of coeducation.⁸⁷ In 1942, he writes that, in the way it is often practiced, the activity school principle cannot bring a change for the better in history education.⁸⁸ Brakstad writes that, even though mistakes have been made in reform efforts in countries that are ahead of Norway, the new ideas have been highly useful, especially that of student activity. He commends the emphasis on character education (*karaktärsfostran*) and freedom in the Swedish methodical guidelines of 1935 and stresses the importance of “life, interest and activity” in the lessons.⁸⁹ Svare does not write much about pedagogical method, but he stresses the importance of scientific research as a basis for educational reforms and, with reference to Thorndike, criticises ideas from the time when “the learned sat at their table and philosophised over matters instead of studying them scientifically.”⁹⁰ He also writes that, in the higher levels, one should aim at awakening the students to “critical afterthought” through discussing difficult issues and showing different opinions.⁹¹ Sirevåg places more emphasis on student interaction than the others. He writes that using filmstrips can be followed by discussion, dramatisation, games, model building, excursions, and tasks.⁹²

Tensions between wishes for more active ways of teaching and the gymnasium’s requirements are highlighted by Voss and Sirevåg. In 1952, Voss writes that ideals from the folk high schools were central to those who planned rural gymnasia. He supports these ideas and would have liked to see them realised, but a gymnasium must be “a school of knowledge with certain precise knowledge objectives to a far greater extent than a folk high school”. Voss adds that criticism of secondary schools for emphasising mechanical memorisation, control, and exam results, is still justified, even though activity school methods have been given more room in curricula and teacher education.⁹³ Sirevåg compares a dynamic reform school to a static exam school and writes that while the 1950 curriculum was a cautious attempt at a compromise, the exam school got far more.⁹⁴ In 1954, he writes that individual projects, inspired by progressive and reconstructionist ideals, were the small sector given to the reform school.⁹⁵

Svare and Sirevåg published booklets for epoch reading, and these booklets illustrate differences between more traditional, closed textbooks, and more open text-

86 J. Fredrik Voss, “Tale ved overleveringa av skulebyggnaden,” (Eidsvoll videregående skole, 1927); Mork (2024b), 53.

87 Voss (1925), 5–6; J. Fredrik Voss, “Um læreryrke og lærerpersonlegheit,” *Norsk pedagogisk tidskrift* 1, no. 3 (1917b), 41; Voss (1952), 15.

88 Voss (1942), 9.

89 Edvard Brakstad, “Norskundervisning og nye pedagogiske idear: Innleidingsforedrag til ordskifte i Eidsvoll pedagoglag,” *Norsk pedagogisk tidskrift* 20 (1936), 147–50, 56.

90 Bjarne Svare, “Kva skal vi gjera med latinene?,” *Den høiere Skole* 34, no. 3 (1932), 55.

91 Svare (1938), 251.

92 Sirevåg (1954b), 498.

93 Voss (1952), 15–18.

94 Tønnes Sirevåg, “Nokre merknader til undervisningsplanen for historie og samfunnslære,” *Den høgre skolen* 51, no. 10 (1952), 308.

95 Sirevåg (1954a), 461.

books, in line with ideas of reform pedagogy. Svare's booklet is closed, in the sense that it does not contain references to literature and resources. Sirevåg refers to literature, journal articles, and sources from city archives, museums, and libraries.⁹⁶ In contrast to Svare's booklet, Sirevåg's booklet contains tasks, some of them connected to the present, such as finding out the number of residents of a city today or examining how trade and transport have developed in one's part of the country.⁹⁷ Svare and Sirevåg also wrote articles about epoch reading and commented on each other's booklets. While Svare criticises the essayist style of the booklets and wants books that more closely resemble older textbooks, Sirevåg commends the essayist style and criticises Svare's book for being partly too encyclopaedic.⁹⁸

Although Sirevåg strongly emphasises student activity, he argues for limiting students' right to decide. In his memoirs, he writes that teacher Olav Sundet sent him his students' reviews of Sirevåg's epoch booklet. Sirevåg quotes his own reply, where he asks what the value of a student statement is. He claims that teachers can be too easily convinced by what students say. Immature youth should not decide the direction of education, and it is important to consider societal demands and navigate carefully between the student-centred approach and what benefits society.⁹⁹

Voss, Brakstad, and Sirevåg, criticise the teacher who just sits behind a desk, testing students. While Voss emphasises the importance of the teacher's personality with a strong will and love for his work and students, Sirevåg criticises most teachers in secondary schools for being homework examiners or lecturers or both.¹⁰⁰ Sirevåg does, however, speak fondly of his colleagues at ELG, especially Brakstad and Svare. He writes that, although he did not find much at ELG of what he had learned from "method pioneers" at the pedagogical seminar, most of the colleagues had the ability to wonder, loved knowledge, and found joy in sharing this knowledge.¹⁰¹

The teachers balance their identity as historians and teachers differently. Voss writes that he has prioritised pedagogy and argues that the pedagogical and practical component of teacher education should be given more time, even at the expense of subject studies.¹⁰² Brakstad agrees with Voss about the need for better pedagogical and practical training, saying that this part is often the most important.¹⁰³ Svare seems to prioritise the role of historian and writes far less than the others about pedagogical aspects. Sirevåg discusses this question in his memoirs, expressing belonging to the fields of history, pedagogy, and English.¹⁰⁴

Studying the teachers' writings gives an impression of their ideals, but these may differ considerably from teaching practices. While descriptions of teachers often

96 Bjarne Svare, *Åndslivet på 1700-talet* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1943a); Sirevåg (1942).

97 Sirevåg (1943), 51.

98 Svare (1952), 18; Sirevåg (1942), 148–50; Bjarne Svare, "Byane i mellomalderen," review of *Byvokster og borgerkultur i mellomalderen. Opphavet til renessansen*, by Tønnes Sirevåg, *Norsk Tidend*, 13 October 1943b.

99 Letter from Tønnes Sirevåg to Olav Sundet, 3.12.44, in Sirevåg (1981), 50–51.

100 Tønnes Sirevåg, "Oppseding til demokrati – Samarbeid mellom skule og bibliotek," *Norsk pedagogisk tidsskrift* 29 (1945b), 84; Brakstad (1936), 146; Voss (1917b), 45.

101 Sirevåg (1979), 229–30.

102 Voss (1925), 15–19.

103 Brakstad (1936), 146–47.

104 Sirevåg (1981), 47–49.

vary, they may add nuances. Voss' authoritarian leadership during the German occupation is described in ELG's anniversary book from 1947.¹⁰⁵ In the same book, Harald Wergeland, who studied at ELG in the late 1920s, writes that he thought the teaching in many subjects was on a very high level and more in the direction of free studies than in many gymnasia.¹⁰⁶ This image differs from the one given by historian and former ELG student, Jarle Simensen, about the teaching at ELG in the 1950s. Svare was Simensen's history teacher in his senior year. Simensen writes that the norm at the school was lecturing, examining homework, and written tests. In retrospect, he finds it surprising that there was so little training in critical analysis, use of various sources, and discussions around interpretations.¹⁰⁷

There is a unique source to Brakstad's teaching. In the schoolyear 1945–46, one of Brakstad's Norwegian classes used a minute book. A student wrote the minutes, which would be read at the start of the next lesson before the book was passed to the next student. These texts portray a teacher who is a clear leader in the classroom and tests the knowledge of his students, but also a teacher who allows for dialogue and student activity. The term activity school appears once. After telling the students to write a text from their homework, Brakstad asks them to exchange texts and correct each other's work. He then asks them what the name of the method is, and when the students do not know, he says it is activity school.¹⁰⁸

Concluding discussion

The aim of this article was to explore relationships between ideas of reform pedagogy and conceptions of history education in the writings of four gymnasium teachers. While all express certain elements of reform pedagogy, their conceptions differ, particularly their ideas of the core of history education and their wishes for societal development. While Voss sees strengthening national identity as the main goal of history education, Svare and Sirevåg stress education for democracy.

The teachers share criticism of teaching based on memorisation, support for more student-centred and active education, and appreciation for research as a basis for educational reform. Using Tisdall's distinction, they express elements of a "non-utopian" form of progressivism, with an emphasis on teacher leadership.¹⁰⁹ Their ideas can also be described using Cuban's concepts of a continuum between teacher-centred and student-centred approaches and hybrids of teacher-centred progressivism.¹¹⁰ Although incorporating certain student-centred elements, their general approach is teacher-centred.

Elements of reform pedagogy are present to different degrees and in different ways in the teachers' texts. Svare gives little room for pedagogical reflections, however, his ideas of democracy, the present, and the importance of economic and social questions, are close to Dewey's progressivism. These ideas correspond with Svare's

105 Brakstad (1947).

106 Bjarne Svare, Edvard Brakstad, and Eirik Sundli, eds., *Eidsvoll offentlege landsgymnas gjennom 25 år* (Eidsvoll: Eidsvoll landsgymnas, 1947), 95.

107 Simensen (2007), 127–28. Personal communication September 2022 and February 2024.

108 "Referat fra norsktimer i 2eg 1945–1946," (Eidsvoll videregående skole, school library, 1946).

109 Tisdall (2020), 2–4.

110 Cuban (1993), 6, 8, 10.

materialist view of history, which is the core of his conception of history education. Sirevåg shares Svare's historical materialism and presents education for democracy and citizenship as the main objective of history education, but he gives far more room for pedagogical arguments than Svare. Brakstad and Voss both stress pedagogical aspects. However, the core of Voss' conception of history education is conservative nationalism.

This article exemplifies Thue's description of Norwegian reform pedagogy, especially in the interwar years, as "ecumenical", bringing together different traditions and ideas.¹¹¹ Reform pedagogical ideas are evident in the emphasis on democracy, independent thinking, and student interaction, in Sirevåg's texts, and Sirevåg fits Samuelson's description of progressive teachers as social engineers.¹¹² Brakstad also expresses a pedagogically and democratically oriented type of reform pedagogy, while Svare meets reform pedagogy through social democratic commitment, a materialist Marxist conception of history, and academic ideals. Voss has a strong interest in pedagogy. He is influenced by Grundtvigianism and later by National Socialism. As in the case of Swiss educator Alfred Zander, Voss exemplifies how national ideas of "people's community" could unite reform pedagogical ideas and totalitarian ideals.¹¹³ As for the clusters of reform pedagogy, described by Jarning, Voss seems quite close to Kristvik and the rural cluster, but quite far from the urban cluster and Sethne.¹¹⁴ While Voss is mainly influenced by European reform ideas, the twenty-six-year younger Sirevåg, is strongly inspired by American ideas, particularly Dewey and reconstructionism.

The teachers' conceptions of history education include material and formal aspects of *Bildung*. Voss and Sirevåg stress formal aspects more than Svare, but in different ways. Voss stresses character formation, linked to emotions and a strong will. These formal aspects are far from the kind of formal history education described by Jensen, which focuses on source criticism and critical thinking.¹¹⁵ Voss' suggestion of choosing material that can strengthen national identity, fits well with a classical theory of history education. Sirevåg's views are far closer to Jensen's depiction of formal history education in his emphasis on forming independent democratic citizens and the value of the process of learning. Svare's emphasis on "critical afterthought" is in line with Jensen's formal and functional theory of history education, but when he is reluctant to prioritise certain material over others, he is close to an objectivist theory.¹¹⁶

The main difference between Voss' and the other teachers' ideas of reform pedagogy is the kind of society they strive for, and this is closely linked to their conceptions of history and their political views. Voss eventually combines his wish for a strong national community with an active role in NS, and he prioritises emotional aspects of education to instil loyalty to the nation. This far-right nationalism is very

111 Thue (2023), 276.

112 Samuelsson (2021), 233–35.

113 Gutmann (2016).

114 Jarning (2009), 482–83; Lien (2013), 105–106; Mork (2024b), 54. See also Vegard Kvam, *Livsnær skole: En historie om Erling Kristvik og den fædelte skolen* (Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2009), 270–24.

115 Jensen (1978), 79–81.

116 Jensen (1978), 11, 67, 79–81.

different from the liberal nationalism that influenced the curricula.¹¹⁷ Sirevåg, Svare, and Brakstad also emphasise national elements, but their nationalism is linked to democratic ideals. Svare underlines class struggle and Sirevåg stresses history education's role in forming "independently thinking, democratic people of society".¹¹⁸

This article adds nuances to the image of reform pedagogy and history education in Norwegian gymnasia, and it contributes to problematising the close associations between reform pedagogy and democracy. As in Samuelsson's research on Swedish secondary schools, the article exemplifies commitment to ideas of reform pedagogy among gymnasium teachers.¹¹⁹ While Samuelsson applies a concept of progressivism encompassing an idea of democracy, the broad concept of reform pedagogy in this article helps exemplify how ideas of reform pedagogy could also be combined with conservative nationalism and totalitarian ideals. The article demonstrates that teachers with different, and even contrasting, conceptions of history, could share certain principles of reform pedagogy. It also shows the usefulness of focusing on individual teachers and their writings to obtain a richer understanding of the history of education.

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117 Thue (2019), Mork (2024a).

118 Sirevåg (1981), 49.

119 Samuelsson (2021), 40–41, 231–36.

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