

Odd Ragnar Hunnes

# **The best from two Schools ...**

An Assessment of the Partnership between  
an International/North-American and a Norwegian School  
in Kenya



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## **INTRODUCTION**

For the school years 2002/2003 and 2003/2004 there was established a partnership program between The Norwegian Community School and the international school Rosslyn Academy in Nairobi Kenya. The aim of the project was to give the Norwegian students at Junior High level a school program that would be acceptable socially and academically and at the same time prepare the students for the school situation they would meet on going home to Norway.

This report presents this partnership program and assesses the quality of the program with special focus on some selected perspectives. Furthermore it is an aim to present information that may be of some value with further development of this partnership in mind, and/or for similar schemes in different contexts.

The concrete partnership continues also through the school year 2004/2005, in expectance of approval from the Norwegian school administration.

The English version of this report is translated from my Norwegian version with a lot of help from my wife Elin Ulmo Hunnes. The chapters 2, 3 and 6 have been made some shorter through this process. Chapter 2 in the English version consists to a high degree of the written agreement between the schools, while the Norwegian version gives a more detailed presentation of the partnership.



# 1. BACKGROUND AND AIM

## **The situation**

Many Norwegian students who live abroad are offered the choice between attending a Norwegian or an international school. This is also true for East Africa. In 1977 Norwegian Community School (NCS) was established to provide a Norwegian alternative. At the same time there are also several international schools both in Nairobi and in other major cities in the region.

When NCS was at its largest, there were over 70 students (76 in 85/86). The number has decreased through the nineties, and in the last 4-5 years there have been approximately 20 students attending. With this few students, there has been ample opportunity for the teachers to help them individually. The curriculum is based on the Norwegian standard of 1997, The curriculum for the 10-year compulsory school in Norway (L-97), and this is positive for the Norwegian children. On the other hand, the social context has been rather narrow for lower secondary<sup>1</sup> level, and this has been an issue of concern, especially for the Junior High students and their parents.

The international schools give the children an opportunity to experience an enriching social context, a different curriculum and a big challenge in the fact that the teaching is given in a different language. Usually the language barrier will give the students a quite difficult start, but experience shows that this is overcome with time. These students may struggle with language problems while abroad, but when they return to Norway, they find themselves ahead of their classmates in the area of foreign languages. They have also had the opportunity to make friends with young people from other countries and thus they have learnt much about cultural, religious, ethnic and national differences. Probably the most difficult subject they face when coming home to the Norwegian school system, is that of their mother tongue, the Norwegian language, but other adjustments to the Norwegian school standard may also bring some challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> In this report for the most part I use the terms Junior High School and High School in stead of Lower and Upper Secondary School

## **The process**

In the fall of 2001 NCS started working on the question of the schooling of next years Junior High students. Five were then in seventh grade, and would be returning to Norway in 2003. One was in eighth grade and was already enrolled at Rosslyn Academy (RA), an international school in Nairobi. All except one of these students were living at the NCS dormitory while their parents were situated at different mission stations in Kenya and Tanzania.

The parents and the personnel at NCS were all of the opinion that the social environment for these students would be too narrow. On the other hand, the challenge of attending an international school could well be too large for a student with below average learning skills. It was considered optimal to find a solution that could suit all students together. On this background an idea was conceived of developing a project that would combine the Norwegian curriculum with that of an international school. It was natural to contact RA about this since one of the concerned students already attended that school. Beside her several high school students at RA were connected to NCS (in the year 2001/02 they were five), and the ties between the schools were good.

RA responded positively to the idea. The leadership valued the concern of NCS to give the students the best possible offer. The vision became to enable the students to experience the best from the two traditions, including preparation in the Norwegian curriculum in order to ease their homecoming. An experimental project between the two schools was established and later approved by the Norwegian government.

The project was planned for the years 2002/03 and 2003/04. The Norwegian eight graders were to receive classes in mathematics and Norwegian according to Norwegian curriculum and by a Norwegian teacher, lessons in English according to American curriculum by the Norwegian teacher, while the rest of the lessons were taken with the regular students at RA. The ninth grader was to receive lessons in Norwegian by the Norwegian teacher, and for the rest of the lessons she was in with the regular students of her grade.

## **Aim of the project**

The application on this project to the Norwegian government stressed the fact that it was important to find a way to make the school year acceptable socially and academically and at the same time prepare the students for the school situation they would meet on going home to



Norway. So this experiment rests on an intention to develop a school program that would meet the special needs of these students and the corresponding challenges of the school.

In addition one said that the cooperation between the two schools would give the parties involved opportunities to develop personal and academic competence. In this project they would get to know each other's school systems, and their habits of thought and procedures would hopefully be challenged and give ground for further development.

Finally it is an expressed hope that this project would be a step in the direction of creating a better school program. Especially in international settings this cooperation could inspire Norwegian schools in other countries to do something similar.

### **Assessment**

The most important motivation for doing this assessment is to document the schooling that the eight and nine graders at NCS received during the years 2002/03 and 2003/04 through the established cooperation between this school and RA. The assessment will concentrate on the year 02/03 but will be supplied by information on experiences from the year 03/04. The focus will be on describing the schooling and on saying something about the quality of it. It is important to view how the school year at NCS/RA is experienced and also how the homecoming to the Norwegian school is experienced. This knowledge then can be used as a basis for finding out whether this cooperation should continue after the two years, and if so, what areas one should concentrate on developing. It is also an aim for this assessment to present knowledge that may serve as a (partly) foundation for similar partnerships between other Norwegian and international schools located abroad. In this connection it may be mentioned that the North American journal for Christian schools "Christian School Education" gave Rosslyn Academy the "Exemplary School Reward" for her partnership with NCS. The reward was based on an article that one of the teachers at RA, Karen Mills, wrote (Mills 2004).

### **Economy**

Both schools have economic interests in this partnership. The work at RA depends on school fees, and the partnership agreement explicitly states that one reason for the cooperation is that "Rosslyn can continue to be the school of choice for the Norwegian community for secondary school." For NCS, and especially the owner Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM), it will

mean economic support from the Norwegian state if the government acknowledges the project. Even so NLM was determined to let the students attend RA whether the state supported the project or not. That shows the importance NLM placed on the contents of this cooperation. Consequently this assessment will not give the economy much attention, but concentrate upon the academic, social and pedagogical aspects.

## **2. A PRESENTATION OF THE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM**

### **The Partnership Schools**

Norwegian Community School (NCS) is a Norwegian school approved by Norwegian government as a private school for 1- 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The Curriculum for the 10-year compulsory School in Norway (L-97) issued by The Royal Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs, is the basis for NCS. The Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) owns and runs the school, which is located in the Norwegian Compound in the south western part of Nairobi (Langata road). At her 10 acre compound NLM has a guesthouse, conference centre, administration centre for its activities in East Africa in addition to the school and boarding for the students. NCS has about 20 students and 7 teachers and is well equipped with buildings and play-ground.

Rosslyn Academy is located on the northern part of Nairobi in a compound 20 acres in size. Rosslyn has modern classrooms, buildings among which are gym, amphitheatre and media centre and several sporting fields in addition to about 20 staff houses. The school is run according to American (USA) curriculum and has about 450 students from 1<sup>st</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Even though more than 30 nationalities are represented in the student body, about 70 % are North Americans (<http://www.rosslynacademy.com>). The school is owned and run by three American churches; Mennonites, Assembly of God and Baptists.

### **Main points in the partnership program**

The main points in the partnership program come forth in the agreement that was signed June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2002 by the Superintendent of Rosslyn and the principal of The Norwegian school:

### **Rosslyn Academy & Norwegian School Partnership 2002-03 School Year**

(with possible extension to the 03-04 school year)

#### **SUMMARY OF IDEAS**

*Rationale:* The younger Norwegian students from grades 8 & 9 at Rosslyn are usually boarding students who live at the Norwegian School that goes up through grade 7. These students are far from parents who live in remote places. The Norwegian community is

proposing a modified program at Rosslyn for the Norwegian students so that Rosslyn can continue to be the school of choice for the Norwegian community for secondary school. This modified program would allow the students more frequent breaks from school so as to visit family and give them opportunity to continue with the study of Norwegian language and math of their system.

*General Proposal:* The Norwegian students do not need a diploma from Rosslyn as they return to Norway for parts of secondary school or for their 13<sup>th</sup> year of schooling. The grade 1-7 Norwegian students who attend the Norwegian school attend classes for about five weeks and then fly to see their parents for a week in which they do independent study. The Norwegian community would like to see the 8-9<sup>th</sup> graders who attend Rosslyn be allowed to follow a similar pattern. The Norwegian community will provide a Norwegian teacher to work at Rosslyn as part of the teaching team of 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades to coordinate this and to prepare/grade the independent study lessons during the weeks of homestay with their parents.

The perceived benefits of this proposal are centered around a situation that would allow the younger secondary Norwegian students to continue attending Rosslyn Academy as their preferred choice of secondary school, while remaining in the dorm situation. The agreement would allow these students to enjoy the benefits of both schooling systems, as well as to give them the familial support that they need during these younger years. The collaboration of the Norwegian teacher with Rosslyn's staff would give opportunity for professional development of all involved, with the opportunity of exposure to the benefits of each other's school systems. The program rests heavily on the personality and ability of all involved to be open in communication and to learning from each other.

*Specific Points of Agreement:*

1. **NORWEGIAN STUDENTS:** There will likely be six students (five 8<sup>th</sup> graders and one 9<sup>th</sup> grader for semester 1 of 2002-03). These students will all follow the normal application process for admission to Rosslyn Academy. Students who meet the admission criteria will be admitted. The Admissions Committee of Rosslyn Academy is given permission by the Rosslyn administration not to count the Norwegian students in our Special Needs ESL percentages since a resource person will be provided to counterbalance these needs.

2. **ASSESSMENT OF NORWEGIAN STUDENTS:** No official credit/transcripts would be issued, rather a certificate of course completion/attendance. A “narrative report card” would be issued in place of the regular quarterly report cards. 8<sup>th</sup> grade students will not receive a quarterly numerical average, but an update on topics covered, regular attendance update, and general description of skills mastered. The 9<sup>th</sup> grade student will receive quarterly and semester reports with credits earned.
3. **OPT-OUT MATH:** The 8<sup>th</sup> Norwegian students would opt out of Rosslyn's Math 8 and be taught Norwegian math by the Norwegian teacher.
4. **OPT-OUT FOR NORWEGIAN LANGUAGE COURSE:** The 8<sup>th</sup> graders will be instructed in the Norwegian language during one period of Language Arts. The 8<sup>th</sup> graders will be instructed by the Norwegian teacher for their English period following Rosslyn’s curriculum. In addition, the 8<sup>th</sup> graders will take ESL for at least the first quarter of the school year. The 9<sup>th</sup> grader would use an elective period to take Norwegian language.
5. **HIRING PROCESS/TEACHING RESPONSIBILITIES:** The Norwegian school will provide the teacher who would need to be present at Rosslyn Academy as part of our teaching staff. A joint interview by the Norwegian school and Rosslyn Academy, following Rosslyn's recruitment guidelines would need to occur prior to July 2002. The Norwegian teacher would be considered a staff member and expected to attend full staff orientation and all professional development activities. All salary / benefits / medical / transport would be provided by the Norwegian school community. Rosslyn will provide a classroom for the math, English and Norwegian classes, a desk and office space. The Position Profile for Teachers would be the working guideline for the Norwegian teacher in his/her responsibilities at Rosslyn Academy. Rosslyn Academy’s secondment agreement would be used.
6. **ILLNESS of NORWEGIAN TEACHER:** If the Norwegian Teacher becomes ill, notification will be sent to Rosslyn Academy. Rosslyn will provide for a substitute teacher for a few days. If the illness were longer, the Norwegian school would provide a suitable substitute.
7. **TEAMING with 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> GRADE TEACHERS:** The Norwegian teacher would become a part of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teaching team, attending these meetings as possible. The Norwegian teacher would attend the core classes of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Norwegian students on a regular basis so that he/she is able to assist these students in their transition to Rosslyn as well as able to create the “independent lessons” for the homestay weeks. The Norwegian teacher and RA High School Principal will arrange a time for the Norwegian teacher to meet with

the 9<sup>th</sup> grade teachers to meet the needs of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade Norwegian students. The independent homestay lessons would be centered around the concepts missed during the homestay weeks so that the students have mastered the concepts upon their return to the Rosslyn curriculum. It should be noted that through collaboration of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade team and the Norwegian teacher, if at all possible, major projects and tests would not be scheduled during homestay weeks. The homestay weeks will be set as early in the school year as possible and correspond for all Norwegian students in this program.

8. COURSE LOAD OF NORWEGIAN STAFF MEMBER: The course load of this teacher would include: Norwegian Math 8, Norwegian language 8, Norwegian language 9, English 8, 8<sup>th</sup> grade planning meeting as possible, and observation of the core classes of the Norwegian students in the Middle School (MS) and High School (HS).

## EVALUATION PLAN

Partnerships require teamwork and regular communication to ensure successful unified growth. Rosslyn Academy and the Norwegian School must be committed to regular communication and evaluation of this school partnership to foster success and to acknowledge shortcomings. The plan below is designed to assist each school in setting parameters for success and to identify indicators of failure. Should either school discover detriment to their vested interests, it is important for each school to agreeably dissolve the partnership in a peaceful manner.

Evaluations address the following categories: professional staff, student progress, and administration of the programs & partnership. The descriptions below indicate factors to be included in the evaluation of each category.

### *Professional Staff Evaluation*

#### Norwegian School

1. Norwegian teacher to be instructionally evaluated by the NS Principal. Observational evaluations to occur in Sept., Oct., Dec., Feb., April

#### Rosslyn Academy

1. RA MS Principal evaluates Norwegian teacher interaction and teaming with Rosslyn teachers in terms of operations/management.

2. 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Team evaluates joint planning and participation in team meetings.
3. RA HS Principal evaluates Norwegian teacher's communication with HS teachers of 9<sup>th</sup> grade student.
4. RA HS Principal evaluates resource instruction for mainstreamed HS student(s).

*Student Progress Evaluation*

Norwegian School

1. Parent perception survey of the student's educational scheme and academic progress.
2. Student's desire to be at Rosslyn Academy
3. Student academic achievement in English, math, and Norwegian is satisfactory

Rosslyn Academy

1. Student academic achievement in classes is satisfactory.
2. Student motivation and participation effort in classes and co-curricular events is satisfactory.

*Partnership Evaluation*

A written, formal evaluation of student progress, participating teacher evaluations and general outcomes/difficulties of the partnership will be submitted quarterly. This evaluation will be made by the Norwegian School Principal and the Rosslyn Academy Middle School Principal to the Partnership Team. The Partnership Team consists of two representatives of the Rosslyn Academy Leadership Team, the Norwegian School Principal, and the Norwegian teacher. Within 2 weeks of receipt of both summary reports, the Partnership Team will meet.

*Administrative Evaluation Reports – Due Dates:*

October 10, 2002	Partnership Team Meeting: by Oct. 24
December 10, 2002	Partnership Team Meeting: by Dec. 24
April 10, 2003	Partnership Team Meeting: by April 24

**DISSOLUTION AGREEMENT**

The Partnership Team will collectively analyze these written reports and recommend the continuance or dissolution of the program.

During the year, any member of the Partnership team may call a Partnership meeting to discuss issues or events that critically affect this program. If dissolution occurs, Norwegian students attending Rosslyn have the option of continuing at Rosslyn in the regular academic program.



### **3. METHODS**

While planning the partnership program, we agreed that I was to apply for resources to conduct a rather thorough assessment of the partnership in addition to what was worked into the partnership itself and described in the agreement (chapter 2). The point in doing a larger assessment was for one thing to strengthen the application to have the project accepted by Norwegian school authorities. Secondly we wanted to learn as much as possible from the program.

The Norwegian School Government approved of the program, but gave no extra money for an assessment. Therefore this report has been made as part of my work as an associate professor at Volda University College.

#### **Am I disqualified?**

There is a main problem with me doing this assessment: I was the principal of NCS at the time of our working out the plans. Will I then be able to be objective enough to make a trustworthy report? It would be “natural” to think that I wanted to present this program as favorably as possible. And if I should be able to make the writing reasonably balanced, my personal investment in the project may influence my focus so that I unintentionally present the project in a favorable light. All my informants knew my role in the planning period. How can we know that they wanted so much not to disappoint me that they gave their information more of a positive angle than they really should do? The fact is, we cannot know, and even though I think they were not bending their information in favor of the program, I may be mistaken.

On the other hand, I want to point out some reasons that may count in favor of trusting the content of the report. I know the project the way it was planned, and with my background I have had ample access to relevant documents and resource persons. Since I see this partnership as a development project for NCS and RA, it should be in my interest not only to highlight the successes, but also to find the failures and weak spots so that these may be corrected.

Since I quit as principal at NCS June 2002 and left Kenya, I have not been part of the carrying out of the program. Distance in time and space are by some (Møller 1999 p. 82, Dale p. 290) pointed at as important in order to reflect in a consistent manner on a project in which a person has played an active role. My present location in Norway and the time that has passed since I left Kenya and NCS may be considered positive in this context.

Everything considered, the best defense against unfortunate sides of this report for myself as well as the reader, is that we all know about my position and may read the report in that light.

### **Focal points in the report**

Most of this report aims at presenting and assessing the partnership between NCS and RA. This is shortly done in chapter 2 through the presentation of the agreement between NCS and RA. In chapter 4 this is done more in length through presenting selected perspectives and viewing the partnership in this light. The criteria for choosing perspectives are:

- main partakers view them as important; this becomes evident through the answers that are given by students, parents and teachers as I asked them what they thought important to focus upon in this assessment
- they represent important perspectives according to L-97; the international perspective, building attitudes, the contents of the subjects, methods of work in the learning process, adapted teaching (individual and local adaptation)
- they become especially interesting in this partnership because the Norwegian and American school culture may seem to differ in these fields; verbal participation, assessment, the social perspective, teacher/student relationship, democracy.

The main focus for this assessment is how the partnership program works for the students. In addition to this, it is also of interest what profit other partakers may have from it. Such partakers are the parents, teachers and administrators of the two schools and their views on this point are presented in chapter 5. Most of the students lived in the NCS boarding and this is shortly commented upon in chapter 6. Finally I have a hope that the experiences from this project may be of general interest. In chapter 7 I therefore present some summarizing evaluations. These may be of some value with further development of this partnership in mind, and/or for similar schemes in different contexts.

## **The information**

Most of the information for this report I gathered during a stay in Nairobi in January / February 2003. The methods I used were:

- Student diary; the students were asked to write their diary for a regular day, and towards the end write something about what they liked/disliked about their school.
- Student Inspectors; The Norwegian government has introduced an internet-based school assessment scheme called "Elevinspektørene" (Student Inspectors). Every student in Junior High School and High School is supposed to answer a survey on the quality of their own school once a year. The results are presented in tables on government home pages accessible for anyone.
- Interviews; For the school year 02/03 I performed individual interviews with all the students, their parents and teachers. Furthermore I had conversations with representatives of the administrations of the schools. The interviews with students of 03/04 I performed in groups, with parents mainly in couples. After the students had attended school in Norway for a year after returning, I performed a short interview with each of the students and a selection of the parents<sup>2</sup>.
- Observation; I performed observations of the students in class, between classes, in the school bus and in the NCS boarding for those who lived there.
- Documents; I read the relevant documents for the partnership.

In this way I have collected a lot of information, so that I have aimed at making a "thick description" of the situation. For the most part the information comes nicely together, but there are of course nuances in views, and I comment upon some of these in the report.

Most of the interviews were taped and later written down. When writing the report, the information was assembled topic by topic so that I could view it all together and in context.

Since the students are relatively young, and because I asked them to yield information in several ways and this may seem demanding on them, I asked their parents' permission to collect the information this way. This was also important since a study like this has everything to gain by being open about all ways and means.

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<sup>2</sup> I selected one of the parents of each of the students; I picked the one who answered the telephone.



## **4. SELECTED PERSPECTIVES ON THE PARTNERSHIP**

### **Participant's perspective**

The information in this project is oriented towards the participants' views. Therefore all the interviews started with the question of what the informant thought was important to focus upon when this schooling was to be assessed. The common pattern was that the informant not only told what he or she thought was important to focus upon, but also expressed their own views about these important aspects.

### **The student is the important one**

The teachers and the parents all agreed that the student is the most important part of this project. Their answers as to what should have high priority in the assessment can be summed up in the two following questions: "Does it benefit the students?" and "Are they comfortable?" It was suggested that one should look to the three following areas for answers: social relationships, academics, and spiritual matters. The students were mostly in agreement with this.

The social aspect was mentioned most often. The social environment at RA is large; both in number of people and in cultural variety, compared to what the students were used to. Sports play a big part of it, and many pointed out that this was the arena where most of the social integration of the Norwegian students took place. Here one may perform through action rather than by talking. At the same time this is also a place for informal contact between students and between student and coach, who was one of the teachers. Thus the language is quite essential in the process of social integration.

The language was also often mentioned as crucial when it came to academics. The students' ability to understand as well as actively take part in the learning process depends very closely on their mastery of the English language. The ninth grader was a regular student at RA the previous year. She said that the combination of sometimes using English and sometimes Norwegian, like she could to this year, was a good thing for her. She used to miss speaking Norwegian. When talking about academics, several were concerned that the total program should be bearable during the actual year, and at the same time provide the best possible

transition between the Norwegian school and their schooling in Kenya, - and that goes both ways.

Several informants mentioned the spiritual aspects of human life and this was an obvious pillar for most of them. The goals of NCS and RA are very much alike when it comes to helping the students to mature spiritually.

A fourth element that several of the adult informants mentioned as especially important for whether the students profited from the cooperation and could cope, was the role and function of the Norwegian teacher. It is evident that she served as a bridge between the two school systems, she has conveyed information between parents, teachers and students, she facilitated fruitful processes for learning and has been a firm, secure cornerstone in the life for the students as well as the parents. Her overall knowledge of things combined with a fundamental trust are essential in this connection.

### **A regular day**

The diary notes from the students strengthen this impression. They were asked to write their diary for one specific day. The point was to have them describe a regular day that at the outset should not be special in any way.

Several of the students find it hard to get up as early as between 0600 and 0615, but one of them writes that “the routine has become a rhythm, so it is not so bad any longer”. The bus ride that starts at the Compound at 0715 and ends at RA at about 0815 is described as boring. They had some fun in the beginning, but it became routine. One student sleeps some, one reads some and one is almost always getting sick. Neither of the students expresses any fear of going by bus even though there are a lot of traffic accidents in Nairobi (Daily Nation 17.03.04). A parent couple of 03/04 reports that they have a fear of the traffic. They try not to worry too much about it, but this is their immediate response when I ask them whether they have qualms about the security of their son.

Chapel, “something like a small worship service for the students”, lasts for 30 minutes. “It is good to have this break between classes!”, “..This is something that I like the most at school. It is something like a Bible study.” Chapel is once a week. Half of the students comment on

the food at lunch, two of them write that this is the peak of the day. Several of the students check their e-mail during breaks in between other activities during the day.

The teachers “own” their classrooms, so the students have to move. The breaks between classes are short. The students are getting used to this. They just barely have enough time to go by their locker on their way to the next classroom. Four out of six students comment upon the locker, and one of them wonders how she will be able to cope without a locker when she goes back to Norway. The subjects that they have during the day are naturally commented upon. ESL is both useful and enjoyable: “We had a good time. I was talking a lot.” One comment about Science: “We are sitting there, half way bored, but everybody is attentive.” And about Social Studies: “We never get out of there without homework!” Several of the students enjoy PE. One student writes that the classes of Mathematics and Norwegian “passed quickly.”

All the girls play soccer and write: “Cool!” and “I get in good shape.” One of them writes that she did not get time to check her e-mail at school because she was too busy playing soccer right after school. She prioritized to be with friends in the short breaks between classes and practice soccer after school.

The students think that they have a lot of homework; much of the time was spent on this after having returned to the Compound. But they had some leisure time. The ninth grader, who has study hall, finished all her homework at school this day, and therefore she had an easy evening. That was convenient for her since her soccer team played Rift Valley Academy, the archrival in most ballgames, and therefore she was late home. One of the students mentions that he received some help with his homework.

Those who do not engage in sports, have a couple of hours of leisure between homework and bedtime. Two of them played some table tennis and watched a movie; one of them also played some at his PC before he went to bed. The boys were not active in sports after school in the period of time when the diary was written, because their soccer season was over. The girls, who played soccer at the time, spent a lot of their spare time for practice and matches. This must be characterized as rather strictly organized leisure time. But they like to participate.

Most of those who live at the boarding (4 out of 5) say that it is hard to be away from home / their parents / brothers and sisters for periods of 3 – 4 weeks. They are glad to have study-weeks at home as part of the NCS/RA project.

### **Thoughts/Points of view**

At the end of the diary sheet, the students were asked to share their thoughts on how they liked to be a student at NCS/RA. Their comments are predominantly positive and take the general form like “a good school”, “very good” and “cool”. Some of them are a bit more specific of what they like about it: “positive social setting” and “more students than at NCS where everybody has to be together all the time”. One student thinks it an advantage to be able to attend a school outside Norway; she has made friends from all over the world and sums this up by writing that she considers herself as having received a gift. The conception of having learned a lot also comes forth: “learn more than in Norwegian schools”. One student expresses the expectation of good grades in English when she returns home.

The spiritual side is also commented upon: “It is very good that this is a Christian school”, “Even at the soccer practices we pray that Jesus must be with us and help us.”

One student writes: “I do not regret the choice I made”. This student has taken actively part in the decision to choose this alternative for her schooling. Another student writes that he would want to attend this school longer than the initial plan (one year). Everything is not positive, though, one writes that it is tiresome, another that the traveling distance between housing and school is too long. However, still another writes that a school day of 10 hours including travel, does not bother him at all: “I am glad I was able to join this school.”

These are all comments from the students from the year of 02/03. I asked the students from 03/04 to write a similar diary. The comments go in the same direction as the first year, and I include some examples: One writes that he enjoys school, but it is difficult to get up so early in the morning. Another writes that it is “very OK” at RA and that he hopes that Scripture Mission will continue sending students there. The students have a positive impression of the schooling, even though they are met with demands that they are expected to fulfill. “In the beginning I did not like it much, it was difficult and we had a lot of homework, but after a while it really is a lot of fun”. In February 2004 when this was written, the hard time evidently



is behind: “Rosslyn is the best school I have attended. If somebody had asked me if I would like to go back to Norway right now, I would have answered: NO”.

### **The international perspective**

The national curriculum for Norwegian schools (L-97) points at several sides of the learning situation that have especially favorable conditions in a partnership like the one that is established between NCS and RA. Under the headline “Cultural heritage and identity” it is written that the students are expected to get acquainted with their own national and local traditions and also to learn about other cultures. “Knowledge of other peoples gives us the chance to test our own values and the values of others”. This will give mutual respect and tolerance (p. 26). The following sentence under “Subject syllabuses, contents and structure” points in the same direction: “Education should promote international understanding and solidarity across borders, and schools must make the most of the knowledge and understanding which minority groups and Norwegians with other cultural backgrounds can contribute.” (p. 70) Even though the quotes are taken from contexts that emphasize the importance to knit this learning to minority groups in Norway and to Norwegians with a different cultural background, the core point is learning about foreign peoples and cultures. Under the heading “Internationalization and the Appreciation of Tradition” it is pointed out that networks are continuously being built all over the world. Norway needs to be active in this building in order to develop welfare and sustain the environment. And this kind of participation “depends on familiarity with other countries’ cultures and languages”. (p. 44)

During interviews the students mention the English language as the most obvious reminder to them that they attend an international school. This fact is ever present in their minds and one student finds that he easily tires from having to communicate in English all the time. This student also finds it comforting that the Norwegian students are not the only ones that do not have English as their mother tongue. This is an illustration of the fact that more than 30 nationalities are represented at RA, even though more than half of them are North Americans. Different food cultures are also a reminder about the international perspective and this is demonstrated during lunch break and at informal gatherings where different nationalities bring different dishes. From the students’ answers to the question of what they learn at this

school that they would not learn at home, obvious answers like English and new types of sports and games come in addition to “good working habits” and “have to be on time”.

In the classroom the Norwegian students cooperate with students from other countries especially when the teacher decides the organizing of groups. When the students decide themselves whom to work with, they most often choose Norwegians or students who sit close. To my question whether the student works with fellow students of different race, language or gender, one of the students of 03/04 answers as follows: “I do not work with people of different races, just with Africans and the like.” This statement may be interpreted in different ways, but it seems clear that there is not a very high level of tension between different ethnic groups. Another student indicates the same thing when he says that he often works with others, “but not with girls”. For the fourteen years old boy it is important to avoid girls, but a different skin color or nationality makes little difference. The breaks in between classes are short and must mainly be spent to reach the next class, but the lunch break is long enough to give the opportunity to chat with students from other countries, and some of the students tell me that they do so. Outside school it is mainly during sports and on the bus ride they meet students from different countries than their own. Due to long distances and early evenings (it gets dark between 1800 and 1900 all year round) opportunities are few for social interaction outside school other than during weekends. Occasionally school friends are invited to the Norwegian compound to visit or spend the night. But the students in Middle School are not allowed to stay over night alone at a friend’s home away from the compound. This is a decision the parents have made.

The parents have a positive view of the international element at the school. One parent expresses his view like this: “It is not easy to put the finger exactly at where the profit is, but just being together like this we think is rewarding.” Another regards it as very positive that the students get this experience early in life, because one cannot live anywhere on this globe without meeting the challenge of encountering people of different cultures. And it is perceived as positive that the students at RA get to learn to know different people and cultures a little bit from the inside, or at least as part of their everyday life. Furthermore it is pointed out that for Norwegian fourteen years olds it may be rather difficult to socialize with Africans of the same age at the mission fields where their parents live because the differences in chores and dues often are too big. For those who do not wish to make friends only with Norwegian

compatriots, the school environment at RA is suitable for contact with children of their own age.

All the teachers think that the cultural diversity is a positive value for the school and for themselves as individuals. One mentions for example that having foreigners in the class gives her the chance to use them as resource persons when the class is working with their home country. In such cases she may ask them if the textbook is describing this in a manner that the student can identify with. Some of the teachers admit that the language situation gives them some extra challenges in the field of making themselves understood. This has led them to become more conscious of taking sufficient time to explain and double check that the students have grasped the information that is given out. These techniques of communication they think are good on a general basis and several teachers indicate that the international element at RA partly demands and partly inspires them to be(-come) better teachers.

### **Building attitudes**

The whole of the introductory chapter of L-97 is saturated by the conviction that education is supposed to include knowledge and skills as well as positive attitudes. This covers of course such a wide variety of possible themes for studies, that I will have to limit myself to comment upon just a few perspectives, and there is also no room for going in depth on any of them.

### **Tolerance**

One of the teachers of the eight graders comes from one of the southern states of the US, and she says that it is wonderful to see how whites and Africans are able to cooperate in a fruitful manner, “just like it should be”. Here race is no issue, she thinks, and says that just to be present and experience this is quite fantastic. For a person from the southern part of the US this of course is a question of tolerance, but it is difficult to say how big a share of the credit should be given to RA for differences between races seemingly being small. The students are to a large degree recruited from families that are in Africa on a mission to help people develop the continent, and therefore many of them have Africans as close friends. Still, the Rosslyn community is actively pulling in the direction of positive integration between different ethnic groups.

The concept of tolerance goes further than race and nationality; it is also a question of language, religion and economic welfare. The students make it clear that it is not their experience that students are treated differently on these grounds, nor on the ground of gender. Everybody is supposed to dress decently and there are definite rules for what that means, but other than that they find little of body fixation present at the school. The students find that the teachers show respect and value other points of view than their own and that the teachers are eager to include everybody in the class fellowship. Most of them also think that the students are appreciated alike regardless of their academic achievements. Sure enough, one of the students is a bit hesitant on this point, and one of the teachers thinks that the school is putting too much emphasis on the academics at RA.

Several parents find that the school functions all right when it comes to tolerance. This is said to be evident through the respect that is shown for the differences among the students and that the school tries to develop the students' personal assets. Other parents do not have a specific impression of the school in this area, while a couple of parents indicate that the school may not be very strong on tolerance, but rather a bit preoccupied by its own stand on some important issues. One of the teachers may be taken to indicate something in the same direction, when he characterizes RA as an American school in an international environment rather than an international school.

It is obvious that NCS/RA on this point faces a paradox well known in Christian mission. On the one hand the school has its values and it is worked hard to have the students make them their own. On the other hand the school needs to respect other points of view than its own. L-97 offers a rather common way of handling this challenge: "Pupils with secure identities rooted in their own cultures are better placed to meet other cultures" (L-97 p. 70). It seems like NCS/RA think and act in a similar manner. Christian doctrine and Christian values are in different contexts presented as the foundation of NCS/RA, and may thus be said to be favored. However, this is done in an open manner and combined with a respect for different views and values.

### **Christian traits**

Parents as well as students emphasize that RA is a Christian school and that the school is based on Christian values also in its work for building character. This is a field that may be a major challenge when the focus is on tolerance in an international environment. One of the

teachers point at this challenge when she says that it is OK that the Christian values should show through example, but she thinks it also should show through words. She further thinks that the parents, who send their children to RA, know that this is a Christian school and thus should be prepared for this to influence the daily life. Some of the Norwegian parents think that RA has a more distinct Christian profile than they are used to from schools in their home country. And those parents, who mention this, are satisfied, probably because RA in this field is “close to our own identity”, as one parent expressed it (in my translation). A couple of examples of what parents find positive are that RA tries both to help and inspire their students to personal Bible study and regular devotional life, and that the students are made to learn passages from the Bible by heart, and that they do without protest.

### **Body**

One of the clear rules at RA is to dress decent. To wear whole and reasonably clean clothes is the main rule. In addition they have the “four fingers rule” for the girls: The dress shall not be shorter than four fingers width above the knee, nor more than four fingers width low-necked and at least four fingers width on the shoulder, and the stomach shall not show. Those who forget and break the dress code, which does happen, especially in High School, have to wear the RA t-shirt on top of own clothes for the rest of the day. Some of the youngsters react negatively on the four fingers rule, but the NCS students accept it without questioning. I asked them if the school actively works against the notion that the body should be “perfect”. One of the students answers: “It is not important to look good”, another: “yes, they say that it is not so important” and a third tells me that there is not very much focus on the human body. This impression is very much in contrast with what a Norwegian professor in psychology, Arne Holte, says to the Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet* (27.07.04). He comments upon a survey among Norwegian 15 – 16 years olds: “When a person is young, it is extremely important how you look and how you dress.” To temper the focus on clothes and body, which seems to be done at RA, is probably well received in the homes of the students. A statement from one of the parents may be taken to support this notion: “Here the pressure on the relationship between boys and girls is not the same as in Norway. Here the relationship comes more natural.”

### **Other attitudes**

RA wishes actively to further and support positive attitudes with their students. Answering my questions about what attitudes they would like for their students to develop, the teachers

mentioned responsibility, diligence, discipline, integrity; “where we integrate what we believe in into what we do”, active involvement, love, caring, positive critical attitude, respect, trust and honesty. Parents find that the school emphasizes responsibility, diligence, helping each other, taking care of each other and do a good job in the classroom. The teachers do have a wider range of attitudes they want to promote than what the parents perceive, but I am not able to read any obvious divergence in the way parents and teachers answer that question.

### **Identity**

“A person’s aptitude and identity develop in interaction with others”; it says on page 46 in L-97. This and similar statements makes it reasonable to wonder how the identities of the Norwegian students are affected by their being students at NCS/RA. To develop positive attitudes is closely linked with developing a positive consciousness and self-esteem. Then encouragement is pivotal, and both students and parents say that the teachers are very good at this. I asked the teachers of the eight graders how the school actively works to strengthen the students’ self-esteem. The main point that comes out is that they are very conscious of encouraging the students. One of them said that his motivation comes from disagreeing with those schools that seem to think that people are being motivated by failure. On the contrary, he thought. Therefore they point out positive change in a student when they can trace it. The teachers of eight grade have agreed that they every week will e-mail at least two of their students and point out something positive that they can see in what the student has done. These e-mails are sent in copy to the parents, so they know what is happening. Several of the parents mentioned that they recently had received such e-mail, and it was obvious that they appreciated the initiative. Furthermore, the teachers think that self-esteem is built through being part of a fellowship where one is accepted. Therefore they try to create an atmosphere in the classroom secure enough for the students to make mistakes. One of the teachers told me that the teachers often discuss how they should go about it to correct the students in a positive manner. Both teachers and students are convinced that the teachers make a big effort to help their students both academically and spiritually. The cooperation between teacher and student seems to support the self-esteem of both parties.

### **The Norwegian part**

An important part of the identity of the Norwegian students is of course the fact that they are Norwegians. The students think that they diverge from the rest of the group and explain this mainly by pointing out that they leave to have school classes by themselves. In the beginning

several of their fellow students thought this was strange, but after having the reasons explained to them, they accepted it. At least that is what the Norwegian students think. To separate from the rest of the students, will hardly be a threat against their Norwegian identity. The opposite may seem more likely, through standing out as special, they are reminded that they have something in common that is not shared by the rest. A total integration with the rest of the students may have had the effect of making them less “Norwegian”. Some of the parents tell me that “everything” American has a high status with their children, but on direct question from me, neither of the parents perceives this as a problem. The students regard themselves as Norwegians, just like their parents do. The international experience broadens their horizon, but does not weaken their Norwegian identity. The Norwegian classes with the Norwegian teacher, Norwegian curriculum and Norwegian as language of instruction, are also strengthening the Norwegian identity.

Some of the students keep continually in touch with friends in their home country, especially by e-mail. One of the students says that she at first wrote quite often to her school back home, but since she only seldom received any replies, she simply quit. A couple of students report that they read a Norwegian newspaper on the web a few times a week. They are especially interested in results from sports, but may also read other types of news. There is only one student who reads Norwegian books; she borrows them at the library at the Norwegian compound. All the students occasionally watch movies with Norwegian subtitles.

The socio anthropologist Hans Christian Sorhaug, who has studied totems in the Norwegian context, claims that “.. the village is the genuine Norwegian totem. It incarnates the real Norwegian way of life – a national disposition in the direction of periphery and the decentralized,” (Melle p. 337). At Rosslyn the students meet an international diversity that is far from the “village” and the home and that gives them quite different inspirations and challenges in their development of identity compared with their peers in Norway. But the Norwegian compound with the boarding and the Norwegian environment will in many respects represent the Norwegian village in the sense Sorhaug uses it. A lot of Norwegians come visiting the compound or are just passing through. Around 10 Norwegian households live there in addition to the students at the boarding. All together, this adds up to many enough Norwegians that you may hear the Norwegian language spoken just as much as English or Swahili. The Norwegians congregate to Christian fellowship meetings, social gatherings and celebrate their national holiday, the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, Christmas and Easter. In

short, it seems as if the compound is a “Little Norway” and that the students have one of their footholds for their Norwegian identity there.

### **The contents of the subjects**

It is interesting to compare the contents of the subjects that the NCS/RA-students work with and what an average Norwegian student in lower secondary at the same age level meet. The ninth grader has a setup where she has Norwegian language according to L-97, but other than that she attends the regular RA-classes. The eight graders attend more of a hybrid system, and I therefore find it useful to focus this comparison on eighth grade. The comparison builds mainly on the plans for corresponding subjects at the NCS/RA (Rosslyn Academy 2002/2003) and L-97.

### **Time spent**

A comparison of the hours spent for different subjects (table 1) show high degree of similarity when it comes to Religious Education (RE) / Christian Knowledge (CK), Norwegian language and PE. NCS/RA spend more hours for mathematics (25%), social studies (35%), science (50%) and English (50% +), while L-97 spends more time for “Other subjects). It is also within “Other subjects” the biggest differences are. Here we find homemaking, music, student democracy, elective courses within L-97, while at NCS/RA we find ESL (English as Secon Language), health, music, art/drawing and ICT. In total, the students at NCS/RA spend almost 100 hours more in class during a year than the students at the same level in Norway do.

While the Norwegian students at NCS/RA go to the same classes in all other subjects, there are individual differences in “Other subjects”. Everybody attended ESL in the beginning, and two of them did so all year, while two of the rest attended ICT and one Health in the third term.

Fag	NCS/RA	L-97
Religious education (RE) / Christian knowledge (CK)	90	80



Norwegian	175	180
Mathematics	175	140
Social Studies	175	130
Science / Science and Environment	175	115
English	175	115
Physical education (PE)	90	100
Other subjects	175 <sup>3</sup>	260 <sup>4</sup>
Sum	1230	1120

*Table 1: A comparison of classes a week in different subjects in eighth grade at NCS/RA and L-97 (average numbers for lower secondary school in Norway). Numbers are rounded off.*

## **Plans**

When it comes to content of the subjects, I find it of little interest to dig deeper than the main points in the plans. There will always be discrepancies between the intended and the realized plan in every school (Goodlad et. al. pp. 46-52), but the aim and the size of this study indicate that a comparison of the plans should be sufficient. We will expect a high degree of similarity when it comes to Norwegian language and mathematics, since both subjects are run according to L-97. More hours spent on mathematics give time to spend more time at each theme at NCS/RA, a fact one of the students found helpful after coming home. He found that he had a better foundation in this subject than he used to have, compared to his peers. PE at NCS/RA focuses some on track, but mostly on ball games, and among these types of games that are not very well known in Norway, for example land hockey. According to L-97, the themes in Norwegian schools are more varied, for example do they have dance and outdoor activities in addition to track and ball games. The NCS/RA students work with the same themes as the regular RA-students in English classes, but with a lesser focus on the formal parts of writing. Still the NCS/RA students receive substantially more teaching in English than their peers in Norway.

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<sup>3</sup> English as Second Language (ESL), health, music, art (mainly drawing / painting), ICT.

<sup>4</sup> Home Economics, music, Class and pupil council activities, Schools' and pupils' options.

In RE the focus is mainly on ethics, central concepts of the Christian belief, knowledge of the Bible, and the relations to different religions. Much of this is the same as in L-97. One exception is the focus L-97 has on recent history of the Christianity in Norway. The clearest difference between the two plans in this subject is clearly the proclaiming profile at RA. The aim for the RE-teaching is that the students shall learn to “Trust the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God which teaches absolute truth”. The students shall “Experience God personally” and “Articulate personal faith” (Rosslyn Academy 2002/2003, Religious Education). RA communicates a very conscious attitude to the religious dimension in life, and this comes forth in all subjects and co-curricular activities where it may be natural / reasonable. A lot of different religions are present in the student body. Therefore I find it hard to say that the students attending the NCS/RA cooperation, are losing out compared to the L-97 students in this field. The parents of these students make it clear that they appreciate the clear Christian profile of RA especially by inviting the students to engage personally in this subject.

In social studies RA has a regional approach by taking the eastern hemisphere and study Africa, Asia, Europe and Oceania. They focus on geography, history as well as political science in each region and selected countries there. In eighth grade the Norwegian plan concentrates to a large degree on Norwegian environment, while Europe is studied in ninth grade, Africa, Asia and Oceania in tenth. The physical geography that is studied in eighth grade according to L-97, “geology” and “weather and climate”, is pretty much covered in science at RA. Thus it is reasonable to think that the NCS/RA-students will have some omissions in their background, especially when it comes to details about Norway, but at the same time they will be ahead of their peers when regions outside Norway are in question.

The themes in chemistry at RA seem to a large degree to cover the content both for eight and ninth grade according to L-97. At RA also some themes within electricity are included, themes that according to L-97 come in ninth grade. Within science in eighth grade L-97 focuses quite a bit upon contagious sicknesses, virus and bacteria and this not done in science at RA, while those students who study health have these themes well covered. We find space and evolution present in both plans, and it is interesting to see the different approach the plans have. L-97 says (p. 229): “Pupils should have the opportunity to become familiar with the main features of the theory of evolution, Darwin’s work, and the theories of natural selection”. The RA-plan for science says: “Provide evidence for and against the theory of evolution” (Rosslyn Academy 2002/2003, Integrated science).

For Social Studies as well as Science in eighth grade, the plan for RA covers a larger area than L-97. An important explanation may be the higher number of hours spent on the subject. The Norwegian students will profit from this when they come home and meet some of these themes in ninth and tenth grade. A disadvantage with this may of course be that some themes may be “old news”, but since approach and context will be quite different this will most probably not be a very big problem. In the interviews I had with the students after their homecoming, they told me they appreciated this as a repetition.

### **Work methods in the learning processes**

The Norwegian curriculum of 97 emphasizes the importance of the work methods in the learning processes. Examples of these are: practical activities, study techniques and good working habits, the combination of doing independent work and understanding the value of cooperation, joint planning and implementation, solving problems, appraising information and answers to questions (L-97 pp. 73, 84-85). In addition to these emphasize is put on: creative activities, practical work, working in groups, project work, different types and extent of home work, tests and presentations. I will not look specifically at all of these methods, but it is of interest to examine the main methods of work that meet the Norwegian NCS/RA students.

Teaching from the blackboard is the dominating method in the classroom. From the answers given in Student Inspectors this method seems to be more prevalent at RA than in Norway. Even so, practical work also gets a higher score at RA while the use of project work is at approximately the same level both places. The students answer consistently that they “learn a lot” both from the blackboard teaching and practical work and field trips. This is above the Norwegian average. Concerning project work, the experienced learning profit is about the same as in Norway. The Norwegian teacher has observed that the students generally have more individual projects at RA. One reason for this may be the emphasis on the work done at home. Since the students live dispersed over a wide area (all of Nairobi), this makes cooperation difficult. This teacher has tried to conduct joint projects in the subjects Norwegian and English. Five of six students answer “a large degree” while one answers “a lesser degree” to the question of whether they are satisfied with the work method at their school. This is above the Norwegian average. So the NCS/RA students are more satisfied with

the work methods at their school and feel that they learn more from them than the students of the same age in Norway. I interpret this as being an expression of a general motivation for learning and of satisfaction with their school and the methods there. Five of the six students answer that they to “a large degree” are able to show their knowledge and skills through the methods used at school (Student Inspectors).

### **Variation**

One of the clear messages received from Norwegian Junior High students is that they find school boring. This does not correspond with the message from my material on the NCS/RA students. The reason for this can hardly be found in a larger variety of work methods. In my interviews they report of “not so much” variation in methods of work: “It is mostly done the same way throughout one theme,” one of the students says. Two others say, “It is much the same with every teacher”. Since there are different teachers in all the subjects, though, and the teachers all teach somewhat differently, there is variety in the teaching throughout the day. One student says “the biggest variety is to go to Kirsten (the Norwegian teacher).” The interviews I did with the parents suggest the same thing, a teaching without great variety. This impression contrasts with what the teachers themselves answer to my question of how they regard the importance of varying the teaching methods. One teacher downplays the importance of variety, while the others find variety important, basically from three reasons. One is that students have different learning styles; another is that variety helps to keep up student motivation, and the third reason given is that different themes will need different methods. So here I find that what the teachers intend and hope for their teaching is only partially fulfilled in the students’ perceptions.

### **Structure**

The opposite of variety can be strict structure. Professor Edvard Befring mentions individual security and structured teaching as being central criteria for quality in a school setting (Befring 2002). Students, parents and teachers all say that they find a clear structure in the program. The students find that the work is well planned and organized, and that there are good, everyday routines. Some routines pertain to the whole school, for instance that every day starts with announcements, devotions and prayer. Other routines pertain to individual teachers that for instance classes in Science start with some questions about the current theme to be answered by the students. The teachers all confirm that they value highly structuring the schoolwork. One of them states that he finds structure especially important in the lower

grades, as this helps the students get routine and rhythm into their work, so that they are comfortable with it. Professor Dale points to rhythm in schoolwork as a mark of the good teacher (Dale 2000). Another of the teachers says that it is difficult for her spontaneously to change her plans for the day if the students should happen to come up with a good idea. She might, however, try to work it into the plans for the following day.

It differs from one teacher to another what they regard as structure. One teacher has a ready pattern for how she organizes the activities all the way through the lesson. Another will say that the important thing is that the students are on time for the start of the class and that they participate actively in the work. Both of these teachers have clear goals for what they want accomplished in each of the lessons they teach.

The students agree on the fact that everybody in the classroom knows the rules and regulations, and also for the most part comply with them. There are no reports as to anyone having had problems in doing their work because of disturbances from fellow students in class.

Even though the structure in the teaching is strong, having preference over variation, the students do not feel that the teachers regulate too much. One student does say that the students have very little influence on the work in the classroom; another finds it rather boring to have to take notes “all the time”. The overall impression is, however, that the students are content.

### **Homework**

The parents have a strong impression of the students being loaded with homework, but the students themselves do not quite agree among themselves about that. Several of them say that they do not really have that much homework, but that it varies. The general attitude seems to be that they accept having homework as long as they do not regard it as being too much. One says, “Sometimes it would have been nice not to have homework”. Most of the students say that they do their homework, while one says he has a hard time meeting the deadlines. None of the students like having homework, and this is explained mostly by the fact that they have very limited spare time. Their school day is approximately 10 hours, transport included. Added to this comes the sports activities for those who participate in that. It can be hard on the students to sit down with schoolwork in the evening after a long day like that. In Science they often are assigned homework over the weekend. The homework mostly consists of

writing answers to questions in the textbooks; sometimes they get other types of questions to be answered. They usually hand in the answers so that the teacher can control, correct and grade them. It differs from teacher to teacher how much homework the students are assigned. Mostly the teachers say they do not give very much homework, the exception being Social Studies where assignments are given for Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.

### **Project work**

By February the students had been assigned four project works, two of these by the Norwegian teacher. At RA they were required to hand in running written reports as to how the project developed. This they had not been required to at the Norwegian schools. Some of the parents had also noticed this difference and commented positively the arrangement at RA. When the project is finished it is presented in front of the class, and at RA the teachers emphasized the importance of this presentation much more than is usual in Norwegian schools. Both contents and form were considered important.

### **Tests**

The students find that they have many tests. In Social Studies they are tested every Friday in the current week's curriculum. After every chapter of the textbooks they are being given a test. The teachers find that the tests are useful as a repetition, as a tool to organize the themes and to find out what is important. None of them say they keep a focus on tests, and point to the fact that the results of the tests only compose from 10 to 25% of the grades they give the students. The teacher in Religious Education (RE) does not give tests at all.

In this field we see another example of divergence between how the teachers and the students view a method of work. The students feel that the teachers put more emphasize on tests than the teachers themselves feel. The students say they receive mostly "remember-questions" in these tests, but that they also get some "consider-questions". In History they have had "compare and contrast-questions". The students say the questions are all related to the currents themes, and that they receive help on how to prepare for the tests. As a whole the work with tests can be said to be a well-integrated part of the total teaching work. Since the students value the tests rather highly, it would seem to be a fruitful strategy of learning.

## **Verbal participation**

From my earlier knowledge of the American High School, both from Texas and RA, I have the impression that verbal participation in class is valued differently in Norwegian and American school traditions. The American tradition breeds the very active student who “sells” his or her points of view and own competence through verbal participation in class. This could be prepared presentations, like we meet in “Calvin and Hobbs” where Calvin very often brings “show and tell” tasks with him to school. The “typical” American TV program “David Letterman Show” is now appearing on Norwegian television screens. A regular feat of this show is that people from the audience come forth and show or tell about something that is special for them. So to show/present something one has found seems to be a strong feature of the American tradition.

Verbal participation can also be just active participation in class by answering questions and participate in discussions. An inquiry done to evaluate the reformed Norwegian curriculum of -97 cites teachers saying that presentations are the most common form of verbal classroom activities, besides the informal discussions (Hertzberg p. 163). Professor Hertzberg writes that one of the most prominent changes in the subject Norwegian from the plans of -87 to those of -97 concerns the enforcing of the oral aspects. Still I think that the Norwegian tradition is more reserved in this area than the American.

On this background I put some extra focus on methods of work at RA that implied oral participation from students. I asked whether the teachers often used conversation in class, either in pairs, in groups or the whole class together. The answers suggest great variety between the individual teachers. The RE teacher bases much of the work in class on discussions, while others just ask some questions in groups or pairs. In RE the students are encouraged to express thoughts and opinions, in Social Studies they may be invited to critical thinking, and as a whole a lot of the questions are in the areas of specific knowledge. I find no reason to say that there is a difference between the Norwegian teacher and the American teachers at NCS/RA when it comes to using class discussions in Middle School. Several of the students say that the Norwegian teacher is giving them better conditions for this kind of verbal activity than the other teachers. This may be explained by the circumstance that this group is small and the language Norwegian and that the students thus feel more comfortable in this setting. Even so, there is no evidence suggesting that the Norwegian students experience a difference in Norwegian and American traditions in this area. Neither do I find

that they talk more in class now than what they did last year in an all-Norwegian school. Most of them find that they speak rarely when the whole class is present, and the usual explanation is language. One student says; "I have to think first in Norwegian and then in English." Several comment that they are too late to find things to say when they sit in the classroom. Still they do not find that the others in their classes talk very much more than they do. Neither do they express dislike of verbal participation, on the contrary; "It is more fun when there is discussion. Then we do not hear only the teacher. It is fun to hear what the others are thinking and to say what I am thinking." As to methods of work, they do not find a strong emphasize on the oral side. Some of them find that they have too much written work to do in class and at home, they would prefer more verbal activity. When held together with what I wrote before on project work, it seems right to conclude that more weight is put on presentation at NCS/RA than the students have been used to.

At High School this difference is even more marked. Two Norwegian students (9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade in 03/04) were of the opinion that they received much more training and teaching on how to present things to an audience than what they had had in Norway. Hertzberg (p. 165) writes about the Norwegian school; "Surely, we see that the students in our classrooms get some training in presentation, but not much counsel beforehand, and no explicit assessment afterwards..." So it is of interest to note that these two students experience that they have more presentations at RA, and also receive more instruction on presentation. One of the two had finished Junior High before coming to Kenya, and he said that he had performed more presentations in front of the class during the one year at RA than during the three years of Junior High together. He felt this had given him more self assurance.

The parents mostly feel that NCS/RA put more value on verbal activity than what they have met in the Norwegian schools. Two parents also mention that being active in class gives results, and this is seen from the grades. The teachers verify this. One parent says that his son is generally reticent, so this way of doing things gives him a nudge in the direction of exposing himself more.

The teachers agree that they think coaching in verbal activity is important. My observations from the classrooms confirm that the teachers do this, and they do so in different ways.



### **Strategies for learning**

OECD has established a program called PISA (Program for International Student Assessment, <http://www.pisa.no>). The report of 2002 says that Norwegian students have lower scores in the area of strategies for learning than the students from the other Nordic countries. I asked the students at NCS/RA whether they have found out what methods they profit most from. Two students answer project work, another field trips, while the rest of them do not have any favorite. Wells says that classroom discussions are very effective as to learning, especially when used for debriefing (Leat & Lin p. 14). I therefore asked the students whether they normally used class discussions to review methods they had used. One student answered that the teacher sometimes asks them what they like best, but the overall impression is that such discussions rarely take place. The teacher seems to be the one in charge of deciding the choice of strategy, and the students are given little encouragement in trying to find out what methods they profit the most from.

### **After returning home**

When answering the questions in my interview of February 2003 in Nairobi, the students were relating to their former experiences in the Norwegian school system. It was therefore very interesting to interview them again when they had been in Norway for a year. What were their experiences of the Norwegian school now, compared to the time at NCS/RA? I find that they see more nuances in their international school year, but the overall impression stands: it was a good time. Some of them even hope to be able to go back and spend another year at RA. One central theme of these interviews was how they compare work methods and work environment at NCS/RA and the school they attended their first year back in Norway.

Where tests are concerned, the experiences are quite varied. Some say they had more tests at NCS/RA while others answer to the contrary. This probably mirrors different practice at different Norwegian schools. But all mention the Norwegian tradition of tests in individual subjects that last the whole school day. They never had this kind of test at NCS/RA.

The impression that the amount of verbal activity was about the same in Norwegian schools as at NCS/RA is kept up after the first year back in Norway. In this area my impressions from beforehand were not confirmed to a large extent.

The students all agree that the amount of homework has been less in the Norwegian school than at NCS/RA. It is a main point in their experience that the Norwegian school requires less of them than NCS/RA. There they were used to having homework every day, their work was controlled and was graded. In Norway they work with plans for the week, where they have to do a certain amount of work on a weekly basis. That puts less pressure on the student. All students also have the experience that the follow-up on their work from the teacher is not as good in the Norwegian school. These changes have resulted in less diligent schoolwork for most of the students. Their parents have also noted that their children have a more relaxed attitude toward schoolwork, but say that the students are beginning to see that they have to take more responsibility for their own learning in Norway. They cannot expect the teachers here to put the same kind of pressure on them as they did at NCS/RA.

We see here two rather different ways of organizing the schoolwork. One is having a plan for the work on a weekly basis; the other is homework from day to day combined with more control exercised by the teacher. The students would undoubtedly have benefited from a better preparation in meeting these cultural differences. They had indeed worked with this type of weekly plan before, also at NCS. However, even though they were reminded of it from time to time, most of them had not really taken it into consideration before they again met this way of organizing the work at their return to Norway.

## **Adapted teaching**

### **Individual adaptation**

Adapted teaching is a fundamental principle in L-97 and this principle has been reinforced in Stortingsmelding no. 30 (2003/2004) (Norwegian Parliament Report) titled “Culture for learning”. The cooperation between NCS and RA is based on this principle, the issue being the situation of these students and their needs. The teaching has been structured around that. The most important adaptation has been that the students have received teaching in Norwegian and Mathematics according to the Norwegian curriculum, in Norwegian language. The classes in English are also adapted. The Norwegian students go through the same themes as the others, but with less focus on formal writing, which is much emphasized in the American system. The ordinary Ra-students have two lessons in English per day while the

Norwegian students use this time for one lesson in English and one in Norwegian. Since the students mainly have the same timetable every day, and 180 schooldays pr year, they thus receive as many lessons in Norwegian and more lessons in English and Mathematics than they would have had in a Norwegian Junior High School (see table 2). This goes for the “regular” English. In addition they have ESL, a subject with much individual adaptation. Since all the regular teaching (except the Norwegian) is also given in English, these students receive much more training in English than they would have received in Norway.

The fact that the students have a Norwegian teacher in the subjects English, Mathematics and Norwegian, is also a prominent adaptation. At NCS there are few students pr teacher, which is considered to be a mark of quality. This holds also true for the NCS/RA student/teacher relationship since here there are six students to one teacher. This gives the teacher ample time for individual attention. The response from all concerned (students, parents, the other teachers, the administration at NCS and RA) indicates that this is a very important element in the program. The Norwegian teacher has adjusted the work in her classes to make the overall pressure more bearable. She has also acted as counselor for the students and has been supportive in several areas.

The study weeks represent a special adaptation for the Norwegian students. Those who have their parents out on the mission field can live with them there for the week and do individual schoolwork. English as Second Language is offered to all the students at RA, and the Norwegian students are all taking this subject. When a student has reached an acceptable level of understanding in English, he or she is free to take another subject in those classes.

The students realize that there has been made quite a few adjustments for their sakes. One of the eighth graders says that he would not have been able to attend RA as a regular student. The ninth grader actually did this the year before. She points to the fact that now she has Norwegian as a subject, and also has study weeks as a consequence of the NCS/RA program. Since RA has no second language to offer her, she has study hall instead. This lessens the pressure on homework. The students generally express that they have the freedom to ask for help, and that they receive what they need.

Individual adaptation can be expressed through a combination of stating requirements and at the same time offering support and help. This statement from one student illustrates this; “We

have to meet the requirements. If we can't make it, we are allotted time to learn more. If our homework is extensive, the teacher comes up to me and asks if I have understood what I have to do." The students often experience that the teachers take their language difficulties into consideration. It is generally considered to be more demanding to write English than to speak it. So when one of the students was allowed to verbally answer a test in RE instead of having to write down the answers, this can be regarded as an individual adaptation.

One way of finding out to what extent the teaching is individually adapted, is to look at how well the students manage to meet the tasks they are given at school. I therefore asked them about this. All students find that they meet most of them; some find that they are able to meet all, and those who are in need of help, receive it. They all find that they get better at managing as the year proceeds, and the ninth grader does better the second year than the first.

The parents also are well aware of the individual adaptations of this program. They all answer that they find the program quite well suited to their child. Several of them mention that they experience that the teachers do "see" the students individually; "The student hands in a draft and receives it back from the teacher with suggestions as to what changes to make. This can go back and forth several times, and I am impressed by the teacher's capacities to do this." The parents say that the cooperation NCS/RA gives room for a certain amount of flexibility. As an example one mother says that her child was given the opportunity to belatedly take some tests that had been given during a study week. The regular arrangement is that tests that not taken on time cannot be taken later. The student thus gets noted for 0 points on that test.

The program also has its limits of course. Some of the parents remark that the subjects and the schoolwork might prove too difficult for some Norwegian students. One parent says that even with the individual adaptation within the framework of the partnership, the program could be too demanding. So it is important to be realistic when considering which students would benefit from participating.

One of the parents is commenting on the fact that RA is a Christian school. He says that in his opinion this is a well-balanced part of the whole school program. The students each have devotion in class, they write it out, and all are put into a written class-devotional. He sees this as a creative way of including everybody, and ends by saying that this aspect is important for

missionary kids, and in that respect this school program is just as well suited for them as the one in NCS.

Through this partnership program, and the presence of the Norwegian teacher, the teachers find that they have become more conscious of trying to communicate as clearly as possible on account of the students who do not have English as their first language. One teacher says he has developed a special sign language with one of the Norwegian students. By looking at her facial expressions, he “reads” when she has difficulties understanding. This makes it easier on her because she does not have to ask for help as often as before. A majority of the teachers also say that they vary working methods in their classes so that no special group or individual student is favored.

### **Local adaptation**

Local adaptation of the education by making use of the environment (L-97 p. 63), is a special feature of this joint program. RA is a school in the relative vicinity of NCS with which it is thought profitable to cooperate with. One sub goal for NCS is as follows; “NCS makes use of the possibilities that being situated in East Africa gives.” This shall be fulfilled by helping the students to relate actively to the social variety that characterizes the East African community; by utilizing the special natural phenomena in the region; and by taking trips and field trips (Aims and goals NCS 2000 - 2005).

There are several good reasons, then, for taking a closer look at whether the students and their parents find that the NCS/RA program clearly shows that this school is situated in Nairobi. The main impression is that for the Junior High students the location only to a small degree is reflected in the program. The eight graders have done a three-day field trip where they slept in tents and experienced the Kenyan nature very close up. This trip is part of a more extensive Cultural Field Studies program (CFS), where the excursions differ as to the grades. There is a progression through the years so the ninth graders visit local Kenyan homes, and ninth through twelfth grade spend one week pr year in CFS. The eight graders have also twice visited a children’s home right outside Nairobi.

Some of the students in eleventh and twelfth grade participate in Model United Nations (MUN). Here students from many countries meet at the UN headquarters in Nairobi and conduct a simulated debate with resolutions totally in accordance with the procedures and

regulations prevalent at UN. The UN headquarters is situated a couple of kilometers from RA, and in the school year of 02/03 the eighth and ninth graders only had contact with it through the fact that some of their classmates had parents who worked there. In the year of 03/04 however, the eighth graders also were allowed to participate at MUN, something they were very happy about.

Those participating in sports meet students from other schools in the area. In Social Studies certain emphasis was placed on the presidential election that took place in the country in December 2002. The school agenda is of course influenced by the Kenyan national holidays, and one parent says he has noticed that the schoolbooks are orientated towards East Africa. Parents have also been asked to contribute to the teaching.

One parent says it is her impression that the students stay mostly inside the campus area. Another finds the campus area very “Americanized”; and illustrates this by saying that there are very few of the teachers or parents that speak Swahili. Still another parent thinks that the school tries to be part of the local environment, but that the navel cord to the US is rather strong.

All factors put together, I find that the Norwegian students, through this NCS/RA cooperation, are given a school program that is individually well adapted. One of the parents of the ninth grader says that the workload was much heavier the year before. This is partly because the student now has a better knowledge of English, the school system and fellow students; but also because she this year is participating in the partnership program.

From a Norwegian point of view, RA is not fully utilizing the existing potential for using the close environment in learning situations. The strong American characteristics of the school can, however, function in an expanding and differentiating way for these Norwegian students, since most of them have lived for several years in an African village setting.

### **Student assessment**

The area of student assessment seems to have different traditions in the Norwegian and American school systems. Within the American system the assessment of “everything” is done by grades, even things like keeping deadlines. The competition to get good grades seems to be hard. The Norwegian system, on the other hand, differentiates between subjects and

order/diligence, emphasizes the process of learning in the assessment (L-97 p. 87) and does not give grades until the eighth grade. When the cooperation between NCS and RA was established, this difference was focused upon. The Norwegian administration did not want to comply totally with the American tradition in this area. Therefore an adjustment was suggested in order to spare the Norwegian students from the “hard grades”. They were to receive written assessments instead of grades in the international subjects. The administration at RA agreed to this. The Norwegian administration, however, had failed to take into account that Norwegian students are in the process of getting grades in the eight grades. Thus it can be easily argued that the students in the NCS/RA program should get grades.

### **Students wanted grades**

The students wrote a letter, dated October 2, 2002, where they request that they receive grades in the international subjects in the same way that their classmates do. I asked them why they wanted this, and the answers can be sorted into two groups. One is that they wanted a more precise assessment of their work; the other is that they wanted to be more integrated with the others at RA and also with their peers at home. On returning to Norway they will get grades and they wanted to become familiar with this type of assessment. All the students were asked about this; and as the majority wanted grades, the rest gave in. I talked with them about four months after this adjustment had been made, and those who had not wanted grades at the outset, now had few objections.

### **The system of grading**

Generally the grades are mostly given in accordance with a set standard; the natural capacities of the individual student are hardly taken into regard. This is not always the case, though. In PE for instance, meeting at the lesson constitutes 50% of the grade, while progression in the speed of writing counts for 25% of the grade in IT. One teacher says that he took into consideration the language difficulties of the Norwegian students in the beginning when giving them grades. But the main rule is that grades are not based on individual weaknesses or progressions. RA wants their students to have knowledge and skills that are reflected in the grades on their diploma. It is important for RA to give their students a solid foundation for further education. One teacher suggests that the academic standard is higher at RA than at similar schools in the US. She makes the assessment of her students in accordance with the average at RA. She says she made lower demands on the students as a teacher in USA

because there the students did not work as much as at RA. But she emphasizes that she puts equal demands on the students in a class.

This corresponds with an assertion I have heard set up several times, namely that many of the former students from RA have an easier time than their peers at school or college in the US. This assertion is general, though, and difficult to verify.

Most of the teachers at RA give grade reduction if a student misbehaves in class, and class participation is also graded. The score is reduced by 10% when a paper is turned in a day too late. Some of the students, the parents and all the teachers I spoke with find that grades are being used for disciplinarian aims. The students did not think this is especially negative. Some of the students answered that they did not find that the teachers used grades as a disciplinarian tool. When asked to be more explicit one student says; “To be well behaved shows on your grades. I guess that can be said to be a disciplinary means, but I do not notice it.” When this student does not think much about it, she is probably rather well behaved.

It goes for all of the Norwegian students that they perceive the discipline at RA to be rather strong, and interestingly enough they find this mostly positive. One of the teachers said the reason for this use of grades is to use reward/punishment as a way to prepare the students for the real world; “If you keep being too late for work, this will have consequences like not being promoted or the like. Hopefully the student will learn this from getting a grade reduction by handing in papers belatedly. If the students leave here with the attitude that they can be late for work or do whatever they want, they have not been taught that such behavior has negative consequences, which in real life it has.” Another teacher views it differently. He does not give grade reductions, but asks to talk to the student who hands in late. In this conversation he asks for an explanation. If he finds the explanation OK, the student receives a “normal” grade on that paper. He never says to the students whether they are given a reduction or not. As a reason for this way of doing things he says that he is not always able to keep time with his own work. So he wants to deal with the students the way he himself would like to be dealt with, with respect and understanding. A third teacher places himself somewhere between the other two; he finds it difficult to use grades as a disciplinary means, but still does it. Even though exceptions exist, it is by far the most common to employ grades as a means of disciplining students. Students say they often hear statements like; “This will show on your grade.” or “It is smart to do it this way. That will give you better grades next



year.” This can be a way of combining discipline and encouragement. In any case the students seem to be concerned about getting good grades, and here the school receives support from the parents.

### **A comparison with Norway**

Two of the students find it easier to get good grades in Norway than at NCS/RA, one says that it is more difficult while three find it to be about the same. This is one year after their return to Norway.

Information given in the “Student Inspectors” can be used to compare the methods of assessment at NCS/RA with an average in Norway. Such a comparison of different methods shows that NCS/RA uses verbal tests less than they do in Norway; they do have more written tests though, and also more presentations of project work, they have more homework, and more practical exercises. At NCS/RA the assessment of all this is done through grades. All of the Norwegian students at NCS/RA answer “to a great extent” when asked if they are able to show their knowledge and abilities through tests and practical exercises; and give the same answer when asked about the assessment of their homework. On these points their score is higher than the average in Norway. When asked whether they get the grades they think they deserve, half of them answer “in many subjects” and half of them say “in all subjects”. This is also a lot better than the Norwegian average. So from these answers we get the impression that more of the NCS/RA students get their work assessed by grades than what their Norwegian peers do; and also that they are more content with the system of assessment. This probably has to do with the fact that they say they understand how the system works. The teachers use it regularly and explain fairly often to the students how they use the grades. One student says this is a big difference between the systems of grading. At NCS/RA he was able to figure out the grade of the term by looking at the grades received alongside. This he was unable to do in Norway. A prerequisite for a system like that is that the teachers write an exact list over all that counts into the grade for each student. This the teachers do. One student says she thinks it is fair that the grade is 10% off on a paper if it is handed in too late, because this is not done when illness is the cause for the tardiness. One parent of 03/04 is commenting that maybe the system of utilizing grades as a disciplinarian method is used too much at NCS/RA and too little in Norway. A couple of the students find it too hard that the flunk line is set at 60 out of 100 points. They express the opinion that in some cases the line should be set somewhere in the region of 50 points. But other than this they regard the system to be just. A

third element that counts as positive is that the students receive written assessment in addition to the grades. In these assessments the teachers point to where they need to work more and also to give encouragement as to what they have done well. The teachers also seem to be able to show interest and care for the students individually, so that the daily focus is not exclusively on the grades. As a whole the students have a positive opinion of the assessment.

### **Satisfied parents**

The parents are for the most part satisfied with the information they get about the school and about their own children. One mother says they receive written reports about the grades and how the student is doing in class. The teacher had expressed that the student would profit from being more active in class and try to get to know the others better. “And he tried” says the mother. Out of this I read that these written reports function satisfactorily as a means of communication between school and home, teacher and student. The Norwegian teacher also is a central person here. She relates questions from students and parents to the other teachers, and takes the answers back. The parents say she represents security for them; and that the other teachers probably discuss the Norwegian students more because she is among them. This was verified by some of the teachers during my interviews with them. One parent finds that the Norwegian teacher is functioning as the traditional Norwegian main teacher; she is a person in the system that has an entire care for “her” students. The ordinary RA students do not have the equivalent of this.

The parents are also mostly satisfied with the grading system at NCS/RA. One parent says it is OK that slackness shows on the grades. But one parent also remarks that illness or legitimate absence should not have negative consequences for the grades, which she thinks it has. One of the students says they can take the test later, but one of the parents says the student is accounted 0 points. The regulations say that a student, who is unable to take a test and has a legitimate reason, is given another opportunity to take the test. The student is even in a position to influence at what time the test is to be given. So in this instance the parent is regarding the regulations as more rigid than they actually are. Another parent says; “The grades reflect the subjects. The other comments concern social things, how they relate to the other students, and activity in class. Bad behavior is mirrored in the grades, good behavior in the written reports. Subtraction from the grade is worse than a negative remark. Maybe this shows a system of values. To be effective and on time is important for well functioning. Not much deviation is allowed before a negative mark is given.” Several of the parents are critical

to the way grades function as a standard of competition between the students. You will always find the informal competition. But at RA they have a “list of honors” where the names of the best students are published in the school paper. In the school year 02/03 this was done in Middle School, but was dropped the next year. A list like this is nice for those who get good grades, but can be an extra burden for those with lower scores.

### **Use of grades balanced by other means**

Several of the Norwegian students get very good grades, and none is doing badly. This is probably one reason why they do not react negatively to the pressure of getting good grades. One parent says that the system with “honor list” is done in a better way than similar practices in Norway. There is great breadth in the types of qualities in students that are “honored”. The list over the winners and their distinctions is therefore both long and varied. One parent says about the written reports from the teachers that they are very creative. They always find something positive to comment on. One teacher says he never criticizes the students for giving wrong answers. He tells them that to be wrong, even to fail sometimes, is part of the learning process. He says that his own mistakes constitute a major motivation for learning more. “There is absolutely nothing wrong in failing,” he says; “what is wrong is not doing one’s best, or not caring.” In addition another teacher says that he is pointing out to the students that the main thing in life is not academic skills. Academic skills are important, but not *that* important. This view sums up my main impression of the system of assessment at NCS/RA:

- The breadth of skills that are honored balances competition for good grades in the different subjects
- Exhaustive comments balance the bare grades
- Care for the individual student balances the grade competition
- Focus on diligence and social competence balances the focus on academic skills
- Counseling and encouragement balance the pressure on good grades
- The diverging practices and points of view of individual teachers balance the general policy and main practice of the school

According to the curriculum for the 10-year compulsory school in Norway, assessment should be two-fold: assessment with and without marks<sup>5</sup>. “Using the aims in the curriculum as a

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<sup>5</sup> In this report I have used the term “grades” in stead of “marks”.

frame of reference, assessment [without marks] should emphasize individual aptitudes, learning processes and results.” Assessment with marks should have “the aims, objectives and contents of the subject syllabus as their starting point. The marks must be seen in relation to individual assessment without marks, in order to ensure comprehensive assessment of the individual pupil” (L-97 p. 87). We have seen that more sides of the students’ performance are assessed with grades compared to the Norwegian curriculum. Examples are activity in class, homework, and being on time. Even so the system of assessment at NCS/RA seems to meet the Norwegian standards of comprehensive assessment with a safe margin.

### **Learning profits**

Ole Petter Hansen (pp.168-169) says that the learning and the development of the student should be the central point of school assessment; and that if we strengthen the student’s consciousness about his own learning, personal goals and learning profits, this will be the best foundation for developing qualities of learning. One positive consequence of working with this assessment has been just this, helping the students to focus on their own learning and thus heighten their consciousness in this area. I therefore asked them whether they had had any personal goals for the school year; such as what they would like to learn/do/ accomplish; and if so, had they come close to/reached some of these goals. The goals stated were of the character “to do my best”, “get good grades” and “learn English and get friends”. So I did not find that they had very concise goals. Still, those who had some kind of goal also expressed that they had come closer to it.

One important concern about this partnership program was of course whether the learning profits would turn out to be satisfactory. This is important for the students’ thriving throughout the school year and also as a foundation for later education and work. When I asked the students to look back at the school year so far and tell what they had learnt, their answers pointed mostly to English, Science and Social Studies. It seemed that my question set their focus on the RA part of the schooling. But this need not be taken to mean that they do not value the NCS part. When I asked the ninth grader about how she experienced Norwegian, seeing that she had not had that subject the year before, she answered; “Last year I felt that I missed out on much, and I was uneasy. I am glad that I could have Norwegian this year.” The students all express that they find the level of the subjects taught higher at RA than in

Norway, but are open to the suggestion that this might be because all is done in English. One student says that the tests often are easier because they are of the “multiple choice” kind.

The parents also focus mainly on the different subjects when asked about learning profits. “He has improved marvelously in English”, one says. Another comments; “She has learnt a lot, much that I didn’t know myself”. Several point out that the academic level in the different subjects is high; one says it can be compared to High School level in Norway. The parents are mostly happy with this, especially since the teachers seem to be able to follow the students so closely up that they are able to manage. One parent says he thinks that NCS/RA has more teacher resources and ability to follow up the students than most Norwegian schools. They spend more time on each theme than they do in Norway, and work more thoroughly. This he finds positive. Some parents have second thoughts, though, and express doubts as to how much they will remember of what they have worked with. “They climb quickly up, then they jump over onto something else, and there is not always much connection between the themes.”

The parents also see other profits; “She has matured enormously”, “They have matured in relation to each other and not only academically”. Both these comments show a broader orientation. One mother says that her son has learnt to work, he has learnt to write alongside the whole time he works on a project. She hopes he will be able to keep this up when he goes back to Norway. When asked about this a year after his return, he says he has managed to do so. One father says his daughter has learnt to be straightforward in front of the class. One parent couple mentions good working habits, structure and discipline as learning profits. They also say that their son has found that it does not pay to be absent from school. He does not want to miss all the positive things during the school day; and is also afraid of not being able to make up the schoolwork he has missed out on. They say that he has learnt to take responsibility for the assignments he gets.

One parent says that his son spends much energy in trying to adjust to the school system. He thinks that the boy learns more from the language/cultural bit than from what strictly concerns the subjects. He also says that he is concerned about how his son will meet the challenges of returning to Junior High in Norway with yet another system to get used to. The experiences show that this adjustment will take some time, especially since the processes of learning are organized differently and the teacher’s role is somewhat different.

Both students and parents alike find the profits of learning to be such that they do not fear the integration in Norwegian schools on return. One parent sums up his view like this; “I have no fear that these students will be behind their Norwegian peers. Norwegian and Mathematics follow the Norwegian curriculum. Even if they have learnt other things than the Norwegians have, they will manage. Probably there will be a lot of repetition when they get back. Then there may be other things they need to catch up on.” These were the expressed views during the year 02/03.

I made one interview each with the students and one of their parents after they had returned to Norway. Most of these were conducted when they had been home for approximately one year. None of the students have found serious gaps of learning in any of the subjects. The parents say the same. One student says the others have worked with different themes than he has, but this has not given him problems. Three of the students mention that their Norwegian peers have better foundational knowledge of Norwegian grammar. This is a signal about the teaching in Norwegian at NCS/RA, and it should be followed up.

The largest gap in the teaching may be in connection with optional subjects. In accordance with L-97 these can be; German, French, Finnish, supplementary Norwegian, supplementary study of Norwegian sign language, supplementary English, or practical project work, all depending on the teacher resources at the different schools. For a student who wants to take an optional subject in ninth grade that presupposes knowledge from the eighth grade this can give some problems. All the NCS/RA students, except one, chose other optional subjects than a second foreign language, and none of the students (or their parents) regards it as a problem that they lack a satisfactory foundation for taking this second language. In the Norwegian Parliamentary Report “Culture for learning”, however, it says that the government will make a second foreign language obligatory in Junior High and that the grades in this subject will be taken into account in the application for further education. When this regulation is put into practice, the NCS/RA program will have to take this into consideration. In this connection it is of interest to note that in the year of 03/04 Swahili was an obligatory subject in Middle School at RA. There is also an ongoing work to be able to offer Spanish at lower levels at RA.

On the positive side can be mentioned that all students find that they are ahead of their peers in English. A father comments on this as being an important profit. Two students say their

English teacher insists that they use British pronunciation. This way of pronouncing differs quite a bit from what they got used to at RA. One of the students found it very discouraging. Both cases were taken to the main teacher and solutions seem to have been found. But it is unfortunate that such things happen; and correspondingly important that the parents bring them to the notice of the school's administration so that it can be speedily solved.

It might have been thought a good idea that the Norwegian teacher at NCS/RA used some of the extra time off of the English/Mathematics lessons to fill up gaps in one or more of the subjects. When one regards the Norwegian curriculum in the different subjects and the experience of the returned students, one finds that the gaps are so small that adjustments in the schedule in these areas do not seem necessary. It might be valuable, however, to look into the possibility of using some of the extra time for Norwegian, for instance Norwegian grammar. Still I would think that the biggest challenge for future plans is to fit in a second foreign language. The way this extra time has been used so far has been proven valuable for the Norwegian students, and that must also be taken into consideration when assessed. The lead these students worked up during the year 02/03 in subjects like English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies gave them room to fill in the gaps they found that they had when returning to Norwegian schools; the one exception being a second foreign language.

## **Social environment**

### **A larger arena**

In Norway some central aims in educational policy are focused on social integration and fellowship (Beane p. 31). Professor Guttorm Fløistad writes in his book "To be able to more than you manage" (my translation): "As human beings we live and breathe in net-works made up of human beings" (p.17). A main point in moving the Junior High students at NCS from the compound in Nairobi to RA was to enable these students to experience a wider social environment. It was thought that the older the students get, the larger the social arena they require for living, breathing and developing. The cooperation between NCS and RA has given the students this space, and there is no doubt as to the importance of it. The students have very positive experiences, and parents refer to children who clearly express that without the opportunity to attend RA they would not have wanted to go to Junior High at NCS in Nairobi. The social environment at the Norwegian compound would have been too small for them if they should have both lived and attended school there. It is of course important to meet many

peers during class, but the possibility to participate in sports and other activities like Youth Rally<sup>6</sup> has also played an important part. Participating in team sports (which for the Norwegians has been mostly soccer) has been especially important as to taking up informal social contact and being included in the student fellowship.

The relationship with fellow students (friendship, fellowship) in general is important for students in Junior High (Arnesen p. 86). The students whom I interviewed confirm this. The majority of them are of the opinion that the most important aspect of their school situation is social well functioning. All feel welcome at RA and all say they have other friends beside the Norwegians. The parents also describe the atmosphere at RA as being hospitable, positive and good. “Especially in the beginning our son was frequently asked how he was doing.” Even so one of them expresses the opinion that the friendly welcome not so easily expanded into deeper fellowship.

Several of the RA teachers find that even though there are individual differences, the including of the Norwegians as a group has progressed slowly. The fact that they leave the ordinary teaching for three classes pr day is mentioned as an important reason for this. In addition to this the Norwegian group is so big that they can stick to each other, which they also do to a large extent. This goes for the eighth graders. In the ninth grade there is only one Norwegian student. Still the teachers express the opinion that all the students have developed socially in a positive way. Several parents have the same impression. The parents of two students say their children have flourished at NCS/RA. For one of the students concerned it is being pointed out that this is a continuation of a positive development that had started before she came to RA.

The program and partnership has been evaluated throughout the school year. One has especially looked at the integration of the Norwegian students and has tried to find ways to help their integration into the student body. An example of such a possible way was to move the “Norwegian” classroom from the High School area to the area of Middle School. Another example is to encourage the Norwegians to participate in different activities after school. In the report of October 8<sup>th</sup> 2003, it tells about some of the students of 02/03 who had been

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<sup>6</sup> Christian reach-out assemblies for youth at Rosslyn on Friday nights once a month.



informing next year's students about the school. They had given the new students the advice that they try to integrate with the other students from the very beginning.

Students, parents and teachers all express clearly that social integration and fellowship is very important. When talking to the students and their parents after the return to Norway, I found that the integration had increased throughout the second semester. One student says; "The real friends came toward the end of the second semester." This development proceeds at different speed for the different students. The parents of one student 02/03 noted with surprise and were also pleased that their son returned early to Nairobi after a study week. He wanted to participate at sports day and to attend a birthday party at RA. The majority of the 02/03 students report in 2004 that they keep in contact by telephone and/or e-mail with friends they made during their school year in Kenya. It is my impression that the students and their parents are fairly satisfied with the way the social integration was functioning. Neither students nor parents as a group seem to have been ready for a faster integration. Judging by the expressed opinions of the teachers in February 2003, their aims in this area were not realized.

### **Return to Norway**

The social integration on returning to Norway is also very important. As expected the students had varied experiences in this field, but the main impression is positive. They have made friends, and in many instances have reopened friendships from before they left for Africa. All parties had changed during the bygone years, but in some cases this only strengthened the renewed contact. Several of those returning felt that teachers and fellow students were actively interested in their African experiences, and this of course made them feel welcome.

Some have had more problems coming home. "The difference was large between international open-mindedness and Norwegian narrowness", one parent says. Another parent comments that the ways of relating to each other can be tougher in Norway, which shows for instance in the use of language. One of the students relates experiences of a teacher cursing in class, something that definitely did not happen at NCS/RA. No wonder that some find this disturbing. When asked what she remembers as especially positive at NCS/RA, one student says; "Chapel, devotions every day, that we prayed before the soccer games". Remarks like this give actuality to the question of whether the students are being protected too much against the universal culture while at NCS/RA. This again might make it difficult for them to be comfortable among people in general.

The teachers at NCS often discussed this question. On the one hand there is the wish to create a good and constructive environment in accordance with the goals of the school and of the mission, an environment where the students can feel safe and included. On the other hand it is important that they get to know other ways of living and believing. The task is to find a reasonable balance. From the responses I have collected one can deduct that NCS/RA has provided the students with a tolerably good basis for meeting everyday life back in Norway. One parent says retrospectively that his son developed his social skills and his abilities to adjust himself. Another parent denies having a “ghetto” feeling about NCS/RA. Still, the students did have difficulties. But most of the parents confirm that things work out better the second year, also the social integration.

### **Teacher/student relationship**

In an article “The ambiguousness of the school from a student’s perspective” (my translation) Anne-Lise Arnesen tries to sum up what Norwegian students express about the student role, good lessons, teachers, and different aspects about the life of the students at school (p. 86). Among the things she mentions as very important is the relationship with the teacher (mutual respect) and the involvement by the teacher with the student (give support and encouragement; do not give up on students who have difficulties understanding). I asked students and parents some questions to enquire into this area.

### **Respect**

Students and parents alike agree that the relationships between teacher and student are marked by mutual respect. Some of the parents mention that in their opinion the teachers are shown more respect than in Norway, and the disciplinarian problems are few. “Some teachers are rather strict, and when you do not know the language very well, this gives you more respect for the teacher”, one parent says. The discipline goes for all the students, not the Norwegians only. One parent observes that the American students can act rather differently in the classroom and outside. They are more relaxed when out of class. The teachers are addressed as “Miss”, “Mrs.” and “Mr.” They demand respect and get it. But at the same time they are being referred to as nice and helpful. “It has not turned into something that is scary or inhuman”, is the comment from one parent. Another says that closeness and distance is well

balanced, and finds that there is no contradiction between closeness and respect. Another comment says that the teachers are very including in their attitude. All agree that the teachers show interest in their students, also the individual student.

From the interviews I did with the teachers it can be seen quite clearly that they are mindful about conducting themselves so that the students are respectful. “In the classroom the students are to address me as “Mr.”, I would have it no other way,” one teacher says. Another says she thinks that most of the students like their teachers, and she continues; “To like them is OK, but it is more important to respect them”. Another statement says that the students need to know that they cannot just drop in with a teacher for an informal visit. The teacher is closer to being an authority than a companion in the work of learning. So the teachers value respect very highly, but they say this has to be balanced by closeness and care for the individual student.

One parent says that his son still, after one year in Norway, keeps in contact (by e-mail) with one of his teachers at RA. This the father sees as an illustration of the fact that the teachers care about their students, not only as students but also as human beings.

### **Good teachers**

The students say that their teachers are good. All say that they have academically well competent teachers in all their subjects. When asked whether the teachers manage to get the students to take an interest in their subjects, 2 students say this is so in all subjects, 4 say it is the case in many of the subjects (Student Inspectors). In the conversations I had with the students they confirmed this impression. One says that the teachers like the subjects themselves. A parent supports this view and says that the teachers have a positive attitude to their tasks and take their work seriously. The students find that the teachers treat them with respect, for instance by showing interest and helping the students with their work when needed. One student comments that the teachers are friendly and understand their problems with the English language. But they also find that the teachers make stricter demands on their behavior than what they have been used to in Norwegian schools. The majority of the students say that most of the teachers signal clear boundaries.

The teachers feel themselves that they work hard on helping the students, academically and spiritually. In general they try to encourage the students as soon as they register improvement. They also often talk among themselves of how they best can correct the students.

### **Care taking**

A song and congratulations in class mark birthdays. If somebody is ill, he or she is surrounded by care expressed through prayer, greetings, welcome back and questions as to how he or she is doing. The students are included in a culture of care taking that involves everybody. When one of the teachers had to go home to the US because her father was seriously ill, she received many cards from the students. On their own initiative they had written to her, expressing sympathy and wishing her welcome back. "That spoke volumes to me", this teacher said afterwards.

To have teaching experience in North America is a prerequisite for employment as a teacher at RA. So it is reasonable for the teachers at RA to compare their experiences here with those from the US. One teacher thinks that boundaries between students and teachers are stricter in the US. Another is of the opinion that teachers at RA to a greater extent see themselves as models for the students. I imagine that both these statements are regarded as positive by the Norwegians.

### **Ability to understand**

In an inquiry done at the schools in Oslo, students answered that one of the most important things to assess in schools is how well the students are able to understand what the teachers are saying (Søgnen og Bjelke p. 110). The cooperation NCS/RA has a special challenge in this area since the language of teaching is English. In the beginning it goes without saying that the students had problems. The Norwegian teacher was very supportive. In the first place she helped the students in their understanding of how RA was organized. She also contacted some of the teachers and explained to them what types of language difficulties the Norwegian students had. In this way the teachers were reminded to speak slowly and clearly. When interviewed in February, the students remembered the beginner's problems they had had, but said that they now understand most of what was said to them, and that the teachers are good at explaining things. The parents are not so sure about this, and say that the students should be more active in asking when they are in doubt. Teachers have expressed that they appreciate it when the students ask. One student says that the teachers do not mind if they give the wrong

answers, and that they keep to it until the students understand the current problem. This indicates that the teachers have succeeded in making the students feel so at ease in the classroom that they dare to make mistakes. This was one of the expressed aims of one teacher.

### **Balance between respect and closeness**

As mentioned before, professor Befring mentions individual security and structured teaching as being central criteria for quality in a school setting (Befring 2002). Based on different types of information, included observations in class and on campus, my impression is that the students experience a large degree of security at RA. The teachers are consciously seeking to find a balance between respect and closeness. The point of balance seems to be another than what the students and parents are accustomed to from Norway. But they seem to be content with the way things are done at NCS/RA. It seems to me that they there are able to keep up a positive respect between students and also between the students and the teachers, while the students also are cared for. The students get help in building self-esteem.

### **Well-being**

From all the sources I have information on how the students thrive at NCS/RA, the answer is synonymous; they all fare well, in the classroom and at school in general. One student answers that he thrives “to some extent” at school, while the others say they thrive “to a great extent”. All thrive “to a great extent” in class. Several expressed that they were anxious in the beginning of the school year, but in February they only felt anxious ahead of a test or a presentation. None were afraid to go to school on account of being harassed. All the students of 02/03 say they have never been harassed, neither by personnel nor fellow students. If they should experience harassment, they would have more opportunities to talk to someone about it, compared with their Norwegian peers (Student Inspectors). The comparison is based on the average for Norway, presented on Internet (<http://www.ls.no>). In the year of 03/04 one student answers that he “seldom” has been harassed, while the others say “not at all”.

This feeling of well-being and security signaled in these answers will be of extra importance for the parents who live at a considerable distance from Nairobi and thus are not able to help their children on a daily basis. I do not have enough material that I can pronounce RA to be a school free from harassment, but it seems relatively clear that there is not much of it going on.

It is tempting to speculate on what could be possible reasons for this. It might be related to the type of student that is recruited to RA. To a great extent the students are children of people who are in Africa to help needy human beings. It is reasonable to reckon that these children will have greater tolerance for other cultures than their own. Nairobi is also a city where many different cultures live side by side, and people meet representatives from other cultures, religions and ethnical groups all the time. A third aspect may be the fact that the students experience that the teachers treat them with respect. Finally I will also mention the relatively strict regime at RA. The students are followed up pretty closely; breaks are short and are mostly spent going from one classroom to the next. The dress code and other rules pertaining to behavior at the school are clear, and the administration takes action to intervene if the rules are broken. The homes receive information about these things at the beginning of the school year. The Norwegians mostly regard these regulations as very strict. When they discover that the rules work out OK in the daily school life, they relax more, with the result that things more or less function without pressure. One important reason for this is that the teachers practice the regulations in a more pliable way than are set on paper. Even so some rules are practiced strictly, like having to give in the mobile phone if used to receive messages in class. One of the students told his father that if similar rules to those at RA had been in Norway, there would not have been any harassment at school.

## **Democracy**

In their book “Lærerens profesjonskunnskap” (Professional Teaching; my translation) Sundli and Ohnstad state that the ideal task for the school is coaching in democracy. Since at RA the teacher has a rather authoritative role in relation to the students, I found it to be of interest to look at the NCS/RA program with such coaching in mind.

Democracy is defined in a general way as a government for and by the people. Everywhere people want to be free to decide their own destiny, express their opinions and take part in the decisions that form their lives. This is said in the Norwegian summary UN’s Human Development Report 2002. And the report continues (in my translation); “For countries as a whole, democracy deals with much more than one single decision or a hastily arranged election. Political development at a deeper level is required to anchor democratic values and democratic culture in all parts of society; a process that formally never will be finished” (pp.

6-7) Thus coaching in democracy can be said to have mainly two levels; for one to build attitudes and values that give a foundation for a government “for and by the people”, and for the other training in accomplishing democratic processes where expressing oneself, participating in making decisions and electing representatives are central elements.

### **Foundation for democracy**

The first of these two levels, to lay a foundation for democracy, is concerned with a basic view of man and his worth. The Russian language philosopher Bakhtin says that human life is in its nature made up of dialog, and that man can only see himself in relation to the other. Thus he claims that dialog is the basic existential condition for man (Dysthe pp. 110-111). An important consequence of this is that when man is mirrored in the other, this implies deep and extensive respect for the other; which also involves regard for the opinions and actions of the other. This goes both ways and leads “spontaneously” to the other being heard when decisions are made; one central factor in the way of governing that is called democratic. I put “spontaneously” in quotation marks because we know from experience that others are not automatically heard. “We realize that all people, also clergy, can be tempted to misuse authority and to be economically or sexually unfaithful” professor Haanes writes in *Luthersk Kirketidende* (Lutheran Church Journal, no.12 2004). He states that it is important to organize practices in such a way that one is not tempted to misuse one’s position. He concludes that a realistic view of man leads us back to democracy.

On this background I tried to find out in what way or to what extent the students at NCS/RA are met so that they build up a secure and realistic picture of themselves. It is mentioned elsewhere in this report that the teachers focus on building the self-confidence of the students and that they encourage them by signaling expectations and also by praising good achievements. The students express clearly that they thrive and feel secure at school. Methods of work are important. Among other things James A Beane writes that thematic structuring of contents seen in a holistic perspective is part of the democratic education (p. 45). We find both thematic and project teaching at NCS/RA even though they in no way dominate the methods of work. The students also find that the teachers value cooperation with others just as high as working individually. In my opinion NCS/RA also have a high score on tolerance in connection with ethnic groups, gender, socioeconomic differences and religion (see paragraph on “Building attitudes”). I asked on several occasions whether the teachers respect and value the opinion of others, and the answers are consistently positive. All of this I regard as positive

for coaching in democracy. My impression is different in the area of participating in making decisions that have to do with small and big concerns in life at the school.

### **Decision-making**

The students were asked whether they had been involved in making decisions during their time as students at NCS/RA. Their answers leave a rather strong impression that that this does not happen very often. One student says she can choose what she wants to do in “Club” (see explanation in table 1), another that one can vote when the student council is elected. In some situations the teacher may invite the students to give their opinions about activities or ways of working, but the overall impression is that the teachers decide. Later in the interview when I ask them what their opinion was about the change of system of assessment, it is obvious that in this instance they were asked to give their opinion (see more about this under the heading “Student assessment”). Here we are confronted with a case of lack of consistency in the information given by the students. There may be several explanations for this. They might have forgotten it when I asked more generally about participation in decision-making. They may have associated this change exclusively with NCS, and thought that my question pertained mainly to RA. It is probably a combination of these two explanations combined with other possible ones. This observation is anyway a reminder of the fact that in cases like this, where information is mainly based on the experience and memory of those involved, the main lines must be given more emphasize than the details.

The main impression from the interviews with the students about minor participation in decision-making is confirmed and strengthened by the parents. They believe that the students are being consulted in the lessons with the Norwegian teacher, but other than that things seem to be “tailor-made” as one parent put it. “I think they do what they are being told to do”, one parent says. The students seem to be content with this. I asked them in what areas they would have liked to be able to have influence on decisions. One student says he would have liked to participate in deciding what methods of work to use; other than that all answers point in the same direction; things are OK as they are. One of the students says she does not bother to use energy on decision-making. This can be interpreted in several ways. One interpretation could be that it might be considered almost impertinent to want to be in on making decisions when the school does not issue invitations in this area. To me, though, the most likely interpretation is that the students are satisfied with the decisions that are made, so why should they bother? This touches on the question of whether participation in decision-making is primarily an offer



and not a duty. Life is full of so many other good things than participating in making decisions (Johnston,R.J. et.al. p. 159). Maybe it can be said to be a democratic “privilege” to leave decisions to others. On the other hand, motivating students not to use that “privilege” can be maintained to be an important task for the school.

As to the more formal part that has to do with different democratic organs like student councils, the answers from Student Inspectors show that the majority of the students do not know if there is a student council at their level, and thus they do not know much about whether the student council is doing a good job at the school. The interviews moderate this impression somewhat. One student says that the student council has some authority, but does not specify this. Another student says that there is a student council, “but the students at the outside do not know a thing about what goes on there”. Student councils do exist, one for Middle School and one for High School. These councils mostly work with arrangements like Christmas Prom and some trips, but they are not seen to influence academic matters.

The teachers at NCS/RA agree that a task of the school is to coach the students to participate actively in democratic procedures. Different reasons are given as to why this does not show through students participating in decision-making in everyday school life. One view was that the coaching must consider the age of the students, and must take place gradually.

Consequently it seems like seven and eighth graders are not mature enough to decide much for them selves. Another view was that the curriculum is given and must be followed through, so there is not much room for deciding things along the way. One teacher says that they try to teach the students *about* democracy, for instance by encouraging them to read newspapers and keep updated. One teacher agrees that the students are not invited to take part in decision-making; and maintains that this to a great extent also goes for the teachers. Decisions at RA are made by the administration and this way of thinking probably spreads along the hierarchy down to the students, is the opinion he voices.

In this assessment of coaching in democracy, it can be useful to compare with what the students have experienced in this field in Norway. The experiences turn out to be rather varied, which mirrors a varied practice at Norwegian schools. I believe one of the parents puts it correctly when he says; “Norwegian schools at their best, when these things are carried through, will score higher than RA, but in average they are probably on the same level.”

After having attended schools in Norway for a year on their return, the students pretty much agree that students here are consulted to a higher degree in decision-making than what they experienced at NCS/RA. The student council and “Class and pupils council activities” are forums they are familiar with. These student organs are in on making decisions about school regulations, fieldtrips, the selling of food at lunchtime, activities like tournaments and building a bicycle track. One student also mentions that in Norway the teachers ask the students “shall we do it like this or like that?” while at NCS/RA “everything was already decided”. The same student sums up; “Here the students are taught to be independent, they do not need others to make decisions for them.” From this can be deduced that student democracy on the average is better functioning in ninth grade in Norway than in eighth grade at NCS/RA, and the explanation can probably not be found in the age difference of one year.

### **The flow of information**

A good flow of information is necessary if one is to influence decision-making. The parents are on the whole satisfied with the information they receive about the school program and about their children’s progress. One of the parents mentions as an example that they at one point were informed about a controversial theme that the class was starting on. This was in Science and consisted of theories about how the universe came to be. The class was going to study this from an evolutionary point of view and from a creational point of view. The parent concerned found this information very positive. It gave them an opportunity to contact the school for more information and also to talk it over with their children. He had never experienced something like that in Norway. It cannot be stated that this information was a direct invitation to participate in decision-making, but it would most probably have been possible to engage in the subject if someone wanted to do that. Still several of the parents find that they would like to have been more part of the information procedures. They especially miss a system of regular talks between parents, teachers, and students, like they are used to from Norway. “We regret that we didn’t get to meet the teachers and be in personal contact with them”. One parent couple say that even though they live far from Nairobi, they still are in town often enough for meetings like that to be possible twice a year or so. The parents’ experience of the communication with the teachers can probably be characterized as functioning better one-ways than two-ways, at least as far as direct contact goes. Between these parties the Norwegian teacher is positioned. Her contact with the parents is strongly marked by being two-ways. This, however, has not made a direct two-ways communication between teachers and parents superfluous.

### **More on democracy**

When it comes to democracy being practiced, Busch and Vanebo (1991 p.176) point to the importance of what type of decisions the participants are allowed to engage in, which steps in the process they are allowed into, and what information they receive as basis for active participation. As a whole my impression of RA is favorable when it comes to giving students self-confidence and positive attitudes; this seen in the context of the students as future active participants in democratic procedures. But when it comes to democratic processes in their own decision-making, things could have been better. Students and parents alike are kept on the outside of most of the decisions that are made at school; students are sometimes given opportunities to express their opinion on working methods, parents are invited to contribute to the teaching, the student council arranges social get-togethers. Teachers are only to a certain extent in on the important decisions. The building-up of a formal structure with student council, class council and systematic talks between parents/students and teachers, is further advanced in Norway than at NCS/RA. This shows in a more active practice in Norway.

## **5. BENEFITS FOR PARENTS, TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATION**

It is obviously of interest also to study what use other participants than the students have of this partnership.

### **Parents**

The gain of the parents is first of all the experience that this program is functioning well for their children. "I am happy with a program of solid academic quality that gives me a good feeling", one of them says. It is also mentioned that even though it is hard to have the children staying so far from home, this gives them time to focus on other things, which in practical terms mean their work.

One parent says that with this cooperation between NCS and RA, one has shown that it is possible to find solutions with a larger perspective than just within the Norwegian context. The parents were given orientation about the ongoing work with this cooperation, and they were important as coworkers in finding solutions. This forced the parents to take a stand on several questions in connection with their children's schooling, and this has undoubtedly increased their consciousness in this area. This was mentioned as very useful. If they had stayed in Norway, the children would mostly have followed the main stream through Junior High. Several parents said they experience the discipline to be stricter at RA than the average in Norway. One mother comments that it is good to see "...that it is possible to discipline the youngsters. When the bell rings they run to be in class on time, - and this they are". Several parents also mention that it has been of interest to get acquainted with the American school system and its culture. One father says for instance that he is impressed by the amount of buildings and structures at the campus. One parent couple says it is positive for them as a family when their children meet friends all over the city. One father says he has learnt something about the solutions that can be found in Nairobi. Another also thinks along these lines and says; "The cooperation with RA fits well into future ecumenical joint ventures in East Africa. The schools have taken a lead to show that it is possible." One important foundation for this is that through the children contacts can be established with other missionaries and leaders of varied Christian activities.

One parent summed up his experience by saying; “This has expanded my horizon”. Half a year after the return to Norway he adds; “We are thankful for what we have, but we see that our own ways not necessarily are the best in the world.”

Not all focus was on RA, however; one parent also commented positively on the role of NCS in the process of planning and execution of this cooperation. She said it was “satisfactory that our school (NCS) *wants to do* something.” It can result in far-reaching and large effects that some parents experience that NCS is working actively and untraditionally to find the best possible school program for their children.

### **The teachers**

There is one type of benefit that the teachers find of special importance; that is to meet different pedagogical traditions and cultures. Naturally several of the teachers tied this in with the Norwegian teacher in the cooperation. They praised her without reservations, for her way of doing her work and for the breadth and variation she is contributing to the faculty. One says; “As opposed to the students, the teachers mostly have similar cultural backgrounds. Kirsten adds new knowledge and cultural breadth to the faculty. She knows her own country and Kenya, but in addition she has a broad experience from Africa and also from Japan”. It is obvious that because of Kirsten’s presence the other teachers at Middle School have a special focus on Norway and the Norwegian students. Several express a wish to learn more about the Norwegian society and culture, though mainly as an example of a contrast to the North American way. The interest in Norway often ties into their wish to improve their teaching and communicating to students from other cultures in general, those who do not have English as their mother tongue. “This cooperation has been of help to us in focusing on the students and their background and on how to reach them better as teachers”, one says. This is an illustrative example of learning by experience (Moxnes p. 53). This can be seen quite clearly in the fact that several teachers say that they have become more observant of how they communicate with their students. The point of interest is not only *what* they ask but also *how* they ask it. One says she has found that she has to check several times not only that the students have understood what she has said, but also have understood their task. And if the students do not understand, she has to start over again. Another teacher says he is figuring out different ways to give the Norwegian students some moments for thought after he has asked the class a question. He wants to give them time to reflect on the question, perhaps translate it to Norwegian, before he asks for an answer. His point is to try to restrain the other students in

such a way that the Norwegians do not seem to be slow. In his opinion he is now learning something that he considers to be a generally good way of teaching.

As a whole the teachers express themselves positively about the cooperation with NCS, this also goes for those who have not had regular contact with the Norwegian students. They were asked to give their opinions on how to develop this program, and several suggestions were made. One says that the Norwegian students can be included in more regular RA-subjects, for instance in Mathematics. Another says the cooperation could be enlarged to include all the grades, that is: first through twelfth grade. A third thinks it would be good if the students were attending the program more than one year.

In this partnership the Norwegian teacher has been the one keeping the program running on a day to day basis. The contact between the administrations of the two schools is not very frequent, but takes place often enough to suit the purpose. There has been very little contact between the faculties of the two schools, though. The Norwegian teachers who do not have their own children at RA have little knowledge of what it is all about. They were invited to attend a sports day at RA; this is a good thing but can hardly be called cooperation as such. One teacher at NCS says that the teachers at RA are not particularly interested in how NCS functions as a school; how such an interest should be expressed, however, is not so easy to say. The Norwegian teachers on their hand have not spent much energy either in getting to know the set-up at RA. They take turns in helping the NCS/RA students with their homework, so here they get a bit acquainted with the program. The teachers in Middle School do not have students on the same age levels as the students at NCS, so a possible working together between the two faculties does not come natural. One could arrange some joint faculty meetings where one could discuss pedagogic views and methods, influence each other and inspire each other. The teachers all have full days as it is, though, and when no clear benefit is apparent, such a venture does not get priority. An extensive cooperation is thus not reasonable to expect, but both parts would probably find it rewarding to have occasional meetings.

### **Administrators**

The administrators who have been involved in this partnership have increased their knowledge about each other's school systems. In addition to this they have enlarged their personal network. As administrators it is also positive to be able to offer a specially adjusted program to a student group, a program that has been very well received by the students and

their parents. This partnership can also inspire the schools separately to dive into possible development potential at their school. RA has discussed the establishing of a similar project with the Korean community, but because the Korean teacher left, nothing has come of it. Instead RA tries to set up a partnership with the Japanese school in Nairobi.

The school culture as a whole benefits from active developmental work. Competence of change and development is one of the basic fields of expected competence for a Norwegian teacher of our times (KUF 1999 b p. 23); and it is important to carry the changes through in such a way that they turn out to be of a positive nature for the students. When this happens, it inspires people to continue the developmental work, which again is decisive for getting better schools.

Lastly it may be mentioned that the reputation of the school is also heightened by this kind of experimental and developmental work. When one parent says that she finds this project very positive, and explains it by saying that it gives her a feeling of security that the school *wants* something, it is reasonable to see this as an expression of a general confidence in NCS and her administration. Everything that builds up the parents' confidence in the school is of value. In a larger perspective it is also of interest to note that RA has received compliments for their part of this venture through the "Exemplary School Reward". This is inspiring in itself. In addition it might contribute to increased economic support and to the recruitment of students and teachers.

## 6. THE BOARDING

The school year 02/03 one of the students lived at home while the rest lived at the NCS boarding. All of them lived in the Norwegian compound. This report focuses mainly on the school but it is obvious that life at school and at the boarding influence each other to a large extent. Therefore I include a few comments on this perspective.

It is noticeable that the students of 02/03 generally speaking thrive better at school than at the boarding. There are offered a couple of explanations for this. For one thing it seems more difficult to accept the rules at the boarding. This is interesting since the rules at the boarding are set up according to democratic principles, something that does not seem to be the case at the school. When it comes to following up the rules, this seems to be done more consequently by the teachers compared to the staff at the boarding. Another important reason may be that while school is school, the boarding is more easily compared with home in the students' minds. Therefore it is easier to accept strict rules at school, while more flexibility is expected at the boarding.

Some of the students would like more organized activities at the boarding. In some instances when this has been tried, it has proved difficult to agree on the activity. Naturally that has held down the motivation to organize, but still it seems like several of the students would like to relax from school work through organized activities to a larger extent than what is realized.

The fact that there are just a few living in the boarding has the advantage that more students may have a single room. On the other hand, the social environment becomes vulnerable. During the first semester there had been some problems that had not been handled in an optimal way according to some parents. But the relations between the parents and the administration of the boarding are reported to be good: "When problems occur, we may discuss them openly", one parent said. In February, at the time of my interview, it seemed to me that the parents generally were content with the situation at the boarding.

For the staff the situation is also not easy. They have received a responsibility for youngsters that are moving into the age of puberty and meet a foreign school system. In a lot of situations they need to be there in stead of the parents. They will not be able to compensate for the parents, and it is also important to note that they are not supposed to. The boarding situation



needs to be organized in such a manner, that the parents still are the parents, and this is extremely difficult.

For the school year 03/04 the situation seemed to be better. One parent couple said that they were a bit skeptical concerning the boarding in the beginning because they had heard about some problems the previous year. But they continued to say that that to them the boarding had been a positive experience.

It is a challenge continuously to build on the positive experiences at the boarding, and even though I have not given the boarding a lot of room in this report, it is important that developing this side of the total program that the students are offered, must be given due priority.

## 7. SOME SUMMARIZING EVALUATIONS

The main perspective in this report has been on the participants. Mainly on the basis of information from the students, the parents and teachers, a reasonably clear picture of the partnership between RA and NCS emerges. As expected, there are nuances. This may be illustrated by the difference in which students and parents evaluate the amount of homework. The parents seem to think that the students have more homework than the students themselves think. When it comes to tests, the students think that more emphasis is put on this than the teachers. The teachers also seem to think that the methods of work are more varied than the students and the parents report.

The main impression that the partnership is a success is quite strong. The students are having a good time socially and receive substantial added value academically. Furthermore, the students are coping well academically and socially upon returning to Norway. These are the main goals for the program and partnership. In this chapter, I will summarize some main points from the report and try to see them in a wider perspective.

### **Values and interests**

The Norwegian sociologist Hoëm use the terms “value” and “interest” in order to structure the cultural field within which a child is raised (Haug 1993 p.41). Haug views this in the context of home – preschool – relations, but it may just as well be put in the context of the home – school relationship. “Value” is about the fundamental concepts and ideologies, and “interest” is about the specific, material contents through which the school is presenting and influencing the children. Haug comments that the more congruence there is in values and interests between the home and the school, the better the chances are for the children to profit socially, both at school and at home. In such cases the conditions are equally favorable for academic profit. This is explained mainly by the likeness in what the student experiences at home and at school. The students who to a large degree meet a school with similar values and interests as the home, will to small degree meet the pressure to change their values. They will mainly be allowed to continue the personal growth and development in the same direction as before.

We have seen a large degree of congruence in values and interests between the NCS/RA and the homes, for instance:

- the positive attitude to the international setting and the rewarding challenge of mingling with people from different countries and cultures
- the Christian values that are the base of the NCS/RA and the ways in which these are realized in the daily life
- the adjustments to the special needs of the Norwegians, for instance the way language is taught, study-weeks, and the way the Norwegian teacher performs
- the strong focus on the academic side
- the close follow-up of the individual student
- discipline

There are some divergences in values between NCS/RA and the homes as well. The way grades are used and weaker structures and traditions in the field of school democracy and coordinated leadership for the eighth graders seem to be the most important. All in all, however, it is obvious that the differences are very small compared to the similarities. At this point we probably are at a very important partial explanation of the main impression concerning the students' substantial reward from the partnership.

### **Good academic performance**

The PISA report of 2002 concludes (in my translation):

“There are several factors that may influence the student's performance, and the survey has among other factors pointed out the homes as relatively important. PISA shows also that there are areas where the schools may take responsibility and some of these areas are mentioned below. These conclusions depend on a summary of international data.

- The international results show that in schools where the teachers have high expectations to their students, where the teachers have a positive attitude to their work, the students perform better.
- In schools where there are good relations between students and teachers, with discipline in the classroom and where the teachers are demanding, the students perform better.
- The survey shows that the schools and countries that spend a lot of resources for library, ICT, adding-machines and special equipment, the students score better on reading tests.”

In my report I have only to a small degree focused on the third ballpoint. I may however mention that RA has a relatively new media centre, each student in Middle School and High School has his/her own e-mail address at school and the classrooms are well equipped. The first two ballpoints have been given rather much attention. We have seen that the teachers have clear, but not exceeding expectations to the students, and they signal very much their

positive attitude to their job as a teacher. Furthermore there is a strong discipline in the school and the relationship between students and teachers is good. One of the teachers told me that working with the Norwegian students had woken his interest for Norwegian society and culture, and I did not find this strange at all: “Most foreigners should be interested in learning Norway to know,” I thought automatically, and was both a bit humiliated and impressed when he told me why he wanted to know more: “As a person I know I like to feel special. For a Norwegian coming here, they will feel a little bit isolation. And for me to be able to give them a little bit of their culture and show them I understand that, I think that will make them feel very special and feel more loved and welcomed here.” That was his motive. For the sake of his students he wanted to learn more about Norway. Such a dedication to the students is an important sign of quality in a school, and there is no doubt in my mind that the students will experience this in many “small” ways.

It is a common experience in the daily life at NCS/RA that the teachers demand a lot from their students. Both students and parents report that they think the students learn a lot during the school year. This impression is confirmed by the fact that neither of the students had any big academic problems when joining their home school in Norway. In combination, all of this supports the notion that the academic rewards for the Norwegian students at NCS/RA are just as good as could have been expected at an average Norwegian school. This assessment indicates that a possible divergence most probably would be in favour of NCS/RA. One parent couple says that they think their son activates more of his personal potential at NCS/RA than he did before, and continues: “He has quite a different day here. He has grown to a higher level academically. He has a different attitude to learning and takes more responsibility.”

### **Collective orientation**

The Danish researchers Lars Klewe and Poul Skov performed a research program focusing on quality development in Norwegian schools (Albrecht). They have found that “collective orientation” is an important factor for successful school development. Schools with collective orientation are known by for instance:

- that the teachers work together with teaching (teaching partnerships) and competence development
- that the school has a spirit of cooperation

- that the leadership and the teachers agree on the direction in which the school is to be developed

The cooperation between NCS and RA may be considered a project for school development, and it may be interesting to assess it in the perspective of collective orientation. When it comes to the first ballpoint, the impression is not especially positive for NCS/RA. A team is established consisting of the teachers of English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies in eighth grade. Some teachers teach more than one subject. On the average the team meets every day and the length of meetings varies. In these meetings the teachers discuss common issues, like how to follow up individual students and matters of discipline. But coordinating teaching and the work load that is put on the students is not often done. The school is organized subject oriented in such a way that each teacher is responsible for planning and teaching her/his subject for her/his students in her/his class. When someone suggests coordination, this is usually positively received, but no new practice is established. I find it therefore more relevant to consider the teaching team more as an expression of a spirit of cooperation than concrete partnership in teaching. For the spirit of cooperation at the school is obvious. The teachers know and support actively the aims and goals of the school and they have a strong and enthusiastic focus on the student. Judged from the outside, it seems like there are strong social links between teachers. Most of them live in houses owned by RA on the RA compound, and they are fellow North-Americans on a foreign continent. This is something that normally inspire unity. It is interesting to see how enthusiastically they work to make the partnership between NCS and RA a success. Even though the teachers indicate differences in points of view on several areas, their loyalty to the aims and goals and the values of the RA and the decisions that the administration makes, is striking.

### **Alternatives**

Generally, the parents speak positively: "We had no dream of this solution for our kids, that it could become as good as this," one says. I asked them how they considered this partnership compared with possible alternatives, and their response was unanimous: "This is the best option", one father of 02/03 answers. And he is accompanied by parents the next year: "To go back to the old arrangement [with eighth to tenth graders taught at NCS at the Norwegian compound] would to us be a great disappointment." Another couple says: "We were skeptical, but are SO content now. We are not uneasy at all. Kirsten has given us this peace of mind." It is clear that several parents relax in the conviction that the Norwegian teacher would alarm

them if their student opted out, and that counts socially just as much as academically. But some of them also point to the importance of not being fooled by the positive feedback. One father points out that it is not unimportant whether the student is doing well academically, is content at school and experience some kind of and some sort of success. The school occupies most of the day for these youngsters. They have few arenas to build their identity on; sports and school. A student, who is not interested in sports and receives low grades and still spends most of his time for school activities, does not have a lot to build his self-esteem upon. Another father says that there may be students who find the hardships at NCS/RA may be too big, and then a thorough follow up is necessary.

### **Partners that complement each other**

During this assessment, a picture of two partners that in many respects complement each other has come forth. RA has some of its strong sides on structure, discipline and focus on academics in her work. There are clear demands and relatively high expectations towards the students. The teachers care for their students as personas and this seems more supported by the school culture (Bang p. 24) than the way student care is structured. The Norwegian school tradition may seem to have its relative strength just at this point: There are mandatory systems for communication between school and home for instance through organized meetings between teacher and student and parents and teacher. The students are divided into groups and each of these groups has a general teacher who has the responsibility of seeing and monitoring the full school-situation for every student. In addition, the school democracy seems to be better developed and better functioning in the Norwegian school, for instance through class discussions and student counsel. Thus structural arrangements are made to ensure a more holistic care for the students, so that their social and domestic needs are met. The study weeks illustrate this point. These weeks may also illustrate the Norwegian school's tendency to give the students more responsibility for working on their own for a longer span of time. This is different to the way work is done at RA, where the teachers call "the shots".

The partnership program that is realized seems to have unified a lot of "the best from two schools". And positive experience from the partnership could possibly be adopted in the ordinary program for each of the two schools.

### **Further development**

Two fields come forth and ask for some attention with further practice and development of the partnership in mind. The first is about making students as well as parents aware of the differences there are in the way learning is organized in the two school cultures. Typical of the NCS/RA is that the teacher takes responsibility for the progress in the learning program. In Norway this responsibility to a larger extent is put on the students through the implementation of weekly plans for their work. Several of the students had difficulties with the change from one to the other. The second field is about the second foreign language, where it is important to find a solution that satisfies future Norwegian demands connected with a complete primary education and the admission to secondary education.

### **Concluding remarks**

A common feedback from students as well as parents after returning to Norway is that the difficulties with transition are at the highest in the beginning. This is quite parallel to their experience when starting at NCS/RA. It is good that a lot evens out as time passes and one becomes acquainted with the new system. At the same time this feedback indicates that the students find the transition from the one to the other quite substantial – both ways. It would be a serious mistake to underrate this point, and even so it should not be allowed to expand into a larger problem than it actually is.

Lastly I therefore will cite one parent, who I think may sum it all up: “We have had a unique chance through this program. It has several advantages, especially the Norwegian teacher. It is not so difficult for the students, they learn Norwegian subjects and there is help for those who may struggle. This is a way of doing things that should be continued. It may be a reason for us to come back as missionaries if there should be doubt. [...] We find the program very positive and are grateful for it.”

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