Topic 1: The school in the city, and the school in the country

It has always been important for people in Ulvik to acquire new knowledge, and we have long-held traditions of finding meeting places to converse about literature. In Ulvik, the first village library opened in 1838. Among other things, the village library was connected to the national school policy, the initial goals of which—from the beginning of the 18th century—specified that all children across the country should learn to read and write.

Norway enacted its first school law aimed at rural children in 1739. The law established that it was now a duty for all children to go to school. Although the law was introduced relatively late and did not receive equal implementation everywhere, it led to the establishment of public schools—also known as common schools—in the countryside throughout Norway.

The first public school in Ulvik opened in 1743 and was for the children of ordinary farmers, tenant farmers, and poorer families. The name "allmuge" (public, common) gives us the understanding that this school system was for "the people." The school was a community school; this meant that the farms were altered into a type of school building for the children in the village, along with a traveling teacher.

The children had to walk long distances in various weather conditions to participate in simple lessons at one of the village farms. Up until the 19th century, public schools were largely for children who came from poor backgrounds since wealthy farmers often taught their children themselves.

We know that, in the middle of the 18th century, children sat on stools on either side of a long table in the farm's smokehouse. The girls sat on one side, the boys on the other, and the teacher at the head of the table. The school day started with a hymn followed by reading aloud. While the teaching proceeded, the farmer and his family would continue with required work in the same smokehouse room, such as spinning yarn or other tasks. Mostly, it was quiet, but there could be noise from the pigs running loose.

There were big differences between the legislation for schools in the country and the city. In cities, compulsory schooling was not introduced for children until 1848, which probably affected children from poor families to the greatest extent. The children of the bourgeoisie in the city learned to read and write by attending a school that required payment. The luckiest of the poor children in Bergen received permission to attend the church-financed parochial schools; others had to pay for their education or settle for the simple education still provided in the churches.

Today, we learn to read because there exists a need to acquire information and learn new knowledge. From the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century, reading was important for someone to be confirmed. If the young people could not read to the priest, they were not confirmed, and then they were also not considered full-fledged adult members of society. The schooling was, therefore, largely a preparation for the confirmation.

The next school law, which was enacted in 1827, was aimed at rural children and represented a change toward more secularisation in society. Reading and writing were no longer exclusively important to being confirmed. Instead, they were to provide a minimum of education, as well. While the children in the country attended ambulatory schools, the children of the common people in Bergen attended in separate school buildings. Private civic schools intended for children in the city also held classes in their own school buildings. Gradually, there were demands for permanent schools in the countryside, which led to permanent school buildings that required both daylight and good air quality.

The first permanent school in Ulvik was built at Brakanes in 1860, but ambulatory schools remained in Ulvik for a long time. The last ones were in Osa, Bagnstrond, and Vangsbygd. There was an ambulatory school in each place until 1905, 1910, and 1918, respectively. Finse's school district was special because the school came with the railway. The school in Finse first rented the premises from NSB between 1908 and 1915 but moved into its own school building in 1915.

In 1889, the law regarding municipality-funded public schools came into effect while the previously state-funded public schools ceased to exist. This changed school history in Norway. Municipalities were given responsibility for the schools at this time, and the division between the city and rural schools slowly but surely disappeared. This resulted in Norway having a more nationally unifying school where popular education was the main goal.

Topic 2: A school day in Ulvik in 1907

Schooling lasted for twelve weeks and took place on a farm, and there was additionally a lot of hard work required at home on the farm. This was the case for Lars Sponheim, who was born in 1900, and for all the others born in Ulvik in and around 1907.

Today, we look forward to the last day of school before the summer holidays. But would you be happy if you were seven years old in 1907 and knew you were required to work on the farm all summer and not go on holiday? Almost all children in Ulvik lived on a farm or a homestead, and the summer holidays were the busiest time of year. The children were allowed to play a little in the summer heat, but they had to work on the farm daily.

You run out of the school gates on the last day before the summer holidays in the 10th grade. You have learned and experienced a lot but are perhaps a little tired. It's not so strange to feel tired when you've gone to school for forty weeks every year for ten years consecutively.

The children who went to school in Ulvik and Bagnstrond in 1907 were probably also tired. Although they only went to school twelve weeks a year for the first three years and seventeen weeks a year for the next four years, they worked a lot on the farm and walked long distances to get to and from school.

A school week could be organized so that you attended only two days a week—for example, Mondays and Thursdays—as was the case for Lars Sponheim.

The pupils at Bagnstrond school in 1907 also attended school for twelve weeks, but in four periods: first from 1 February to 21 February at Jon Bolstad's home, second from 19 March to 13 April at Jakob Haaheim's home, third from 14 October to 23 November at Lars Haaheim's, and fourth from 29 November to 19 December, also at Lars Haaheim's.

The length of a school day in 1907 resembled today’s school day length, but there were differences in the curriculum. Each day at school in 1907 started with a prayer or a psalm, and they often had a Bible story. The children also had lessons in oral or reading Norwegian, Norwegian history, arithmetic, and writing. They learned about maps and needlework and received physical education. They drew and sang.

The pupils received grades on a scale from 1 to 6 in all subjects from 1st grade onwards, in addition to grades for diligence and order.

Topic 3: Teacher and student

Young boys travelled from farm to farm and taught the children in Ulvik to read and write at ambulatory schools. The young boys stopped being teachers the day they started their own families.

The school commission in the parish decided who could become a teacher. Until around the 1850s, teachers were mostly young boys. During this time, there were no requirements for teacher training; it was enough that they could read and write. Additionally, the young boys had to have good manners, be polite, and display good behaviour. Women were not allowed to teach until 1869, and the first female teacher in Ulvik was appointed in 1889.

In 1860, writing and arithmetic became compulsory in Norway, in addition to reading. However, in practice, schoolteachers at the ambulatory schools in Ulvik began teaching the children how to write and count back in 1830. Being a teacher at an ambulatory school in the countryside in the 18th and early 19th centuries was not a high-status profession. The teachers lived on the farms that acted as school hosts and received free food and a roof over their heads.

As the 19th century progressed, greater demands were placed on education. The teachers received better compensation, and the schools improved. The children were given their own reading books and teachers were required to know a form of early pedagogy. This was designed by a bishop in Bergen in 1825 and was termed Rules of Wisdom. One of the rules indicated the teacher had to be prepared for their pupils to be "ignorant, uneducated, yes many times spoiled and naughty children!"

The teacher's role and pedagogy changed rapidly in the succeeding decades. In 1850, a teacher's school was established in Voss, which helped increase the status of the teaching profession. The view towards being a strict teacher also changed, and there was a higher emphasis on exploring children's feelings and willpower through teaching. Gradually, the classrooms incorporated both humour and care.

The view of the school's role was changing. Around Norway in the 1850s, the largest point of contention was whether public schools should emphasise Christian or bourgeois education. Many people advocated that children should learn subjects such as history, geography, and social studies instead of only learning to read and write or quote religious texts. Those who held this view believed it would strengthen the children as citizens of Norwegian society.

Topic 4: The reading child

Reading preachy religious texts written for adults must have been laborious work for many children, and certainly quite difficult.

Initially, the reading instruction provided in the public school was preparation for one's confirmation. When the teacher for the ambulatory school came to the farms, he brought with him devotional books, catechisms, and the Bible. Because children had to memorize the scripture, literacy rates were low for a long time, both in Ulvik and throughout Norway.

Finally, in the 19th century, books were available specifically for reading instruction. The books were aimed at children, who gradually developed abilities and skills through independent reading of unknown texts.

It was well into the 20th century before books were designed with a children's pedagogy, which gave children the pleasure of reading as we know it today. The books available in schools from the middle of the 19th century also contained, among other things, natural science and history, alongside demanding religious texts and stories from the Bible. They were still not based on a separate pedagogy for children. According to school records from 1839, it was not unusual for children to have superior reading skills compared to their writing skills. There is a probable connection to the fact that the children who had books at home could practice reading there.

Nevertheless, we know little about which books the schoolchildren who lived in Ulvik in the 18th century and earlier 19th century had access to at home. In addition to imparity in levels of reading abilities, there were also probably significant disparities between children of self-employed farmers and children of tenant farmers in terms of books available in the home. We know that, as early as 1832, reading books purchased for schoolchildren in Ulvik contained more secular content. Then the government shifted the focus of reading education into something more independent of religion.

The concept of what reading was intended for was now changing. The schools in Ulvik later adopted P. A. Jensen's Reading Book for the Primary school and People's Home. The book was developed in 1863 as a response to the change in the law that occurred in 1860. Parliament then decided that geography, natural science, and history should be included in the curriculum in addition to religious texts and literature from Norway and the Nordic countries. The new ideal that encompassed educating the people emerged in full force and pointed towards primary school, which gave the children a wider range of books with dynamic stories.

Topic 5: Public information and reading society in Ulvik

Reading and collecting books, along with the knowledge conveyed through the printed word, were part of a larger cultural and scientific change in Norway in the 18th century. Even small and isolated places, like Ulvik, could now come into contact with the book-based European culture of enlightenment.

The transition from Orthodox to Pietistic Lutheranism in the 18th century brought with it an increased interest in acquiring useful knowledge. Furthermore, it was important that everyone could read the Bible and the catechism for themselves. Until this point, it had been mostly wealthy townspeople and owners of large farms who found an interest in being able to read, but the common people gradually realized this benefit as well.

Although the first private book collections and reading societies were established in Ulvik in the 18th century, it would still take more than 100 years before class differences in reading ability diminished. The reason for the reduction in these disparities was, in part, due to the rise of public schools and public libraries.

Towards the end of the 18th century, most adults in Ulvik could read a book. However, since books had to be purchased in Bergen or obtained in advance from the authors, it was not usual for ordinary and tenant farmers to have easily accessible books at home.

In the Hardanger area, parish priests, civil servants, a few farmers, and the vast majority of men formed reading societies and thus gained access to literature and knowledge from Europe. They established reading societies and formed book collections around 1770.

Kristofer Sjursson Hjeltnes from the Hjeltnes farm, along with vicar Paul Schnabel and his son Marcus Schnabel, gradually accumulated enough books to create a private library in Ulvik. In 1774, Schnabel established the Hardanger Reading Society. The vast majority of those involved in the Hardanger Reading Society were civil servants, but Hjeltnes, a farmer, was part of the running of the society. The reading society acted as a book exchange. There were around thirty members who each bought a book which they then lent to each other.

Hjeltnes then developed a sizable private library of his own. On the one hand, Hjeltnes' book collection is an example of what book knowledge meant to the upper social classes in the village; on the other hand, we must note that Hjeltnes also donated books or money to the church so they could, in turn, buy books and lend

them to other people in the village. In this way, the books became available to more than the upper social strata in Ulvik. It is unclear whether these collections contained children's books, but we know they contained classical literature in Latin, dictionaries, theology, mathematics, and natural sciences.

The Hjeltnes farm was a cultural gathering place in Ulvik because of the book collection, among other reasons. The reading society had thirty members; two of the members were women.

Around 1800, Hjeltnes' private book collection had become a significant collection in Hardanger. There were also book collections located at other farms in Hardanger, such as Aga and Skoro in Fyksesund. Nevertheless, Hjeltnes' collection was among the largest. Today, it includes approximately 3,000 volumes.

In Holmen—located in Ulvik—schoolmaster Christian Kølle also established a cultural centre with a book collection. He lent books to the schoolchildren, and he was particularly invested in furthering the knowledge of both "the gifted boys" and his daughters. Christian Kølle had three daughters and represented a modern attitude towards his daughters at the time as he wanted to ensure his daughters received a book-based education. One of his daughters, Catharine Hermine Kølle, is today considered Norway's first female painter. She was born in Snarøya but spent much of her time in Ulvik's intellectual cultural centres in the middle of the 19th century.

In 1838, Granvin was a larger municipality comprised of Granvin, Ulvik, and Eidfjord. At that time, the Granvin municipal council received a mandate to establish a public library with funds from the state. It followed two premises: the municipality was to maintain a reading society and the politicians had to donate money. Of all the villages in Granvin, Ulvik politicians donated the highest sum toward the reading society. This may be because Ulvik's mayor showed a great interest in the library issue.

With funding secured, along with the reading society that already existed in the village, Ulvik got its first public library around 1850.

In other words, had it not been for the private initiatives people built up over the years and political will, it is unclear whether Ulvik would have had a public library so early.

The cultural and scientific changes in the 18th century also contributed to the overall development of public schools in Norway. School history spans several hundred years and, as we have seen, the changes have affected the everyday life of children and young people in Ulvik.

Today, children in Norway can access books at school and in libraries. We are an enlightened people who place value on knowledge and insight, and who seek to understand the world around us. We can thank our ancestors—both male and

female—for this, in addition to proactive national and local policies in the field of reading.

Be a person who reads so you can enjoy the unique power books and literature have: to impart new knowledge and create wonder and joy every day!