Learning Objectives

'If learning has to do with active
involvement in meaningful activities,
the main task of the teacher must
be to arouse curiosity that can become
subjective goals, and that hopefully
can be linked to the objectives of
the school.'

Elina Maslo

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Foreword

Well now, Grethe, we must make a target plan for you. Grethe, 93 years old, has just arrived at a convalescent home after having fallen and broken her hip. A professional careworker is responsible for filling in a target plan together with the new patient. When Grethe looks at the careworker with blank incomprehension, the latter turns to Grethe's son and asks him if Grethe is deaf. No, the son answers, it's just that she doesn't understand what you mean by a target plan. Everywhere in the public sector, from cradle to grave, there seems to be a focus on targets – and a target plan is then included as part of welfare technology. In this number of Sprogforum, Learning Objectives, we take a look at what learning objective can signify in educational programmes.

As far back as the middle of the previous century, an educational researcher advanced four rationales which he felt would always apply, no matter the kind of programme involved: aims, content, organisation and evaluation (Tyler 1949). Even today, people refer to Tyler's rationales concerning the four fundamental cornerstones for education. In the reforms of educational programmes that have taken place in recent years, one can confirm that the aims rationale fills considerably more than it formerly did. There have probably always existed descriptions of aims for educational programmes, but it is a more recent phenomenon to formulate precise subgoals on the path to general objectives, as for example can be seen in Kabel and Svarstad's article in this number. That curricular control documents are historical and political in nature can be seen by the fact that changing governments emphasise different educational initiatives. With reference to Tyler's rationales, one can note for example that in the latest reform of the Folkeskole Act a shift of paradigm has taken place from a focus on content to a focus on objectives, which are to be understood as competence objectives. The same tendency can be observed in Fristrup's article on the upper secondary reform from 2005, and at the universities competence objectives for the various programmes have been formulated now for many years.

In connection with the Folkeskole reform, the Ministry of Education published "Learning-objective controlled teaching in the Folkeskole" (2014). To demonstrate the focus on learning objectives, one can note how objective (*mål*) is referred to in this publication. There are the following finds: objectives - Common Objectives – Simplified Common Objectives – clear objectives (and not: Clear Objectives) – learning objectives – learning-goal-controlled – proficiency objectives – knowledge objectives – competence objectives – learning-objective categories – stage objectives – final objectives – objective-determined – phase objective – objective attainment – objective fulfilment. An attempt is made to capture the complexity of the objective concepts by the umbrella term Simplified Common Objectives. This can be read about in Rohde and Henriksen's as well as Sandahl and Laursen's articles. In this number we uncover what the focus on objectives can entail in relation to promoting linguistic and cultural diversity in the Folkeskole and other types of education. It is possible to note, at any rate, that the focus on objectives is central in the Folkeskole reform of 2014. A closer analysis can cause one to wonder, now that the focus on objectives is described in such detail, why concepts for objectives one would expect to find there are absent. This could be, for example, such concepts as measurable and measurability. Could it be because the primary focus is on proficiency objectives that can be measured and weighed – by testing and examining? The interview with Leni Dam can also lead one to wonder about the absence of the concept that is so central to her understanding of learning, i.e. student-controlled objectives. This simply does not occur in the Ministry of Education published "Learning-objective controlled teaching in the Folkeskole". Can it perhaps be because bottom-up control of objectives and the inclusion of the learners in the process have slipped into the background in favour of top-down control of objectives?

Sandahl and Laursen present us with a didactic model that has four dimensions, intended for all subjects at school. One of the learning objectives for the language subjects is cultural understanding (formulated in various ways: cultural meetings, intercultural understanding, intercultural contact, intercultural competence). How can one organise teaching that aims at achieving these objectives and at the same time strengthens oral and written communication? The paths to achieving this are, of course, many (see, for example, Gregersen 2015), and here we will give just one example from English (class 8 or 9) where the emphasis is on developing the students'

intercultural understanding, including expanding their knowledge of the world and giving them an opportunity to develop their critical awareness.

The class could work, for instance, with the subject of Scotland (Risager 2014). In connection with the work on intercultural understanding, the teacher – perhaps in cooperation with the students – could compile a series of images, videos, interviews, quotations, etc. about Scottish national symbols and 'Scottishness' to make the class become aware of the great range of various conceptions about Scottish identity – not only in Scotland but also in Denmark. One could examine how various groups of Scots regard 'the English', and how various groups of English people regard 'the Scots'. Or examine how various groups of Scots regard Denmark and Scandinavia.

But it is also important for the students to acquire good background knowledge about Scotland to be able to understand facets of Scottish identity. In connection with the work on Scotland and Scottish identity, an obvious thing to do is for the students themselves to access background information on the Internet about geography, landscape, towns, population, languages (English, Lowland Scots and Scots Gaelic, as well as immigrant languages), fishing, the oil industry, flags, Scottish dishes, bagpipes, kilts, etc. The Internet is particularly suitable for searching for more factual information about all sorts of things, and it is reasonably accessible for the students themselves (and they are naturally to learn to treat their source material critically). Knowledge about Scotland will not only deal with relations within Scottish borders but also with Scotland in a larger perspective: relation to the rest of Great Britain, position in the North Atlantic, historical and present-day relations to the Scandinavian countries, etc. Critical awareness is also an important aspect of cultural understanding, and Scotland is a topical example as it brings up the issue of power relations between countries, peoples and nations in the world: Denmark is an independent country (this opens up the whole EU discussion of course) whereas Scotland is not. Why are things like this, and can or should they be changed? It is interesting in this connection – also when comparing with Denmark – that Scottish nationalism and the movement for independence is not ethnic but political: It is not primarily a question of ethnic Scots having better opportunities to cultivate their own special ethnic identity (language, etc.), but of everyone in Scotland, immigrants included, obtaining political freedom. For that reason there are even groups such as 'Scots Asians for Yes' and 'Africans for

an Independent Scotland'. There will be ongoing work in the process on the two dimensions called signs of learning and forms of evaluation (see Sandahl and Laursen's article).

The Folkeskole reform of 2014, among both professionals and laymen, has given rise to many discussions as to whether teachers are legally obliged to implement learning-objective controlled teaching. Folkeskolen.dk quotes a mail from the ministry where, in answer to the question, it states that learning-objective controlled teaching is not obligatory, cf. "Learning-objective controlled teaching is not obligatory. It is up to the individual teacher to decide how he/she wishes to organise teaching on the basis of the Common Objectives, so that it accords with the students' prior qualifications in the best possible way," adding, "The Ministry of Education does not regulate teaching methods." So the ministry states firmly that the new objectives of knowledge and proficiency are obligatory, but that the path to them is subject to the teachers' freedom of method. The questions are still legion, e.g. if simplified objectives in actual fact are complexity-reducing learning objectives, and thereby pioneer innovative thinking for pedagogical practice in the educational programmes.

Have an enjoyable read!
The editors

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BODIL DUE

A spoke in the wheel for foreign languages

[Benspænd for fremmedsprog]

Abstract

In my article I stress the importance of competences in foreign languages in today's global world and warn against some potentially dangerous tendencies in the Danish education system. One is a tendency to understand the goal of education very narrowly as a means to secure employment, another is a tendency to initiate successive rather than coordinated reforms, resulting in lack of coherence between the different levels in the education system. The primary school reform of 2013 will no doubt have a positive effect in the foreign languages area, seeing that all pupils now have English from the very start and their second foreign language much earlier than before. But in secondary schools and in higher education the situation is alarming. Fewer pupils and students choose a language programme and at the universities many language studies are being closed down. To secure Danish interests and international influence, a national strategy for education in foreign languages is needed.

LILIAN ROHDE AND BIRGIT HENRIKSEN

Changing the National Curriculum – why and how?

[Forenkling af de faglige mål – hvorfor og hvordan?]

Abstract

This article presents and discusses the 2014 revision of the Danish national curriculum for primary and lower secondary levels with regard to foreign languages (English, German, French, Spanish). The article focuses on the pros and cons of the shift towards broadly defined competence goals and output-based education in contrast to the former skills- and content-based curriculum. Making use of Killen, the article presents four essential principles which will support the teacher's planning and teaching in an output-based paradigm. All national goals for foreign languages imply a communicative, functional view of language, a cognitive view of learning, a dynamic view of culture and an activity-based and learning-centred methodological approach. Expectations for pupil outcomes have increased with the introduction of English in grade 1 and German or French in grade 5 and connections between learning different foreign languages are now emphasised. The authors participated in the writing group for English which, like all writing groups, encompassed a broad knowledge base of researchers, teacher trainers, ministry consultants and teachers.

DORTE MARIA BUHL SANDAHL AND LENE LAURSEN

Language subjects in the Folkeskole: Simplified common goals

[Folkeskolens sprogfag: Forenklede Fælles Mål]

Abstract

This article deals with the Folkeskole reform of 2014, in which a change of emphasis has taken place in language subjects from a focus on the teachers' teaching to a focus on the students' learning. Teaching is to be controlled by learning objectives and not activities. The article provides an overview of the structure in the various levels of objectives in the Folkeskole reform – from competence objectives via proficiency and knowledge objectives to learning objectives, and an account is given of the so-called relation model, which is a didactic model shared by all school subjects. This model places four dimensions in relation to each other: learning objectives, teaching activities, signs of learning and evaluation.

BERGTHÓRA KRISTJÁNSDÓTTIR

The stony road to ambitious goals for Mother tongue teaching

[Stenet vej til ambitiøse mål for faget Modersmålsundervisning]

Abstract

The subject Mother tongue teaching differs from all other subjects at school, since it represents a battlefield in which target groups, economy, objectives, organisation and content are involved – as well as the question of what societies the subject is to provide education and personal development for. The section of the Act and the appurtenant official order regarding teaching in the subject limits to a great extent the possibility of promoting the potential linguistic and cultural competence of bilingual students via teaching in the Folkeskole. There is a disparity between ambitious descriptions of objectives in the new Simplified Common Objectives of 2014 and the actual regulatory framework. The linguistic and cultural complexity in present-day societies is denied in the section of the Act and the appurtenant official order, which continue to hold onto a conception of a monolingual and monocultural Denmark.

BEDRIYE SENER

Danish as a second language, level A at upper secondary level for young adults (HF)

[Dansk som andetsprog niveau A på HF]

Abstract

In the first part of the article, I present the 'new' Danish subject, in which I criticise the fact that subject identity, objectives and content in the curricula for Danish and Danish as a second language at HF are identical. Subsequently, I include the subject goals for Finnish as a second language in youth education programmes that emphasise multicultural identity. Finally, on the basis of inspiration from the curricuulm for Finnish as a second language, I make a number of recommendations for the curriculum for Danish as a second language and ask for Danish as a second language to be recognised as a second-language subject. The article's points of view and analyses are further developed in my MA dissertation in didactics in relation to Danish.

DORTE FRISTRUP

Teaching objectives between competence and general education – challenges for foreign language subjects at upper secondary level

[Læringsmål mellem kompetence og dannelse
– udfordringer for sprogfagene i gymnasiet]

Abstract

This article deals with the upper secondary reform of 2005 and points to certain actual challenges for language subjects. The reform marked a final break with the concept of syllabus in favour of thinking in terms of competence and general education in language subject programmes at upper secondary level. The general competence and education objectives are now to be achieved via a number of subject-related objectives that comprise both receptive and productive skills, including the ability to give a coherent oral exposition of a subject-related topic. The article argues that this calls for a balancing of expectations between the various parties involved: students, parents and teachers, particularly when dealing with other foreign languages than English. It is also argued that there is a need to adjust learning objectives for language subjects in the direction of a clear use orientation, which involves greater emphasis on digitalisation and medialisation, intercultural competence and innovation.

JETTE VON HOLST-PETERSEN

Chunks – a way to communicative competence in German teaching

[Chunks – en vej til kommunikativ kompetence
i tyskundervisningen]

Abstract

This article deals with the "chunks" phenomenon and its importance for developing communicative competence in the subject of German in the Danish Folkeskole. Language consists to a great extent of lexicalised, automated phrases that make it possible to communicate swiftly and smoothly. If this knowledge of chucks is transferred to German teaching in the Folkeskole, it means that students can more successfully learn German by automating prefabricated chunks. The various chunks function as "crutches" for communication, and the students soon experience that they are capable of communicating in German, which has a highly motivating effect on them. At a later stage in the teaching it is important to draw students' linguistic attention to the regular features in the acquired chunks, which will enable the students to discover for themselves the grammatical rules and develop their linguistic knowledge. By using chunks it is emphasised that the development of communicative competence is the key aspect of German teaching – that work on the grammar thus plays a subordinate role and serves to develop communication proficiency.

Abstract

Dieser Artikel beschäftigt sich mit dem Phänomen "Chunks" und seiner Bedeutung für die Entwicklung der kommunikativen Kompetenz im Fach Deutsch in der dänischen Grundschule. Sprache besteht in großem Umfang aus lexikalisierten, automatisierten Phrasen, die uns erlauben, schnell und problemlos zu kommunizieren. Überträgt man dieses Wissen von Chunks auf Deutsch im Fremdsprachenunterricht, bedeutet es, dass die Schüler durch Automatisierung von präfabrizierten Chunks Deutsch lernen sollten. Die Chunks dienen als "Krücken" für die Kommunikation, und die Schüler erleben eine schnelle Entwicklung ihrer Kommunikationsfähigkeit, was eine stark motivierende Wirkung hat. Im weiteren Verlauf des Erwerbsprozesses wird die sprachliche Aufmerksamkeit der Schüler auf die Regelmäßigkeiten in den gelernten Chunks gelenkt, und die Schüler können dadurch selber die grammatischen Regeln entdecken und ihr Sprachwissen entwickeln. Durch die Verwendung von Chunks wird unterstrichen, dass die Entwicklung der kommunikativen Kompetenz der Kern des Deutschunterrichts ist, während die Arbeit mit der Grammatik eine der Kommunikation untergeordnete Rolle spielt.

KRISTINE KABEL AND LONE KROGSGAARD SVARSTAD

Teacher Perspectives on Goal-setting in the Subjects Danish and English

[Lærerperspektiver på faglig målsætning i dansk og engelsk]

Abstract

The article is based on conclusions from the report "Faglig målsætning i skolen – et narrativt review med dansk og engelsk som case (Goal-setting in schools – a narrative review with study cases in Danish and English) (2014). The report is the result of collaboration between University College UCC, Metropolitan University College and Aarhus University. Much international research pays attention to the effect of goal-setting in schools in relation to student learning outcome, but fewer studies examine teacher perspectives on goal-setting as a part of a multi-faceted everyday school praxis. This report examines what potentials and challenges teachers experience with goal-setting in the subjects Danish and English. Data consist of observations of feedback sessions and semi-structured interviews with 10 teachers in a suburban Copenhagen school. The purpose of the report is to outline professional development initiatives as well as school-based initiatives that target teachers and goal-setting in the classroom.

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ELINA MASLO

Subjective goals as a motivating force for language and learning

[Subjektive mål som drivkraft for sprog og læring]

Abstract

In this article I present a project on the subjective and emotional dimensions of language learning. I have had a number of conversations with multilingual migrants from different countries about what experiences, interests and dreams made them start learning specific languages. These learning histories offer new perspectives on learning and language learning by providing insight into individuals' unique, practical, emotional and symbolic lives in concrete historical contexts. It is also argued that if learning is about active engagement in meaningful activities, the task of the teacher is to arouse curiosity which can become a subjective goal, and which, hopefully, can also be linked to the overall objective of the school.

Students' learning – teachers' responsibility: Developing learner autonomy

[Elevernes læring. Lærernes ansvar: Udvikling af elevautonomi]

Abstract

In the interview, Leni Dam explains how – throughout her working life – she has been concerned with getting learners involved in their own learning. The learners' engagement is to be seen as a prerequisite for developing learner autonomy. The teacher has to focus on the learners' learning rather than on her own teaching. Dam stresses that it is the teacher's responsibility to create a learning environment in which the learners' motivational power, i.e. intrinsic motivation, can unfold. At a time where evidence-based approaches are called for, it is crucial to ask how the students' learning can be documented. It is here that the value of logbooks and portfolios comes into play. As regards the possibilities for goal-setting, Leni Dam says that it works extremely well within learner autonomy, provided it happens in close cooperation between learners and the teacher.

STEPHANIE KIM LÖBL

Open pages: The effect of targeted teaching in French

[Effekten af målrettet undervisning i fransk]

Abstract

Future tense and aspect in French are two verbal categories that can cause Danish learners problems, since their distribution differs between the two languages. In French, one is in both cases presented with a choice that does not exist in Danish. This article on the acquisition of aspect and future tense in French is based on my MA dissertation containing an efficacy study that examines if students of French acquire the analytical forms prior to the synthetic within aspect and future tense respectively. It also investigates why acquisition takes place as it does, what factors are involved. The analysis of the results from my efficacy study show that both groups use the analytical forms as a standard form. Subsequently, an improvement takes place in the test group as opposed to the control group during the text period in the acquisition of the synthetic verbal forms. The text group, which receives targeted instruction in both subjects, improves considerably more than the control group, which does not receive any instruction. There are a number of factors that influence the students' acquisition, such as the frequency of the linguistic elements, interference from the mother tongue and the obviousness of the form/function relation of the elements. The study further shows that the students improve most in the acquisition of the synthetic forms in those cases where there is a time adverbial in the sentence and its meaning is clear. It also helps to include and underline the importance of time adverbials in grammar teaching in identifying and using forms of the past tense and future tense. It is also useful to include teaching in the nature of an action in teaching aspect, since these categories interact closely and can provide the students with tools for choosing and using the correct aspect depending on context.