

Freedom - A Prerequisite for Autonomy?

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From the Norwegian national curriculum for French and German, lower secondary level, L97:

Approaches to the Study of French

The approaches are designed to make the subject accessible to all pupils. Pupils should be allowed room to bring many sides of their personalities to bear and to use their own approaches. Pupils may acquire elements of language in different sequences, and what they learn of the language may also differ. In cooperation with teachers and fellow pupils, they will gain experience of shaping their own language learning.

The learning task will be both practical and theoretical, enabling pupils to discover and explore the language, to use it right from the start, and through their own use of it gradually systematise their discoveries and try out their knowledge of the language. It is emphasised that pupils are to work also with texts that were not specially designed for language training (authentic texts). Such texts bring pupils into contact with the living language they will encounter in French-speaking areas.

The language course emphasises creative work, in which drama and music are among the natural components. Pupils will use the language to create their own oral and written texts, which can also be shared with others. Texts in this broad sense involve both oral and written use of the language. Attention will be paid to the aesthetic qualities not only of the learning material which pupils will encounter, but also of the material they create themselves. When pupils concentrate on the relation between form and content and discover that diversity of meaning offers a number of paths to understanding and insight, they may find the space they need to express themselves with and in the language, questioning, interpreting and using their imagination. Errors can often be seen as signs of learning. Particular attention should therefore be paid to the process whereby pupils develop their own texts. The pupils' evaluation of their own texts, and of the actual work process, helps them gain insight into their own language learning.

With regard to opportunities for all pupils to learn French, information technology is creating a new situation. It enables pupils to gain immediate and realistic experience of the language in a motivating and efficient way. It can make it possible for pupils to participate in real language communities by talking to people in nearly all parts of the world and communicating with people whose first language is French. Such direct contact with the language is also an invitation to independent learning.

Issue for Discussion

Norwegian teachers did not respond to the change of approach to teaching and learning as designed by the national curriculum. The disjunction between the curriculum as text and the curriculum in operation is considerable. Not surprisingly, a learner autonomy approach represents a challenge to static French and German classroom culture and teachers' attitudes.

The question is what we can expect from a curriculum in terms of classroom innovation and why do teachers not take into account new ideas and change accordingly.