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Notions of EFL Reading in Norwegian Curricula, 1939–2013

Abstract

This article explores how English syllabi between 1939 and 2013 dealt with reading in English as a foreign language (EFL). Using perspectives from critical discourse analysis (CDA), I address the different notions of reading expressed in these syllabi, the purpose of reading and the roles of the reader and the teacher. I distinguish between four notions of reading: reading as exposure, reading as a tool, reading as an encounter, and reading as meta-awareness. How curricula explain reading is tied to contemporary pedagogical thinking, but must also be understood in a political and ideological landscape where increasingly larger groups of the Norwegian population gain access to universal secondary education. The notions of reading addressed in this article are part of a historical development as well as a recognisable repertoire of understandings related to EFL reading today.

Key words: EFL reading, curriculum history, critical discourse analysis (CDA)

Sammendrag

I denne artikkelen undersøker jeg sentrale utviklingstrekk i læreplaners beskrivelser av lesing i engelskfaget fra 1939 til 2013. Jeg anvender perspektiver fra kritisk diskursanalyse i utforskningen av læreplanene for å illustrere hvordan ulike forståelser av lesing kommer fram og hva disse innebærer når det gjelder elevens og lærerens rolle. Jeg inndeler de ulike læreplandiskursene omkring lesing i engelskfaget i fire forståelser av lesing: lesing som eksponering, verktøy, tekstmøte og meta-forståelse. Hvordan lesing forklares henger sammen med skiftende pedagogiske strømninger men må også forstås i et politisk og ideologisk landskap hvor stadig nye grupper av befolkningen deltar i et obligatorisk løp fra barneskole til og med videregående opplæring. Disse forståelsene kan ses som ledd i en historisk utvikling men også som et gjenkjennelig repertoar av forståelser knyttet til lesing i engelskfaget i dag.

Nøkkelord: lesing i engelsk, læreplanhistorie, kritisk diskursanalyse

Introduction

This article explores shifting notions of reading in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), encompassing roughly 70 years of curriculum history, a topic which has received little academic attention to date. It begins with the 1939 syllabus, the first to regulate English as a compulsory subject in primary school (Ministry of Church & Education [henceforth MC&E], 1939a), and ends with the 2013 English Subject Curriculum, which covers both primary and secondary education (Ministry of Education and Research [henceforth ME&R], 2013). From its central position in the first decades of the 20th century, when English was still a subject for a select few, reading was gradually downplayed in favour of spoken skills until the late 1980s. From the 1997 syllabus, reading was restored to an equal position to that of other linguistic skills (Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs [henceforth MER&CA], 1997). In the National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion (LK06), reading is presented as one of five equally important and interdependent basic skills: oral, reading, written, numeracy and digital (ME&R, 2006).

This article traces elements of continuity and change in the explanation of reading in English syllabi, concentrating on the lower secondary school. It addresses the following research questions: What notions of reading are expressed in the syllabi? What roles are assigned to pupils and teachers? What aims of reading do syllabi express? As indicated by the title of the article, the English syllabi analysed are integral parts of their respective curricula. Therefore, I situate the different syllabi explanations of reading within the broader context of educational and social change.

Research Context

This article relates to the field of curriculum history and specifically to the development of school subjects. Curriculum history considers how understandings inherited from the past act upon present ones (Apple, 2003; Goodson, 2002; Kliebard, 2002; Sivesind, 2008). Goodson argues that if the curriculum is perceived as a fact, one “risk[s] ignoring circumstances that are directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (Goodson, 2002, p. 14). Curriculum history explores how the changing representations of school subjects tie in with social, political and educational developments, both nationally and internationally. It traces the conflicting interests at work in the development of school subjects such as the language arts, science, maths and history (Ahonen, 2001; Elgström & Hellstenius, 2010; Engelsen, 2015; Englund, 1986, 2015; Goodson & Marsh, 1996; Goodson & Medway, 1990).

Per Goodson and March (1996), studying the development of school subjects means studying a “microcosm” of differing interests—educational, social and

political—at work at given points in time (p. 42). Such interests have been established as “subject traditions [. . .] which exist with varying degrees of articulation within most school subjects” (Goodson & Marsh, 1996, p. 41). The first is an *academic* subject-oriented grammar school tradition, which focuses on preparing pupils for professional or university study. The second is a *utilitarian* tradition, intended to provide pupils with practical and professional skills. A third is the child-centred *pedagogic* tradition, which focuses on the pupil’s learning and development (Goodson & Marsh, 1996, pp. 42-44). The authors show how corresponding traditions are traceable in England, the United States and Australia, but that their manifestations reflect the different countries’ historic developments and political priorities. In England, for instance, the academic Grammar School tradition retained hegemony even when comprehensive lower secondary schooling was introduced in the 1970s (Goodson & Marsh, 1996).

Several studies in curriculum history also analyse teachers’ experiences and negotiations with curriculum change (Goodson, 2014; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). In recent decades, scholars have looked at curriculum change from cross-national and globalisation perspectives as international testing and standardisation of learning outcome increasingly influence national curricula regarding both content and form (Goodson, 2014; Karseth & Sivesind, 2010; Mølsted & Karseth, 2016; Sivesind & Wahlström, 2016). However, while curricula across countries reflect international movements, they are also conditioned by national school systems and political priorities (Sivesind & Wahlström, 2016; Yates & Young, 2010).

In Norway, scholars in curriculum history or the history of education underscore the importance of the values of democracy and social inclusion (Dale, 2008; Sivesind, 2008; Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006). When the idea of a common school emerged in the mid-1800s, an important concern was that an undifferentiated classroom should unite pupils across social divides (Telhaug, 1974). In 1936, Norway established a 7-year common school. In 1969, a 9-year compulsory education abolished previous divisions between academic and vocational schooling at the lower secondary level (Dale, 2008). In 1994, Norwegian adolescents gained equal access to upper secondary education, (MC&E, 1994), and with the 2006 reform (LK06), schooling was extended to 13 years including the voluntary upper secondary level (ME&R, 2006).

As in most Nordic countries in the post-war period, there has been a political consensus that state-mandated schooling should provide equal educational possibilities while securing pupils’ social inclusion (Antikainen, 2006; Telhaug et al., 2006). Political and business interests went hand in hand to build an educational system that would promote the nation’s economic progress (Sivesind, 2008; Telhaug et al., 2006). In the 1970s and ‘80s, Norwegian educational discourse espoused a radical pupil-oriented pedagogy, reminiscent of the 1920s and ‘30s progressive movement, but which, this time also

demanded local self-determination for pupils and teachers. The tide turned, and from the late 1980s, an international economic recession coincided with a “restorative” emphasis on the dissemination of traditional subject content in Norwegian curricula (Telhaug et al, 2006, p. 262). As Dale points out, the concern for social inclusion was strengthened in the 1980s and ‘90s through educational legislation securing pupils’ right to teaching adapted to their individual abilities (2008). From the beginning of the 20th century, neo-liberalist ideas have increasingly put their brand on Norwegian educational legislation (Helgøy & Homme, 2016; Sivesind, 2008; Telhaug et al., 2006). Still, Helgøy and Homme (2016) contend, recent decades’ educational outcome-oriented discourses continue to accommodate traditional ideals of equality and inclusion.

Both the more general “subject traditions” (Goodson & Marsh, 1996, p. 41) and national political discourses are recognisable in the development of school subjects in Norway. For instance, Aase describes how the position of the mother tongue “has balanced between being justified by its practical usefulness and by its broader cultural ‘Bildung-aims’ (Aase, 2005, p. 71). The subject has served an important identity-building function and been responsible for maintaining the national literary heritage of a young nation state (Engelsen, 2015; Nordstoga, 2003). The development of the subject English was marked by corresponding tensions between utilitarian and academic elitist traditions. Gudem (1989) investigated the differing interests at play in the development of English as a school subject in Norway from the 1880s to the early 1970s. She describes how two competing discourses struggled for hegemony in the processes towards compulsory English teaching in the 7-year common school in 1936 and the lower secondary school in 1969. One discourse saw English as intended for the study of canonical texts; the other promoted English as a modern subject that would provide practical language skills for all (Gudem, 1989, 1990). Also, English has been influenced by British and American institutions and international developments in foreign language learning (Simensen, 2008, 2011).

As previously stated, this article presents a study of syllabi representations of EFL reading in Norwegian curricula, a topic which is minimally represented in the existing literature. While Gudem’s study ended with the 1970s, this article deals with developments in the subject until 2013. The purpose is to understand present notions of reading by looking at how reading has been represented in curricula in the past and how these notions have intersected with the surrounding educational discourses. These notions of reading can be interpreted in two ways: as a linear development where new understandings replace or merge with the old, or as an available repertoire of meaning about EFL reading that cuts across generations of Norwegian syllabi. It appears that these notions of reading continue to condition the reasoning of present-day English teachers (Bakken, In progress, 2017).

Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

Goodson argues that the written curriculum provides us with “the best official guides to institutionalised schooling” (2002, p. 16). For instance, it allows us to trace the disempowering and empowering of social actors. Through examinations and streaming, the curriculum establishes distinctions between the able students and the less able and between the content knowledge that is assumed to be suitable for either of the groups (Goodson & Marsh, 1996).

This critical and social constructionist stance ties in with the CDA perspectives that I draw on in the analysis of English syllabi. A vital concern in CDA is an exploration of how the truths of the past are built into present understandings, thus contributing to the maintenance of or change in our “systems of knowledge and belief” about the social world, social identities or social relations (Fairclough, 1992, p. 64). In this respect, how social actors such as pupils and teachers are cast in a text, such as a curricular document, is significant, particularly if they are dealt with differently in different texts representing the same social practice (Van Leeuwen, 2008). Paying attention to developments in the representation of social actors provides insight into these “systems of knowledge and belief” and how they persist or change (Fairclough, 1992, p. 64).

Sometimes, social actors are left out simply because their presence is perceived as superfluous in a discourse context, or because certain social actors are promoted at the expense of others (Fairclough, 1992; Van Leeuwen, 2008). For example, when curricula fail to mention teachers in the explanation of reading, this omission may indicate that their roles are assumed to be commonly understood by their readers, or that the roles of pupils are seen to deserve more attention. Social actors may be represented as activated or passivated in a process, or they may be excluded or backgrounded (Fairclough, 2003; Van Leeuwen, 2008). They may also be represented as an undifferentiated group or explicitly differentiated from other groups of similar social actors (Van Leeuwen, 2008). To some extent, curricula cast social actors in genre-specific characteristics that persist over time. However, genres adapt and change with social developments (Fairclough, 2003), and how curricula explain the proposed practices or assign roles to social actors are salient discursive features that mirror such developments.

The CDA perspectives introduced above were carried into the analysis of the curricula. I examined how different syllabi explain reading regarding the roles of pupils and teachers and the aims of reading. To gain insight into these questions, I pursued linguistic and semantic features that explicitly or implicitly deal with reading, how to approach reading, what texts are considered appropriate and the degree of agency allowed to pupils. The word *reading* itself, for example, frequently used in the early curricula, is later replaced by words and expressions that mirror new perceptions of reading. Such discursive features may promote

the pupil's own efforts to achieve curricular aims or tie those efforts to the use of specific procedures. Whether pupils are represented as actively in charge of processes or as "beneficiaries" of proposed measures (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 30) reflects contemporary views of the pupils' roles in learning processes. Also, the roles of pupils are likely to be conditioned by the roles of teachers and vice versa. Thus, the analysis examined the agency assigned to pupils and the balance in their relationship with teachers.

The titles of the four periods—reading *as exposure, tool, encounter* and *meta-awareness*—are categories that emerge from the analysis of syllabi. They capture the essence of syllabi representations of reading regarding the positioning of the pupils and the aims of reading. I also paid attention to how syllabi explanations of reading change when new groups of pupils gain access to English. What curricula explicitly or implicitly say about the roles of social actors provides insight into the dominant notion of reading, who it is for and what purpose it serves.

Material

The empirical material for this article comprises eleven syllabi for English, including a 1939 government circular and a preliminary plan from 1957. The first two rows in Table 1 relate to compulsory English teaching both at the primary and secondary levels whereas the third and fourth row relate to non-compulsory English teaching in the lower secondary school. The material does not include syllabi for non-compulsory English teaching at the upper secondary level.

The 1939 syllabus introduced English as a compulsory subject in years 6-7 of the 7-year common school. It was followed by a 1957 preliminary plan outlining "An English teaching for all" (Attempts Council for Schools, 1957, p. 168). This plan was further developed in the 1960 and 1964 experimental syllabi, introducing compulsory but differentiated English courses at the lower secondary level. The 1974 syllabus was the first to regulate unstreamed English teaching at the lower secondary level. In the 2006 and the current 2013 revised version of the English Subject Curriculum, English is a compulsory subject from school year 1 throughout the general (year 11) and vocational courses (years 11 and 12) of upper secondary education. In 2006, the national curriculum was divided into subject curricula, and thus the current syllabus for English is called the "English Subject Curriculum."

Table 1: Syllabi regulating English teaching in Norway: 1939-2013

Compulsory education	Syllabi	1939	1957	1960/64	1974	1987	1997	2006/13
	School years	6-7	5-7	7-9	4-9	4-9	3-10	1-11/12
Non-compulsory education	Syllabi	1939	1950					
	School years	8-10	8-10					

The 1939 governmental circular introduced new principles for non-compulsory English teaching in the academic branch of lower secondary schooling (*realskolen*) and formed the basis for the 1950 syllabus. I have included the 1939 and 1950 syllabi for non-compulsory English teaching for two reasons. First, reading at the lower secondary level was designed for a more mature and competent group of pupils than the 1939 syllabus and is thus more comparable to present-day EFL reading. Second, the syllabi for non-compulsory English teaching were important, as they defined English teaching in compulsory education well into the 1960s (Gundem, 1989).

These eleven curricular documents vary in length from two to five pages (1939 circular, 1939 syllabus) to about 30 pages (1960 and 1964 syllabi), the last two including descriptions of the differentiated courses. From 1987, the syllabi cover eight to eleven pages. The syllabi are all analysed in the original language to avoid meaning loss in translation. Syllabi excerpts and quotes from 1939 to 1987 are translated into English, but for the 1997 syllabus and 2006 and 2013 subject curricula, I use the official English versions.

This article takes a critical approach to what insights can be gained from text-based research. The findings construed from an analysis of texts are “inevitably partial” and “always provisional and open to change” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 14-15). Such critical reflections also extend to my “repertoire of interpretations” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 273), which is likely to emphasise some and de-emphasise or exclude other interpretations. Also, understanding the past from a current perspective has certain limitations. As Goodson (2002) states, “there are always substantial dangers in drawing conclusions from past historical experiences embedded in different political and social contexts” (p. 16). Still, as a cultural artefact, a syllabus can be seen to accommodate both preceding and contemporary understandings, which in turn condition later ones.

Analysis: From Reading as Exposure to Meta-awareness of Texts

This analysis is presented chronologically through four periods of curricula history to trace the changes in the roles of the social actors that developed in tandem with the surrounding educational discourses. For each of the periods, I describe the essential features of such discourses, specifically those about

reading and the teaching of English. The aim is to provide an interpretative context for the shifting notions of reading and their resurfacing in later periods.

Reading as exposure: 1930s–1950s

The direct method that influenced English syllabi in this period incorporated several progressive ideas in contemporary language learning pedagogy. The first was that of the Reform Movement originating in Germany in the 1880s (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). It promoted three principles for foreign language learning: the acquisition of correct pronunciation based on new advances in phonology, the use of connected texts, and monolingual teaching. A second and related influence encompassed several different “natural methods” that favoured unmoderated one-language exposure (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004, p. 211).

These influences underpinned Carl Knap’s (1921) version of the direct method in Norwegian EFL teaching (Gundem, 1989). Notably, Knap (1921) pointed out that even though mastering spoken English was the priority, reading was always the ultimate aim. He proposed reading exercises that were aimed towards an immediate understanding of the text and argued that translation of texts to compare the foreign language with the mother tongue was an obstacle to such immediate understanding. Language patterns should be induced from connected texts and not deduced from abstract rules and artificial examples.

Contemporary English syllabi express close commitment to the direct method at both the primary and the secondary levels. The 1939 syllabus states that the teaching of English at the primary level will be conducted using the principles of the direct method that apply to the secondary level (MC&E, 1939a). When reading English, “two things need to be practiced (. . .) pronunciation and the ability to immediately understand the meaning and content of texts” and, “reading will gradually take up the first and the most space in the work with the language” (MC&E, 1939a, p. 236)

Thus, in the 1939 circular and 1950 syllabus for lower secondary English teaching, reading receives the most attention. It is vital to take on texts directly and not spend unnecessary time on preparation. Pupils are encouraged to “read as much English as possible” on their own both at school and at home (MC&E, 1939b, p. 8; MC&E, 1950, p. 42). Also, texts must fit the ability of the reader so that they are “easy enough to avoid having to translate them” (MC&E, 1939b, p. 8). In this way, pupils will be able “to move faster” than with the conventional methods (MC&E, 1950, p. 45).

Excerpts from the 1939 circular below illustrate this emphasis in EFL reading at the lower secondary level:

One should stop going through texts as soon as one finds it justifiable, providing a text does not present great difficulties, as for instance a poem might do (...) The time one gains from doing what is mentioned above should be used for more extemporal reading. (MC&E, 1939b, p. 8)

One should not require any detailed study of the texts. The pupils should have understood them [the texts] in terms of their main content, and one can control this by asking them questions in a lesson, or the pupils can make short summaries of what they have read. (MC&E, 1939b, p. 8)

Thus, the first course of action for the teacher is to “stop going through texts” as soon as possible. This would save time and allow for more extensive reading. While the above excerpts focus on the concrete measures taken by the teacher, the following one relates to the specific role of the pupil and the aims of reading:

The ability to manoeuvre through an unknown text is an important aspect of modern language acquisition. Hence, the pupil may use the knowledge he possesses to develop his ability to combine elements and to exercise judgment. (MC&E, 1939b, p. 8)

First, the unprepared text exposure is essential because it allows the pupil space to develop an analytical attitude to reading. In this way, the pupil may use previous knowledge to “combine elements” and “exercise judgment” when having to “tackle unknown texts” (MC&E, 1939b, p. 8). Independent manoeuvring helps the learner understand text content, and it also encourages the ability to master future text exposure, thus assigning pupils an “activated” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 145) and autonomous role as well as control of their language resources. At the same time, the teachers are to decide when the new approaches are “justifiable” for their pupils, and make sure that they have understood the main content of the texts (MC&E, 1939b, p. 8).

Reading as a tool for practical language skills: 1960s and 1970s

In the experimental period leading to compulsory lower secondary schooling, educational authorities signalled a profound shift in discourse. As a compulsory subject, English teaching had to change. As the newly established Attempts Council for Schools (1957) contended, it would be against the principles of “An English teaching for all” to continue with the conventional emphasis “on reading, grammar and written work” (p. 170). Thus, syllabi in the 1960s and 1970s reflected the demand for an English teaching true to the values of the Norwegian common school by underscoring the importance of practical and particularly spoken skills that so far “had been pushed into the background” (Attempts Council for Schools, 1957, p. 170).

However, this commitment did not mean that everybody was to be taught the same. There was general agreement among scholars and teachers at the time that compulsory lower secondary education had to be differentiated by the pupils’ academic abilities (Gundem, 1989). Therefore, both the 1960 and 1964 curricula

outlined differentiated courses for the different subjects at the lower secondary level. In the case of English, the requirement for reading was an important distinguishing criterion between courses. The most extensive reading was to be reserved for the courses that would allow access to upper secondary education (MC&E, 1960, 1964). The 1960 syllabus states that for the pupils “who follow the general, practical course,” a change of direction is of great importance “so that oral use of English receives the most attention in the teaching” (MC&E, 1960, p. 207). Still, the emphasis on speaking skills continued in the following years when the syllabi no longer differentiated pupils by their language abilities. It was last repeated in the 1987 syllabus, which declared that “the oral use of the spoken language is most important at all levels” (MC&E, 1987, p. 206).

The call for “practical language skills” in English coincided with new advances in language learning theory and applied linguistics underscoring the importance of habit formation and graded language acquisition (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). Hence, from the 1960s onwards, syllabi moved away from the principles of the direct method. The extensive and independent reading promoted in the 1939 circular and 1950 syllabus was downplayed. This development culminated in the 1974 syllabus, which promoted behaviourist drilling of pronunciation and language patterns in the teaching of English (Simensen, 2008). In the 1974 syllabus, texts are referred to as “language material” intended to exemplify language patterns (MC&E, p. 147). The following excerpts demonstrate what was considered the appropriate approach to reading in the teaching of English and what roles should be allocated to pupils and teachers:

Intensive treatment of texts requires an in-depth study of the text and practice so that the pupils understand the content, master pronunciation and are comfortable with the new language patterns. The intensive text treatment is expected to be led by the teacher. (MC&E, 1974, p. 150)

There must be strict requirements to form and content in a text that is to be treated intensively. It must be organised in such a way that it creates a natural sequence where the level of difficulty increases gradually in terms of vocabulary, expressions and language patterns. (MC&E, 1974, p. 150)

The reading processes described in the above excerpts focus on the means and modes that teachers and pupils must observe in the intensive and extensive treatment of texts. To understand the content, master pronunciation and become comfortable with new language patterns, the pupils need to be collectively led through reading procedures that the teacher controls and monitors. The purpose is not to encourage the pupils’ individual judgement, but for the pupils to acquire the selected language patterns. Thus, texts that are treated intensively must have “strict requirements to form and content” and “require an in-depth study” (MC&E, 1974, p. 150). Texts for extensive reading are to be

conscientiously chosen to help sustain already acquired language, and teachers are cautioned against using independent material without careful planning.

Even though the teacher is placed in charge of the appropriately sequenced procedures, this role is restricted. The 1974 syllabus makes clear that “the work with the learning material must take place in accordance with a carefully adapted plan” ensured by an approved textbook or a “complete programme for language learning” (MC&E, 1974, p. 147, p. 150).

Reading as encounter: 1980s–1990s

From the mid-1980s onwards, earlier notions of reading were revisited when syllabi merged notions of the direct method with several contemporary influences. The most striking feature from this point onwards was a complete change in discourse, placing the pupil at centre stage. The word “encounter,” introduced in the 1987 syllabus, captured the new emphasis on the pupil’s meaning-making and personal preferences. Thus, texts had to be meaningful and of “value for the pupil” (MC&E, 1987, p. 210). The 1987 syllabus encouraged teachers to choose relevant topics at the local level, preferably in cooperation with pupils.

Two influences were particularly relevant to EFL reading in this period. The first was Krashen’s input hypothesis in foreign language learning, which sees language as innate in human beings, meaning that the individual subconsciously recognises the structural elements of a language when exposed to it. Thus, the learner will automatically make sense of texts in the foreign language providing the texts constitute “comprehensible input” (Krashen, 1982, p. 9). With this precondition in place, the learning of the foreign language takes care of itself.

The second influence focuses on the building of learner autonomy. Holec (1981) defines learner autonomy as “the capacity to control important aspects of one’s language learning,” which is not inborn, but can be learned (p. 3). This understanding is incorporated in the 1997 syllabus and is clearly expressed in one of the general aims for the subject: “to promote insight into what it is to learn English and their [the pupils’] capacity to take charge of their own learning” (MER&CA, 1999, p. 240, [English version of the 1997 curriculum]). These excerpts trace the above influences in the description of reading:

Learning takes as its starting point the pupils’ encounters with the language in contexts which provide pointers for understanding and exploring what is new. Thus, pupils can develop the ability to find their way around English texts, express what they experience in the encounter with those texts and thereby enhance their text competence and language awareness (MER&CA, 1999, p 239).

It is emphasised that the pupils are also to work with texts that are not specifically designed for language learning (authentic texts). Through a variety of texts [that] can inspire them, arouse their curiosity and serve as models for them when they express themselves in English, pupils will come into contact with the living language (MER&CA, 1999, p. 238).

First, the attention to the pupils' *encounters* with texts permeates both excerpts. Second, pupils should be provided with "texts that are not made with language learning in mind" to enable experiences with the "living language," thus underscoring the authenticity of the encounter. Third, the repeated use of the possessive "their" accentuates the pupils' conscious awareness and ownership of their learning.

These excerpts suggest that a series of simultaneous processes are at work in the interaction between the pupil and the text. As pupils "find their way around English texts," they can add new elements to both their language skills and text competence. Also, texts can "arouse their curiosity" at the same time as they "serve as models" for the pupils' own oral or written production, thus merging a spontaneous response to the text with analytical reflection. Notably, while keeping the pupil-centred aspect of the 1987 syllabus, the 1997 syllabus introduced recommendations for literature echoing earlier concerns for canonical texts in the study of English.

In both the 1987 and 1997 syllabi, achieving the proposed aims for reading does not depend on the efficiency of the teacher's method, nor is the pupil's development of learner autonomy presented solely as the result of his/her individual reflections. It is seen to come about in "cooperation with teachers and fellow pupils" where "they gain experience of shaping their own language learning" (MER&CA, 1999, p. 238). While the role of the pupil is promoted and represented as "activated", the role of the teacher is "backgrounded" and must be inferred from context (Fairclough, 2003, p. 145). The backgrounding of the teacher suggests a new balance in the relationship between teachers and pupils; rather than providing authoritative interpretations of texts, teachers are expected to facilitate text encounters that encourage the pupils' own reflections.

Reading as meta-awareness: 2000s

At the dawn of the new millennium, the Norwegian educational community was shaken by the news of Norwegian lower secondary pupils scoring at mediocre levels in the international PISA test that measured competencies in core subjects (Lie, Kjærnsli, & Turmoe, 2001). Also, a study of final-year upper secondary students showed that their reading skills in English insufficiently prepared them for academic study (Hellekjær, 2005). Research into foreign language learning brought new insights into the complexity of reading. It underscored how purposeful and strategic reading is essential to improved reading proficiency and text comprehension (Grabe, 2002; Urguhart & Weir, 2014).

Spurred by these developments, the LK06 provided explanations of reading and other basic skills across subjects, aligning with international standards. In the case of English, the Common European Framework of Languages (CEFR) offers descriptors of the language learner's competencies that allow for uniform assessment (Council of Europe, 2001). Also, the 2013 explanation of EFL reading ties in with recent decades' international literacy discourses of social

empowerment. For example, in UNESCO's (2006) definition, literacy develops along a continuum, from basic reading and writing skills to a critical literacy that enables individuals to participate fully in society. These influences are traceable in the 2013 syllabus where reading in English is explained as follows:

Being able to read in English means the ability to create meaning by reading different types of text. It means reading English language texts to understand, reflect on and acquire insight and knowledge across cultural borders and within specific fields of study. This involves preparing and working with reading English texts for different reasons and of varying lengths and complexities. The development of reading proficiency in English implies using reading strategies that are suited to the objective by reading texts that are advancingly more demanding. Furthermore, it involves reading English texts fluently and to understand, explore, discuss, learn from and to reflect upon different types of information (ME&R, 2013, p. 2).

The introductory sentence expresses an emphasis on differentiated text exposure to develop the ability "to create meaning from texts". Thus, the notion of the autonomous pupil who can navigate a variety of text landscapes is retained from the 1997 syllabus but, now this ability relies primarily on a purposeful and strategic reading that is "suited to the objective". Also, the explanation focuses on the outcome of reading rather than on the pupils' spontaneous response to the text encounter. What should result from reading is the ability to "understand, explore, discuss" and "reflect upon" texts echoing the descriptors for reading in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). In this way, the current syllabus promotes reading as a *meta-awareness* that enables pupils to critically think and talk about texts and their contexts.

The above explanation of reading is kept in universal terms with no explicit reference to social actors or their relationships. For instance, the "agentless" processes (Fairclough, 1992, p. 179) of "preparing and working with reading English texts for different reasons" (ME&R, 2013, p. 2) make no concrete mention of how these activities involve pupils and teachers.

Summary and Discussion

In the period inspired by the direct method, the emphasis in syllabi was on unprepared text *exposure* to promote an immediate understanding. In "modern English acquisition", the conventional grammar-translation method belonged in the past (MC&E, 1939b, p. 8). In the 1960s and 1970s, syllabi saw reading *as a tool* to acquire practical language skills. Pronunciation and spoken skills were paramount, while meaningful text content, which was equally important in the direct method, was gradually lost towards the end of this second period. The syllabi in both periods were largely method-driven and gave clear instructions for reading procedures and the roles of pupils and teachers. This characteristic

was strengthened in the 1974 syllabus, which assigned less agency to both pupils and teachers in the teacher-led drilling of language patterns. The syllabi in the 1980s and 1990s merged elements from the direct method and favoured the pupils' *encounter* with authentic texts. Reading was vital to the development of both the pupils' analytical skills and for personal development. With the LK06, Norwegian curricula became competence-driven. The most recent curriculum emphasises the purposeful reading of a variety of texts to encourage the pupils' *meta-awareness* of texts.

Notions of reading and the roles of pupils and teachers

The different notions of reading expressed in curricula are intimately related to the pupil's agency. Reading as described in the 1939 and 1950 syllabi implied that the pupil would meet the text directly—*as exposure*. The purpose was for the pupils to develop their ability to use previous text experiences in their encounters with new ones. Similar notions of reading are manifest in the 1997 and 2013 explanation of reading. For instance, reading in the 1997 syllabus was represented as a metaphorical journey in which pupils were supposed to “find their way through English texts” (ME&R, 1999, pp. 239). It appears that a similar idea of reading as “reader-driven” interaction (Urguhart & Weir, 2014) underlies the notions of reading expressed in these syllabi. Despite such fascinating resemblances, the later notions of reading are not replicas of previous ones. For instance, the 2013 explanation reflects a much more complex view of reading involving “meta-cognitive” strategies to make sense of texts and their contexts beyond basic text comprehension (Urguhart & Weir, 2014, p. 179). Moreover, when Knap advocated exposure to “meaningful” texts, the primary intention was to spur pupils' interest in reading extensively as a means of acquiring the language. Here, the 1987 represented a “paradigmatic shift” (Simensen, 2008) due to the unprecedented value given to the pupils' meaning-making. Now, texts should not only appeal to pupils to ensure further text exposure but also to arouse “curiosity” (ME&R, 1999, p. 238) or encourage “insight across cultural borders” (ME&R, 2013, p. 2). Also, reading as an *encounter*, as expressed in the 1987 and 1997 syllabi, represented a new emphasis on social interactions with peers and teachers in line with socio-cultural learning theory.

The shifting notions of reading are also closely tied to the role of the teacher. In the era of the direct method, syllabi gave the teacher clear recommendations about not interfering too much with the pupils' reading. Still, there is little doubt that the pupils' learning was seen as the responsibility of the teacher. By contrast, the new radical movement influencing Norwegian curricula from the 1970s onwards came with a peer-based learning and pupil-centred pedagogy where teachers were “process-oriented supervisors” (Telhaug et al., 2006, p. 259). These influences were somewhat belated in the case of the subject English. As we saw, the 1974 syllabus still placed the teacher firmly in charge of the

pupils' learning. But, in the 1987 and 1997 syllabi, the pupils' ownership of their learning became paramount, and the role of the teacher changed. An important job of the teacher, it appears, was to provide suitable arenas for pupils to express and share their responses to texts. In the 2013 explanation of reading, the actions of both pupils and teachers are backgrounded or excluded. These "textual choices" are important (Fairclough, 2003) because they build on the premise that teachers appropriate centrally given aims to their local contexts (Engelsen, 2015; Sivesind, 2008). As part of a new output-oriented generation of curricula, syllabi no longer prescribe improved practices or offer recommendations, but leave it to the teachers to decide how to achieve syllabi aims.

Notions of reading and their shifting legitimization

Reading in line with the direct method promoted a scientific-academic approach where pupils could learn to induce abstract rules or patterns from concrete experiences and thus develop their intellectual capacity (Dale, 2008). At the same time, it underscored the importance of preparing individuals for participation in society, expressing a clear "utilitarian endpoint" in line with the progressive pedagogy of the 1920s and '30s (Elgström & Hellstenius, 2011). Still, the reading prescribed for non-compulsory English teaching was intended for the select few.

When English syllabi gradually left the principles of the direct method, this happened for several reasons. First, paradigmatic shifts towards behaviouristic methods in language learning pedagogy did not agree with the direct method (Simensen, 2008) and, second, extensive and independent reading appears to have been perceived as unfit for the more practically inclined pupils. Hence, syllabi in the 1960s and '70s favoured practical and preferably spoken skills to enable "possibilities for contact" in the pupils' future work or leisure (MC&E, 1960, p. 204). The emphasis on practical skills in English syllabi aligned with an expressed utilitarian post-war discourse in education. As in most Western democracies in this period, state education systems were seen "as vehicles of common purpose and social good" (Goodson, 2001, p. 46).

While EFL reading in the 1960s and '70s was legitimated by its usefulness, a pupil-centred discourse gained hegemony in the 1987 and 1997 syllabi, where the priority was the learner's autonomous reading. In the current 2013 explanation of reading, analytical approaches reminiscent of the inductive thinking of the direct method dominate. The word "practical" has disappeared. In addition, the concern for the pupil's personal response to texts is downplayed. Also, EFL reading is legitimated by measurable learning outcomes that are adaptable across language learning contexts.

As the above examples suggest, it appears that the shifting notions of reading have intersected with the national discourses of democracy and social inclusion in important ways. For instance, in the process towards compulsory lower

secondary teaching, the differentiated syllabi of the 1960's "represented an effort to break with the hegemonic position of the text" (Gundem, 1989, p. 299) thus linking social inclusion to spoken English skills for all. As we saw, the preference for spoken skills was maintained in subsequent, unstreamed syllabi until 1997. In 1987, democratic participation meant allowing for locally determined texts and topics that would fit the pupils' interest and needs. The 1997 syllabus' recommendations for classical literature can also be understood against these discourses. The expressed intention of the 1997 curriculum was to establish "common frames of reference for all" through centrally chosen subject knowledge (ME&R, 1999, p. 42). Thus, the cultural texts previously reserved for the few should now be available to everyone across social and ethnic divides. The current explanation of reading also includes important elements of social inclusion, but they align with an international literacy discourse of citizenship and the individual's societal involvement (UNESCO, 2006).

Concluding remarks

The aim of this article was to show how notions of EFL reading in syllabi representations of reading have evolved in tandem with developments in foreign language learning theory and how this relates to the roles of pupils and teachers. It also provided examples of how the shifting notions of EFL reading interact with the broader educational discourses, which to different degrees reflect utilitarian, academic and pedagogic "subject traditions" (Goodson & Marsh, 1996, pp. 42-44).

These shifting notions of EFL reading seem to have coincided with the national political agenda in important ways. For instance, when new generations of pupils gained access to English in post-war Norway, this democratic enterprise came to be more closely associated with speaking the language rather than reading it. It seems that in the process towards compulsory English teaching for all in the 1960s, English syllabi not only established a distinction between speaking and reading but also between those who were disposed towards reading and those who were thought to be better served by learning oral skills. This latter concern appears to translate as ambivalence to reading in the discursive practices of present-day English teachers where pupils tend to be referred to either as fond or avid readers accustomed to reading from childhood or as less fortunate and reluctant to read. While acknowledging the benefits of reading to language learning, several teachers said that differences in the pupils' reading abilities and backgrounds were difficult to remedy in their English teaching (Bakken, in progress, 2017).

This article is intended to raise awareness of how previous notions of reading travel across generations of syllabi and adapt to new contexts thus reflecting change and continuity in our "system of knowledge and belief" (Fairclough,

1992, p. 64) about what EFL reading means and what is its purpose and legitimation. I believe teachers must be aware of these accumulated understandings to critically reflect on the notions of EFL reading that condition their practices. To gain further insight into these matters, one should also explore other texts, such as texts books or exam papers, or investigate how the understandings of the past affect present reading practices in the English language classroom.

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