

International Perspectives on Writing Curricula and Development

A Cross-Case Comparison

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Chapter 9

Between joyride and high-stakes examination: Writing development in Denmark

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Focusing on Denmark as a context for the teaching of writing, this chapter has two aims. One is to explore how writing and writing development historically has been, and currently is, described, or rather “prescribed” (Goodlad et al., 1979), in the curriculum for Danish as a subject (L1) in Years 1–9. The second aim is to explore in what ways the prescribed curriculum is enacted in practice.

The context of Denmark

Since the nineteenth century, Denmark has developed into a rather coherent nation-state, currently with 5.8 million inhabitants. The jurisdiction covers roughly 2,000 state-funded or private primary and lower secondary schools teaching around 700,000 students. Denmark has a long history of the centralised governance of education, represented by the Ministry of Education and overseen by the Parliament. The Ministry’s curricular documents for primary and lower secondary education govern teaching at schools in all regions of the country; primary and lower secondary education is one contiguous system. Regarding teaching of writing in schools, there is a gap between two relatively closed circular systems: one comprised of university colleges educating teachers for primary and lower secondary education; and one comprised of university academics, within the “Nordic” language and literature departments, training teachers for the upper secondary system. These two circuits are reflected in the structure and organisation of curricula and in governing agencies at the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, it should be noted that each municipality, school and teacher is granted a large degree of autonomy, relying on local policies and school leadership as well as the teacher’s professional judgement.

The dynamic between centralised governing and decentralised autonomy has implications for writing and writing development in compulsory education. For example, scholarship focusing on the emergence of multimodal writing in Nordic L1 subjects finds that multimodal composition is now inscribed in all Nordic L1 curricula, but argues that the decentralised organisation in Denmark has an impact on how this aspect of the curriculum

is “enacted” in practice (Elf et al., 2018). In other words, while there is one prescribed national curriculum in Denmark, quite a lot of variety is expected in classrooms.

Another local-national condition that co-shapes variety in the enacted classroom is related to learning resources. Unlike some countries, the market for learning resources has been fully liberalised in Denmark, and it has been like that since the middle of the twentieth century (Fougt et al., 2020). Like in many other countries, writing is mainly taught within the L1 subject. Research on prompts for writing within learning resources for Danish as a subject finds clear patterns. For example, in early primary school, researchers find “a subject dominated by the repetitive pedagogical approach, with content mainly consisting of repetitive spelling instruction and literary analysis” and conclude that “this is not in line with the national curriculum” (Bundsgaard et al., 2020, p. 26). A similar point is made for Grades 7–9 and is backed up by research on the way grammar is taught in Grade 7 classrooms, decontextualised and without linkage to the teaching of writing (Kabel et al., 2019). The national curriculum’s target goal for “Production” Grade 7–9 (age around 13–16) states that students should be able to “express themselves comprehensively, clearly and varied in writing, speech, sound and image in a form that suits genre and situation” (UVM [Ministry of Education], 2014a, our translation). As Jeffery et al. (2018) have shown, this goal reflects a broad multimodal notion of writing in the Danish writing curriculum, whose progression is described in a “relatively linear” manner from Grades 0–9. However, as Bundsgaard et al. (2020) critically argue, “only a few learning materials focus on media, communication and the reading and composition of multimodal messages” (p. 25). While one should be careful not to equate learning resources with enacted classroom practice, this observation does raise questions as to whether there is a discrepancy between the prescribed and enacted writing curriculum. As we shall demonstrate later, a similar conclusion could be inferred from other research from Danish classrooms, including research on the teaching and student uptake of multimodal composition in classrooms (Christensen, 2016) and how national writing exams are realised and assessed by raters (Troelsen, 2018, 2020a). More broadly, these findings are a reminder of the well-established claim across educational systems worldwide that prescribed curricula—including writing curricula—are often *misaligned* with auxiliary documents, such as guidelines for writing examination, and the enacted curriculum as found in classroom practices.

School writing and educational writing research in Denmark

Briefly, writing in the Danish curriculum for compulsory education is primarily found within the curriculum of Danish as a subject (L1), although some aspects of teaching writing and promoting students’ writing development are

found in other subjects as well, including physics/chemistry and English and other second-languages (Dysthe et al., 2016; Jeffery et al., 2018). However, writing is positioned across the curriculum in primary and lower secondary education (age group approximately 6–16) mainly as a core focus and competence area in Danish and evaluated at the school-leaving exam in “Written composition” (the literal translation would be “Danish written production”) and a test in “Grammar and orthography” (Troelsen, 2018). Besides this school-leaving exam, there has been no tradition for standardised assessment on writing. Thus, evaluation depends on the individual teacher. Recently, a 55-year tradition of all testing being voluntary and low stakes in the “Folkeskole” system (literally meaning “School of the People,” the public-funded school covering primary and lower secondary education in “Steps 1–9”), was abandoned given the implementation of new admission requirements for vocational and general upper secondary education. Since then, students who fail the examination in either Danish or mathematics will lose their legal rights for further youth education. This basically represents a paradigm shift in Danish school culture. In earlier days, a student could not be prevented from continuing to upper secondary or vocational education. Now you can. Those who have trouble passing exams are offered some compensatory steps. Nonetheless, a consequence is that 15 to 18% of all students are left behind as school dropouts with no legal rights to further formal education (Pihl & Salmon, 2018). Later in this chapter, we shall investigate more deeply how writing and examination practices are framed and realised within Danish as a subject.

What agencies are then responsible for framing and designing the writing curriculum? Educational research in Denmark has played a limited role in the making of curricula, including writing curricula. Instead, policy making and teacher education for primary and lower secondary school has acted rather autonomously, at least until the end of the twentieth century. Theoretically, current and earlier curricula are informed heavily by German didactics based on hermeneutical and critical traditions, as well as more local Danish and Nordic *Bildung* movements and thinkers, such as the tradition for oracy in teaching founded by Danish nineteenth-century educational thinker N.F.S. Grundtvig.¹ So, considering which actors are informing and co-shaping curricular policy making on writing on primary and lower secondary levels and how writing research and theory-making is informing prescribed and enacted curricula, there is an important history to remember. Later in this chapter, we highlight historical points of impact for writing in curricula from the early nineteenth century through frequent reforms from 1960 until 2014. Over the last two decades or so, there has been a change in the situation due to developments within both the Danish education and research system and global megatrends. Basically, teacher education has been confronted with requirements to become more informed by research (Styrelsen for forskning og uddannelse [Department for Research and Education], 2018). Along with

that, educational research has increased, become academised and more oriented towards international research.

Considering writing research in Denmark more specifically, the research environment is relatively small and has so far had limited impact on policy making and teacher education. Only a few research projects have focused on writing in primary and lower secondary school, and only one large project funded by the national research council, the *Writing to Learn, Learning to Write* project, has explicitly focused on writing *development*, specifically on the transition from lower to upper secondary education with an emphasis on the latter (Elf, 2017; Krogh, 2018; Krogh & Jakobsen, 2019; Krogh & Piekut, 2015). Another way of illuminating the limited impact and outreach of writing research on current curricula is to note that until recently no researchers were involved in authoring the auxiliary document that describes criteria and guidelines for the school-leaving exam in written composition, a key document we focus on here (UVM, 2019b). Nor have educational researchers taken part in developing national writing exams. The exam is developed by a committee comprising teachers and civil servants, appointed by the Ministry of Education, but no writing researchers, quite unlike the case in other countries, including Norway and Sweden (Troelsen, 2018; see also Skar & Aasen, this volume). Having said that, changes are on their way. Literacy researchers, such as the head of the National literacy centre, were invited as members of the commission revising the *Common Standards* (UVM, 2014a) for Danish L1 that we will focus on in this chapter. Likewise, one of the co-authors of this chapter (Elf) has been appointed chair of a Ministry of Education commission revising—or more specifically, as the official mandate states, “clarifying” assessment criteria for the examination in written composition.

Analytic strategy

The above sketch of central government entities, informed by practitioners in limited dialogue with research, for developing Danish curricula has been the well-established practice for decades—a practice, which should be kept in mind as we analyse the following data:

- a legal documents from 1814, 1960, 1976, 1984, 1995, 2001, 2009 outlining writing curricula ([Legal document], 1814; Folketinget [The National Parliament], 1960, 1976, 1984, 1995; UVM, 2001, 2009)
- b currently ruling curricular and auxiliary documents on writing and writing examination (UVM, 2014b, 2019b)
- c empirical research on the enactment of writing examination in classrooms and at exams (Christensen et al., 2014; Christensen, 2015, 2016; Troelsen, 2018, 2020a).

Following the general analytical framework of this volume, we argue that curricular documents and classroom and writing examination data—analysed

inductively through content analysis and deductively through the Discourses of Writing (DoW) framework (Ivanič, 2004)—allow us to discuss how writing and writing development are prescribed and enacted in Danish primary and lower secondary education as compared to similar cases across the world.

According to Ivanič and, more broadly, this volume’s analytical framework for understanding writing and writing development in contemporary national curricula (see Chapter 1), one must first try to consider the spatiotemporal context for writing, that is how historical, social and cultural developments on a sociohistorical timescale (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010) co-shape writing discourse and writing as a social practice in school. Above, we briefly framed the contemporary educational context for writing and writing research in Denmark. In the next section, we further elaborate on the history of teaching writing in a Danish context. This is followed by an analysis of contemporary global geopolitical trends, and how they have been translated and recontextualised in a Danish educational context, and how this co-shapes the Danish writing curriculum in the twenty-first century. This then leads to a section that offers a content and discourse analysis of the central curricular documents from Ivanič’s discourse perspective. In continuation, we synthesise, based on empirical research, how the current curriculum is enacted in classroom practice. Finally, we offer a brief discussion of implications for research and practice in a Danish context and in a comparative cross-national perspective.

Locating writing in the Danish curriculum: A brief history

Considering briefly the history of writing in Danish education, we demonstrate in this section how writing was established as a subject in the early-nineteenth century. Since then, it has been present in the curriculum, however losing its status as a subject and instead becoming an integral part of the “mother tongue” subject Danish. Important school reforms, which have rearticulated the discourse and function of writing in school, are found in 1960, 1976, 1984, 1995 and in early-twenty-first-century 2001 and 2009. Tracking the contents of the writing curriculum historically and trying to understand what writing and writing development have meant discursively in different epochs—drawing on Ivanič’s DoW framework—will add further to the sociohistorical context for understanding how writing and writing development are framed discursively in the current *Common Standards* curriculum.

As a precursor to the twentieth-century writing, the early-nineteenth-century writing curricula documents show that “writing” is used as a term and existed as a subject in school. As an important impact point, in 1814 all children were secured the right to schooling for seven years in primary school, and *writing* was sanctioned as one of four core goals. As declared in section §24 by King Frederik VI, “Schools should teach Religion, writing,

and calculation as well as reading.” ([Legal document], 1814, our translation). Current writing research argues that teaching writing at that time was based on what we would term today, with Ivanič’s DoW framework, a skills-oriented approach to writing offering very basic access to literacy (Berge, 1988; Engstrøm, 2003; Ivanič, 2004).

Tracking the curricular development further into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we find that writing as a core topic/subject slowly lost its privileged position as a subject in its own right. Instead, the mother-tongue subject was proposed during the late-nineteenth century and later reconstructed in the twentieth century in a way that would reflect both broader international paradigms as well as local-national influences (Green & Erixon, 2020; Sawyer & van de Ven, 2006). In Denmark, writing became an integral aspect of Danish as a subject (Krogh, 2012). It remained to serve a nation-building narrow *Bildung* purpose until the mid-twentieth century, albeit challenged by emerging “developmental” and “communicative” paradigms within L1, inspired by Dewey’s reform pedagogy and the “linguistic turn” respectively, that would introduce an expanded notion of texts and writing (Elf, 2009; Krogh, 2012; Sawyer & van de Ven, 2006). In Denmark, a key turning point took place in a post-war 1960 reform, as a new steering document stated that:

It must be considered one of school’s main tasks to train each individual student in using the mother tongue as proficiently as possible, with regards to understanding both speech and writing, training reading and developing individual skills for expressing oneself both orally and in writing. Hereby the subject meets not only everyday life’s practical aspects; the foundation for personal growth is established, and a sense of community and solidarity is strengthened. (Folketinget, 1960; our translation)

This statement is strikingly modern, in several ways. Firstly, it emphasises writing as part of a broader literacy development that involves both speech and writing. As such, it clearly moves beyond the skills discourse of writing (see Ivanič, 2004) and orientates towards writing as a social and creative practice that accentuates the individual writer’s interests. Secondly, “personal growth” is emphasised and expected to develop in a dynamic individual process shaped by social practices ranging from practical life to the broader community. Finally, there is clearly a normative orientation in this statement even though it is freed from religious and moral beliefs and relatively empty of pre-supposed content.

The 1960 law clearly reflects early-twentieth-century reform trends as it builds on a growth model of personal development inspired by Dewey, among others, and a broader conception of literacy informed by the linguistic turn. Some contemporaries rendered it “progressive,” implying a positive democratisation and modernisation of education; while other contemporaries and later critics, both in a Danish and international context, describe it with

the similar term “progressive,” however referring to a negative setback for education and society.

Regardless, the personal growth and expanded literacy model for writing and writing development continued to dominate and was further accentuated in two later reforms. In 1969, the Danish Parliament voted for a reform of the Danish primary school system. Seven years later (!),² in the 1976 reform of primary and lower secondary school, the new curriculum for Danish was implemented. One historic aspect of the 1976 legislation was to change and extend the “7 years of schooling” rule from 1814. Instead, a comprehensive *school for all children* comprising at least nine years of schooling was implemented (although some segregation mechanisms remained until a 1993 reform). In the 1976 reform, focusing on the Danish curriculum, the subject was rearticulated as follows:

The purpose of teaching Danish is that students strengthen their opportunities to participate in a rich and varied language community.

Part 2. Teaching should stimulate students’ opportunity to make evaluations, take a stance and act. It should aim at offering students means for understanding of their own and other people’s situation, as well as means for gaining new knowledge, support their development of concepts, and offer tools for contact and communication.

Part 3. Students should gain/acquire skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing language to a level that makes them capable of perceiving and expressing themselves proficiently and varied. (Folketinget, 1976, our translation)

Some of the utterances here clearly draw on a modern understanding of communication, informed by, among others, sociolinguistics (“language community”). Drawing on the DoW framework, we would argue that writing as a social practice is a dominant discourse. One could even argue that the discourse of writing as sociopolitical is privileged (“make evaluations, take a stance and act”), which is rare (see Conclusion, this volume). However, considering the historical context, mid-1970s, influenced heavily by Marxism among scholars in Denmark, this should not be surprising.

Moving on to the 1984 reform, and a radically changed cultural and political climate, the purpose of Danish takes on a new direction and introduces a concept which has been retained and is still found even in the current curriculum, namely “joy.” It goes as follows:

Part 1. The purpose of teaching is that students develop their skill to use language in a good and multifaceted way, and that they increase their understanding of spoken and written Danish.

Part 2. Students should develop their sense of perspectives and values as well as their joy of expressing themselves and reading, through

experience and analysis, comprehension and evaluation, of older and newer literature as well as other modes of expression. (Folketinget, 1984, our translation)

The notion of joyful writing, or rather joyful expression through “multiple modes,” a notion reflecting new popular electronic media and anticipating later digital and multimodal composition, is remarkable. Using the DoW framework, we would argue that this 1984 purpose accentuates the creativity discourse, while also highlighting the basic skills discourse. However, this interpretation seems somewhat unsatisfactory. Rather, the purpose statement is a unique mix of writing discourses transgressing the DoW framework.

The 1984 reform is rather robust and was not revised until 1995. In the 1995 reform, the curriculum document’s “Part 2” states in a slightly different way:

Teaching should promote students’ inclination to use language in personal and multifaceted ways in collaboration with others. Students should strengthen their recognition of language and develop an open-minded and analytic approach to the modes of expression in their own contemporary life as well as in in other periods. They should achieve a joy of expressing themselves and reading and increase their engagement and insight in literature and other kinds of fiction. (Folketinget, 1995, our translation)

If many similarities are found compared with the 1984 document, one could ask, what is different? We argue that there is a discrete indication of a skills, or rather a competence, discourse, in the use of the words “should achieve a joy...” This expression is, frankly, a contradiction in terms. Nonetheless, it does make sense considering the changing sociohistoric context within which it was manifested. We now turn our attention towards this context and how it had powerful implications for the current writing curriculum, analysed in a later section.

The “Togo Shock”: Global geopolitical trends and local developments in the 1990s and on

Global trends of literacy research linked to policymaking increasingly co-shape local curriculum development, including reading and writing curricula in Denmark. One important literacy event that catalysed a radical shift in the view on literacy and, more broadly, the design of curricula and tests in Denmark was the so-called “Togo shock” in the aftermath of the IEA study of reading literacy six years earlier (Elley, 1994). According to public debate in Denmark, Danish reading results were lower than Togo, one of the poorest countries in the world. In fact, Togo never participated in the IEA study, but was mixed up in public debate with Trinidad-Tobago (an embarrassing,

culturally discriminatory fact). Nonetheless, politicians had to respond to the debate. As a result, the curriculum for teacher education was revised later that decade, and revisions of the curriculum for primary and lower secondary school were adjusted in 2001 introducing *Clear Standards* and later *Common Standards* (2009) emphasising a more goal-oriented approach. This was a first step, we argue, towards a competence-based framework applied to the curriculum from 2014. Also, the Togo shock left no doubt for politicians that Danish students should participate in the PISA (the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment) reading test, which Denmark has contributed to from 2001 on. Early in the first decade of this century, national reading tests were implemented in the Danish curriculum, and actions were taken to redesign national curricula establishing an elaborated centralised framework for teaching and assessing the progression of learning, through targets for learning outcomes, including learning to write (Jeffery et al., 2018). In other words, the linkage between tests, reading and writing and standardised frameworks for outcome-oriented student achievement has been a dominating educational discourse since the beginning of this century.

In recent years, this trend has had direct impact on the assessment of writing. In the 2019 guidelines for the national writing examination in Danish as a subject, writing is linked to a high-stakes situation. Specifically, if a student does not pass the exam in Danish, consisting of four different tests of which the writing exam is one, (s)he will have no access to upper secondary education (Jeffery et al., 2018, p. 339; see also Troelsen, 2018). As an attempt to create a pushback, some Danish scholars have argued that national reading tests and high-stakes examinations are highly problematic, even invalid. They are problematic because, among other reasons, the reliability of the current high-stakes writing exam was found, in a recent evaluation study commissioned by the Danish Parliament, to be as low as 0.55 (Dolin et al., 2018)—which is highly criticisable from a legal rights perspective. And invalid, in a more philosophical sense, because such an approach constructs teaching and learning in instrumental ways focusing solely on narrow criteria for “what works” and thus jeopardises a historically founded tradition for teacher-oriented *Didaktik* informed by continental *Bildung* theory (Biesta, 2014; Nepper Larsen, 2015). A *Didaktik* and *Bildung* rationale would emphasise teacher autonomy, a less instrumental approach to the governing of education, and that a student's receptive and productive work is linked intrinsically to personal formation and identity building (Deng, 2015; Gudem, 2000; Westbury et al., 2000). On the other hand, it should be noted that other Danish and Nordic scholars argue that curricula based on standards and learning outcomes complemented with continuous tests is the necessary answer to current flaws and future challenges in Danish education, and that a redesign of curricula could in fact integrate outcome-based teaching with the *Bildung* tradition and/or a more

holistic understanding of competences, such as the so-called DeSeCo framework (see e.g., in a Danish context Bundsgaard, 2016, 2018).

Hence, from a broader perspective one could argue that contemporary developments in the design of Danish curricula are realised through a narrow focus on reading literacy and international comparisons. Further, curricula are co-shaped by megatrends in the educational sphere such as the discourse of an emerging globalised “knowledge society,” “fast capitalism” and a “new work order,” which call for a rethinking of education systems and for broader debates about the “whats, whys and hows of education.” The DeSeCo framework mentioned above, developed within the context of Council of Europe, is but one example; other prominent examples are the agency for twenty-first-century competences (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012) and The New London Group’s multiliteracies framework (New London Group, 2000). With increasing pace of reforms, such megatrends have had a more or less direct impact on framing education and designing new curricula, including the curriculum for writing, in Denmark, as we show in the next section.

Simplification as complexification: Moving towards the current curriculum

Whereas curricula reforms in earlier times were quite rare and the curriculum comprised short descriptors of “purposes” of subjects as the central subgenre informing teaching, since the 1990s Denmark has experienced a movement in curriculum discourse towards more explicit top-down elaborated frameworks for education and teaching. New curricula reforms have been launched and then reformed again—and again—probably underestimating the inertia of implementation in practice and the resistance it can create among teachers. The long list of reforms includes in the 1990s, as noted above, steering documents framed as “CKFs” (Central Knowledge and Skills), and in the early-twenty-first century at least three reforms: a curriculum framework across all subjects named *Clear Standards* implemented for Danish in 2001 (and other subjects until 2005), a revision named *Common Standards* implemented in 2009, and in 2014 a larger reform first named *Simplified Common Standards* and later, going back to the original name, *Common Standards*. Both the “Clear” and the 2009 “Common” Standards outline CKFs for Danish specified as common objectives in the shape of end and form level goals/targets following Grades 2, 4, 6 and 9. Such goals establish a national aim for the direction and goals of outcomes (Jeffery et al., 2018, p. 338). Of course, one should be wary of overstating the impact of prescribed curricula in practice. On the other hand, seen from the point of view of the Ministry of Education, public servants, politicians and classroom teachers, these documents and their embedded discourse did indeed bring about a change towards curricular thinking and practice that foregrounds the pursuit of learning goals and progression

while backgrounding broader educational “purposes.” This became particularly evident in the 2014 revision *Simplified Common Standards*. Here, the notion and instrument of “competences” was added to the learning outcome-based design of the curriculum, with quite radical implications. In the case of the L1 subject, four “competence areas” were established, including Reading (Læsning), Production (Fremstilling), Interpretation (Fortolkning) and Communication (Kommunikation), and for each competence area specific “knowledge and skills” for a number of subdomains were listed for Grades 2, 4, 6, 9 and 10. This led to highly detailed tables (excessive and hyper-complex tables, as many teachers experienced them) presented on the Ministry of Education’s website in a hyperlinked auxiliary document structure and printed as large posters distributed to schools.

In this document, the (Simplified) *Common Standards* are represented in large interactive tables specifying goals and sub-goals for knowledge and skills within so-called competence areas in L1. The intention of the web version was to offer an interactive tool for teachers to plan their teaching and assessment focusing on particular goals, learning outcomes, and examples of “signs of learning,” the latter notion referring implicitly to Hattie’s notion of “visible learning” (Hattie, 2009). The website navigation presents tables for competence goals on the first page that are further detailed if one clicks the “show more” [vis mere] button. In Danish, more than 100 sub-goals are specified. It became a common joke among Danish teachers that the alleged simplification was in fact a “complexification,” or “complication.”

The table is one example of the trend of a standards- and learning-goals-oriented approach, which is currently influencing Danish (writing) curricula. Such designs of outcome-based standards are now a vital part of the Danish school culture and the dominant way of conveying the curriculum to stakeholders. As already hinted at, this development has indeed produced debate and pushback. The Common Standards development in Denmark has served as a catalyst for a strong and polarised public debate among teachers, teacher educators, educational researchers, politicians and other stakeholders. Several prominent educational scholars in Denmark argue that the Danish Ministry of Education has rushed the test, standards, competence and visible learning regime often associated with Hattie, among others (Nepper Larsen, 2015; Skovmand, 2016). Ironically, Hattie himself, who has been visiting Denmark as a consultant touring the Danish educational system extensively, has suggested that he might have been misunderstood by Danish politicians and civil servants in the Danish Ministry of Education in their attempt to translate his theory of visible learning into actual design (Hattie, 2020). These debates have, in fact, led to minor changes in the design, status and authority of the *Common Standards*. For example, whereas the competence areas and learning goals were foregrounded in the first web version, while the purpose section was backgrounded despite the fact that the purpose represents the highest level of the curricular hierarchy, the most recent version has restored the

hierarchy (see www.emu.dk). Perhaps most significantly, the multiple sub-goals related to knowledge and skills have changed status from “must” be implemented to “can” be implemented by teachers, from mandatory to voluntary. In principle, this allows for a higher degree of teacher autonomy and interpretation of the L1 subject’s purpose and competence areas. However, school municipalities have stated that they may very well decide to continue to regard standards as mandatory “must-goals” anyway. In other words, the standards movement has probably changed, at least to some extent, Danish school discourses, practices and culture, including writing cultures in Danish compulsory schooling (Christensen et al., 2014). On the other hand, due to the well-known discrepancy between prescribed and enacted curricula that we introduced in the beginning of this chapter (Deng & Luke, 2008; Goodlad et al., 1979), reforms might *not* have had as much impact as anticipated by policymakers, at least not on what is going on in classrooms. In fact, empirical research of classroom and examination writing practices offer a more differentiated picture of how the teaching of writing and aspirations for developing students’ writing development are in fact taking place, as we shall see later. First, however, we offer a closer analysis of the content and writing discourses in the current L1 curriculum.

Analysis of content and writing discourses in the current curriculum

As we have already pointed out, a “purpose” section is found in the 2014 curriculum; however, it is backgrounded and difficult to find on the website due to the interface design. Nonetheless, if we look at and analyse the purpose section specifically, it has more or less the same length as prior purpose texts from twentieth-century reforms and, in terms of content, it comprises many of the same utterances and themes found in them, including the main point about “joyful expression.” In Jeffery et al. (2018), an elaborated analysis of the content and grade-level differentiation for Production is offered. We want to highlight three main findings. First, that students’ writing development should evolve in a relatively linear progression, however in increasingly contextualised, formalised and disciplinary ways; secondly, that on primary and lower secondary levels Danish texts are meant to inspire and provide models for student writing, and students are positioned as personally reflecting writers; and thirdly, that goals include a broad repertoire, “including genre awareness and command (Jeffery et al., 2018, pp. 346, 348).

The third point relates to a DoW analysis of the 2014 curriculum. Analysing both the purpose section and the competence area sections systematically through the DoW framework—which we have found challenging both due to the hyper-complex design of the curriculum and limitations in the framework when applied to a Danish context—we argue nonetheless that the current curriculum covers all discourses except for the sociopolitical

one, albeit in different ways dependent on age level. Considering dominant discourses, we argue that a *process* discourse dominates the Production and Communication competence areas. This claim is backed by the document, which outlines the Production competence area after Grade 6.

In the second column, the aim is specified as follows: “The student is able to express him-/herself in writing, speech, sound and visuals in formalized situations” (our translation). The six columns that follow reflect a typical structure for process-writing pedagogy as the headlines are “Planning,” “Preparation,” “Production,” “Response,” “Revision” and “Presentation and evaluation” (our translation).

Overall, our analyses find that the DoW discourses are emphasised as follows from Grades 1–6:

Skills 3
 Creativity 2=
 Process 1
 Genre 2=
 Social Practices 5
 Sociopolitical –

However, this emphasis on a process discourse and the weighting of the other discourses potentially represents an oversimplification. If either we focus on other more detailed levels or the overarching “purpose” level of this highly complex curriculum design, other discourses are emphasised. This is why we argue that all discourses are present, albeit with varying significance dependent of the age level and context.

Another reservation is that the DoW framework does not fully fit the Danish curriculum and its writing discourses. First, the prominent position of “joyful writing” repeated for decades in the curriculum reflects the personal formation and *Bildung* discourses, which seem difficult to align with the DoW framework. The notion of joyful writing is only to some extent encompassed by the creativity and social practice, and perhaps even the sociopolitical, discourses. Second, the 2014 curriculum transcends the DoW framework in some respect as it establishes a multimodal understanding of writing. Interestingly, the term writing is absent in the curriculum. Instead, writing is referred to by the term “written production” representing a subcategory to the competence areas Production and Communication, both equivalent, to a greater or lesser extent, what Ivanič (2012) has named “wrighting” with a “gh,” emphasising the multimodal maker-aspect of writing (Troelsen, 2018).

A third reservation is that the auxiliary document for the assessment of writing at school-leaving exams could and perhaps should be included in the analysis of writing discourses. As Swedish literacy and assessment researcher Michael Tengberg (2015) has argued, “National tests should be seen as *part*

of the curriculum. ... This is mainly owing to washback effects from high-stakes tests on policies and practices in school” (pp. 83–84). Following Tengberg’s recommendation, we would highlight the auxiliary document outlining guidelines for the high-stakes school-leaving exam in written composition for analysis (UVM 2019). Within this document, the following goals are presented:

Students should be able to

- approach texts from diverse media in an analytical and reflective manner,
- control the writing process from idea to finished text,
- express themselves in a coherent and organised form,
- write coherently, clearly and varied in text types appropriate to the situation and context,
- develop and expand vocabulary and conceptual world,
- show insight into the range of language from everyday language to artistic expression,
- master a precise language with correct spelling,
- be able to read proofs of own texts,
- make use of various types of text and style and grammatical rules in relation to the target audience,
- make use of the various forms of representation, narration and literary devices,
- express the purpose, target group and situation of the text,
- facilitate communication through layout, and
- consciously and appropriately make use of the potential of the Internet. (UVM 2019, our translation)

From a DoW-perspective, these goals cover almost all six discourses plus, vaguely, a multimodal perspective (e.g., “layout”), representing a multifaceted and eclectic understanding of writing. However, the guidelines do not align with the curricular goals. For example, they lack the contextual age-level sensitivity outlined in the competence areas. So, one interesting question is to what extent curricular and assessment goals are taken up and have effects in practice in different contexts. More broadly, one could ask whether and how the prescribed writing curriculum, including assessment guidelines, is reflected in the enacted curriculum. We focus on this question in the next section, illustrated by three empirical studies.

From prescribed to enacted writing curriculum

In the ethnographic study *Writing to Learn, Learning to Write* based on field work in three schools in Grade 9 in 2008–2009—that is, during the late *Clear Standards* period—analyses found a substantial washback effect

from the school-leaving exam (Christensen et al., 2014). In other words, exam training took over the educational agenda of writing practices in classrooms in the final year of lower primary school. Following a number of students in the transition from lower secondary to upper secondary education, the study showed more broadly how already established school and subject writing cultures heavily co-shape the writing practices and writing events observed in practice (Krogh & Jakobsen, 2019). These findings have implications for understanding the relative impact of new writing curricula and auxiliary documents, including guidelines for assessment.

Another research project on the enacted writing curriculum in a Danish context focuses on multimodal composition, which is a relatively new content and discourse within the writing curriculum (Christensen, 2015, 2016). Christensen explores this in a mixed-method design focusing on how students in two classes at different schools compose multimodal texts prompted by a scenario described by her and teachers. In addition, she investigates the kind of formative and summative feedback students receive from teachers, and what students take up from this feedback in processes of revising their compositions. One of the interesting quantitative findings is an increased joy of writing. Briefly, students write longer texts and appreciate doing so when prompted to produce multimodal texts. From a qualitative perspective, Christensen finds that student opportunities to develop multimodal text competence are intimately linked to the quality of teaching; and quality teaching is more specifically linked to the degree that teachers engage in a multimodal writing culture themselves, including the extent to which teachers teach and acknowledge the importance of multimodal writing and offer feedback to student texts. Christensen points out that, although the curriculum promotes student development of multimodal composition, there seems to be a high degree of uncertainty among both teachers and students when it comes to using criteria for evaluating good multimodal composition. This finding is backed by other Nordic research (Elf et al., 2018; Silseth & Gilje, 2019) suggesting that multimodal composition challenges basic assumptions of what counts as good writing within the subject and school writing more broadly.

The third study we highlight is an exploratory case study on the school-leaving exam in written composition conducted by one of this chapter's authors. In this study, the writing prompt and students' texts were analysed (Troelsen, 2018, 2020a) and compared with the textual norms and situated prioritisation of raters (Troelsen, 2020b). Findings show that the writing prompt, an html-file comprising four different assignments (Figure 9.1), represents a complex and ambiguous, even cacophonous, notion of exam writing, implicitly compelling students to handle double positioning strategies and contradictory standards.

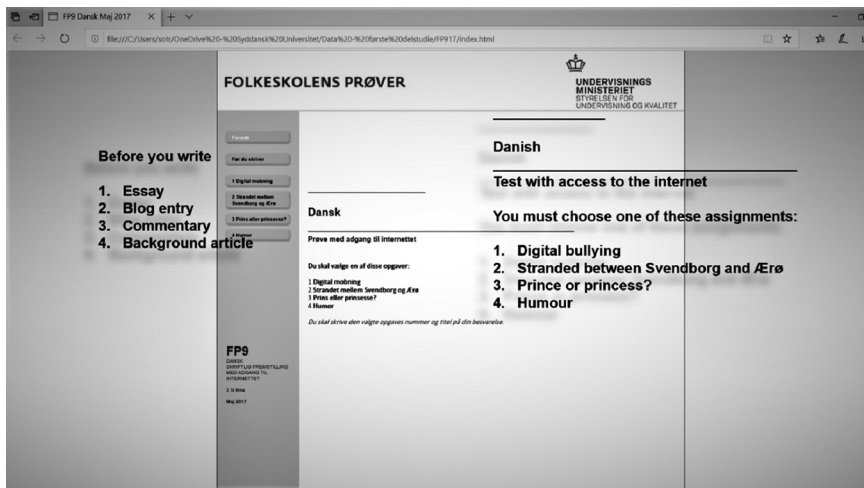


Figure 9.1 The front page of the writing prompt May 2017 lining up four different assignments to choose from (UVM, 2017, our translation added)

One of the four writing prompts (Figure 9.2) may illustrate this: Firstly, the students must position themselves in quite a complicated scenario: assuming a fictional writer identity, addressing a fictional audience (readers of the school blog) but writing about an incident that actually took place years ago (described in the first lines of the instruction). Secondly, the multimodal cohesion of the text is contradictory: claiming in words that the fictional writer is aboard the ferry and visually presenting a picture of the ferry seen

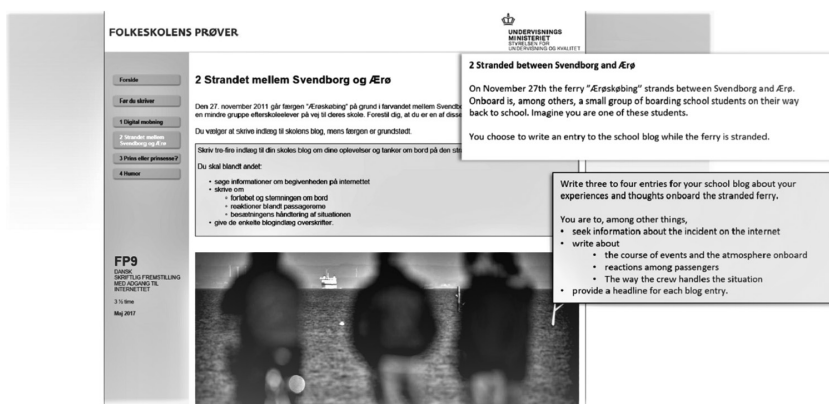


Figure 9.2 The second out of four assignments for the school-leaving exam in written composition (UVM, 2017, our translation added)

from ashore. Thirdly, the direct writing instruction (in the grey text box) is written in an “everyday discourse of writing,” not actualising any of the six DoWs (“write about,” “provide a headline”) (see Matre & Solheim, 2014) and thus blurring the purpose of writing.

Think-aloud-ratings of student texts answering this prompt (and others) uncover a double standard among the raters: the writing prompt is expected to be answered in detail. But that does not suffice. In addition, students are expected to meet veiled quality norms not explicitly communicated in any documents. Analyses show that students who meet the complexity of the prompt through advanced multimodality are not fully rewarded for their effort while others who draw on literary style, actually missing the point of the blog-genre, seem to benefit from that (Troelsen, 2020b). These findings substantiate the basic point that the prescribed curricular standards both in the central curriculum and in the auxiliary documents for assessment differ substantially from the enacted curriculum in teaching and in the exam practice. In a sense, there is a hidden curriculum guiding writing norms and assessment practices.

More broadly, if we return to the dynamics between prescribed and enacted writing curriculum, findings from the empirical studies presented above represent a critical corrective to the widespread assumption often found among policymakers, school leaders and sometimes researchers that a revision of curricula, such as the shift towards *Common Standards* and new target goals, will automatically lead to a change of practice. Normally, it does not! And, as the three studies demonstrate, it most likely has not, at least not in a Danish context. From a sociocultural point of view, this conclusion is not at all surprising. Simply put, *context matters* in students’ writing and writing development, as pointed out by Applebee and many others (Jeffery et al., 2018). More specifically, the *Writing to Learn, Learning to Write* project stresses that well-established writing practices and discourses, known for decades, dominate everyday teaching of writing, and that alternative theory-informed writing discourses as well as new emerging writing discourses, such as multimodal composition, are rarely observed in practice. Troelsen’s findings suggest that designers of the examination material select, more or less ambiguously, from prior practices not necessarily informed by the most recent ruling curriculum, and that students struggle to figure out what counts as “good writing” and, one could add, how they should position themselves as “developed writers” within the context of exam writing. This finding is particularly worrying since the examination has become a high-stakes situation. In addition to that, the rating procedure has changed: since the 1950s, it was an established practice that two teachers assessed the student product in dialogue—one was the student’s teacher, the other an unknown rater appointed by the Ministry of Education. In the current practice, however, only one unknown teacher-rater evaluates the student text. As mentioned above, one of several serious consequences is a very low reliability for this high-stakes examination.

Between joyride and high-stakes examination: Conclusion and discussion

Reservations in terms of generalisation should of course be underlined when evaluating the results from the three illustrative studies highlighted above. They are qualitative case studies focusing on limited contexts comprising a limited number of students, teachers and raters enacting the writing curriculum at the end of lower secondary education. Thus, we should be wary to draw any inferences about the teaching of writing and writing development on earlier stages. As pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, empirical writing research is still rather limited in Denmark, as in other countries (this volume), not the least when it comes to research exploring the teaching and learning of writing from a developmental and longitudinal perspective. We cannot draw on any systematic empirical research covering the broad scope from early primary to lower secondary education.

Instead, we have offered a historical and contextualising analysis of writing and writing development in the Danish curriculum, focusing on a content analysis and a discourse analysis of prescriptive curricula from twentieth and twenty-first century. Furthermore, we have explored how the prescribed curricula are and are not reflected in the enacted writing curriculum focusing on the three illustrative examples. The historical analysis finds that throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the curriculum of writing has been relatively stable, albeit with some variances in the emphasis of content and writing discourses and, not the least, how they are designed and functioning. Content-wise, we find that students' writing development is expected to evolve in a relatively linear progression, and that writing and writing development is linked predominantly, if applying Ivanič's DoW framework, to a process discourse. However, we also argue that all six writing discourses are present in the curriculum with varying dominance dependent on the context, and that there are limitations in applying the DoW framework on the Danish writing curriculum.

Perhaps, the most significant historical change from twentieth to early-twenty-first century is the design and function of the current curriculum. We have argued that due to global trends in education, the Danish curriculum has been radically reshaped. There has been an unprecedented push towards an outcome-based and competence-oriented notion of education. The sections on the "purpose" of teaching Danish, and thus writing, that were foregrounded in the twentieth-century curricula, have lost their prominent status and are now complemented with the much more foregrounded standards framework comprising highly elaborated specifications of end goals for age levels, which are now assessed at a high-stakes school-leaving exam. This curricular development has created a misalignment, or even a discrepancy, between different sections and genres of the curriculum. It proceeds *from* the purpose section's open-ended formulations, including a Bildung-oriented

“personal growth” appeal to develop students’ “joyful writing”; *via* the specified goals outlined in the competence framework expanding the expectations to the students’ development of a writing repertoire in relatively linear ways; *to* the final high-stakes exams framed by auxiliary document guidelines reflecting, to some extent, the competence framework goals, which we then learn are not necessarily taken up in actual assessment practices.

We wonder which part of the curriculum might play the biggest role for teachers in practice. We lack research in Denmark that could answer this question. However, most scholars would probably argue: it is the assessment guidelines. As we pointed out earlier, referring to Tengberg, assessment and evaluation practices should be considered part of the curriculum, and a very powerful one. This might be even more true in the case of high-stakes assessment and has been backed by empirical classroom studies revealing a significant test and assessment orientation in the way writing is taught—especially during the final year of lower secondary school. Briefly put, teachers do tend to teach to the test, and they acknowledge this, themselves (Christensen et al., 2014). At the same time, writing longer texts is often equivalent to rehearsing for the examination using assignments from previous years as learning resources and paying attention to the specific genres and standards of the examination (Bundsgaard et al., 2020; Christensen et al., 2014).

These findings raise several discussions. A main discussion for us is the *problematic ambiguities* in the current curricula, on several levels, which must make it difficult for teachers to act, in meaningful ways, as writing teachers. There is the ambiguity in the relationship between the curriculum and the examination. In addition to that, there is the ambiguity of the exam construct separating the assessment of writing from spelling and grammar and thereby cementing the tendency to maintain this separation in teaching as well. And, there is the ambiguity in the relationship between broad goals of joyful writing and extremely detailed instructions for teaching. Finally, there is the ambiguity of the purpose of writing in primary and lower secondary education. So, the basic questions: why teach writing? What is it supposed to be good for? are answered in ambiguous ways. In other words, there is currently no clear answer to the crucial question of *legitimacy* when comparing the multiple documents for writing. Moreover, there is no coherent research-based understanding of writing and writing development within the compulsory educational system. As an implication for future research and development, we would argue for a research-informed holistic and Bildung-oriented approach to the teaching and assessment of *literacy*, including writing understood in a broad semiotic perspective. Along with that, we recommend a dialogue involving writing researchers as well as teachers in order to obtain a real simplification of the curricular documents and standards communicating the purpose of writing education and goals for writing development.

Notes

1. Grundtvig is probably unfamiliar to most scholars outside Nordic countries. Nonetheless, he has had a huge impact on the Danish school system. He is famed for promoting *the spoken*, instead of the written, word in Danish schools and teacher education. He is also the founder of the so-called “folk high schools” (see e.g., <https://www.danishfolkhighschools.com/about-folk-high-schools/history/>), and he and his followers have been somewhat sceptical about inviting academia into education and teacher education for compulsory school.
2. The reason we add an exclamation mark is that, unlike today, reforms came slowly, with long preparation involving teacher educators (not writing and education researchers, who were at that time almost absent), and they were seriously debated before being implemented.

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