

## **Reimagining Emancipation in Norwegian Naval Leadership Education and Practice — A Reflective Practice Approach**

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Naval leadership education at the Royal Norwegian Naval Academy (RNA) has changed significantly over the past decades. In this paper, some Personal Experiential Phenomena from a Military perspective and possible notions of, or differences in Norwegian Naval Leadership Education past and present were examined. Firstly, the article relied mainly on the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire's authorship as a basis for original and critical reflections. Reflective Practitioners use this process to modify and enhance their understanding of Professional Practice. The initial approach in this article was based on the Reflective Practice Research Method. "Which contributes to educators' professional development and personal growth". But knowledge of reflective methods alone are not sufficient. This article therefore also employed results from a survey conducted at RNA. Thus, mixed methods were adopted for the study to create a bridge between Personal Reflections and recent findings. Therefore, the survey among today's Cadets, this paper may shed new light on Naval Leadership Education from both learners' and educators' perspectives. It would thus also have relevance for civilian educators within the field of Leadership Education and -studies.

*Keywords:* formation, higher education, liberation, military leadership, oppression

### **Introduction**

Educational practices are not everlasting, but change over time (e.g., Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). The purpose and goals of this paper was firstly to reflect on personal educational experiences in my time as a Cadet at the RNA. Also, it aimed to explore educational Naval Leadership education with recent examples from the RNA. As this was explored, Gloria Jean Watkins aka bell Hooks (2010) was a reference point. She claimed that "learning requires openness and willingness to engage with new possibilities" (p. 187). My own learning experiences at the RNA have raised several questions in me. What can I say about learning in a Military Leadership educational setting? Is it, for example, stuck in former practice? Is it oppressive or liberating? I therefore firstly revisited my own Leadership Learning and Education through critical pedagogic lenses by engaging with the Brazilian author Paulo Freire's (2000; 2005) works.

Thereafter, I explored and discussed possible notions of, or differences in Norwegian Naval Leadership Education then and now. My overarching research question was: "Does it seem to be differences between Norwegian Naval Leadership Education at the RNA now and then?" In addition I wanted to explore how today's

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Cadets perceive their own perspectives of recent Leadership Education. Through this, I wanted to compare my own Leadership Education with what today's Cadets perceive in order to clarify any possible differences.

Terjesen and Gjelsten (2017) claims that Higher Naval Leadership Education in Norway has changed significantly over the past decades (Author's translation). Akbari (2007) suggested that reflective teaching will make teachers question clichés that they have learned during their formative years and will also enable them to develop a more informed practice. Reflective Practice is a process of systematic awareness to self-analyse and self-assess own practice in order to design new strategies that can enhance teaching (Habib, 2017). As Norwegian commissioned naval officers are also teachers for younger officers and NCOs,<sup>1</sup> this also applies to them. Probably also for teachers in Civilian Higher Educational Institutions.

My personal experiences with Naval Leadership Education began in 1982 and thus barely preceded the arrival of Schön's (1983) explicit naming of "The Reflective Practitioner" as a goal for education in the professions. Kolb (1984) drew attention to the fact that when we want to learn from something that has already happened to us, we need to recall our observations of the event and then reflect on those observations in some way. He also suggested that we frame some action as a result and that this possible course of action is seen as our 'learning'. This will then inform any action we take resulting from the experience. Through this, I may come to a deeper understanding of specific experiential phenomena I have encountered.

Freire (2005) stated: "Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? They will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it" (p. 45).

With this introduction, I initially reflected on some personal experiential phenomena as a Commissioned Military Officer, Educator, Supervisor, and Leader by the concept of Reflective Practice Research (e.g., Habib, 2017; Lindseth, 2020). It was not my intention to either challenge or question Freire but rather to have a dialogue with him. Applied research, practically founded, is normal science, research which is based on the prevailing paradigm without threatening it (Freely after Thomas Kuhn. In Lindseth, 2020, p. 77).

However, there is one particular incident that deserves attention. In 1986, the Vassdalen Disaster happened, where 16 drafted soldiers were killed in an avalanche. At that time, Leadership in the Norwegian Armed Forces (NAF) was mostly order-based. To put it somewhat extremely, you were to follow orders and not question them. This changed dramatically after this tragic disaster (e.g., Norwegian Ministry of Justice, 1986, p. 20; Norwegian Ministry of Defence, 1991, p. 19). Luckily, one might say, the Vassdalen Disaster spawned a wide-ranging debate. The debate eventually resulted in what is called the Reform of the Norwegian Military Leadership, which addressed the organizational structure of the Military, its organizational culture, procedures, and Leadership ideals. The solution to the above-mentioned challenges was the Leadership philosophy, *Oppdragsbasert Ledelse* (OBL/mission command). This, in turn, would also influence Norwegian Military Leadership

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<sup>1</sup>Non-commissioned officers.

Education (e.g., Olsen, 2017). Probably for the better by introducing broader participation and acceptance of voice (Hirschman, 1970) in decision-making and Leadership processes.

Even if this paper has a slight list towards Military Education, it may still have relevance for both Military and civilian teaching practitioners in the sense that it may put their own practice to the test of Reflection. The following section includes a literature review and short descriptions of essential concepts for this paper. The next sections discuss Naval Leadership Education in Norway including original and critical reflections. Thereafter, the following sections discussed Communities of Practice and Methodology, and finally the survey results. The last sections provide a general discussion with educational implications, followed by recommendations, limitations, and acknowledgements.

## **Literature Review**

### **Reflective Practice Research**

According to Lindseth (2020), Reflective Practice Research can be directed towards other people's experiences; then it becomes a challenge to get them to talk, so that they begin to reflect and wonder about their own experience and understanding. But research can also be usefully based on their own experiences of – and stories about – being challenged in activities and life contexts (p. 80, author's translation). Reflective Practice may be regarded as one of the ways that professionals learn from experience to understand and develop their practice (Jasper, 2003). The concept of reflection and the reflective practitioner has exerted a strong influence on the development of professional education (Clegg, Tan, & Saedid, 2002). According to Ginsburg (1988), reflective practitioners use this process to modify and enhance their understanding of professional practice. But knowledge of reflective methods alone is not sufficient. There must be a union of skilled method with attitudes (Van Manen, 1996).

### **Communities of Practice**

Communities of Practice (CoPs) have been described by Wenger (1999) and others as a type of informal learning organization. The CoP was originally developed to provide a template for examining the learning that happens among practitioners in a social environment (Li et al., 2009). They suggest that the CoP is still an evolving concept. Wenger's description seems therefore to apply to both Military Learning and Practice Communities because learning and practice are inextricably intertwined as indicated above.

## **Naval Leadership Education in Norway**

Norwegian Naval Officers have been educated and formed at the Royal Norwegian Naval Academy for more than 200 years (Terjesen & Gjelsten, 2017,

author's translation). RNA educates becoming commissioned officers for the Norwegian Navy. Role models at the RNA are linked to their own formation (*bildung*) (e.g., Klafki, 2007), culture, and practice. Leadership is also thought critical to innovation in schools (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2007). Role models may be regarded as liberators or hindrances in a military "Community of Practice" (CoP) (Wenger, 1999). Midshipmen<sup>2</sup> (aka Cadets) are a part of such a community through four years of learning and *bildung* processes. These processes may also be considered to take place in a Community of Learning (CoL) (Chapman, Ramondt, & Smiley, 2005). Both CoPs and CoLs are thus significant arenas for learning Military Leadership. The RNA provides both arenas. Through four years of academic studies and extensive Leadership education, training, and practice, Norwegian Midshipmen are formed into professional CoPs and CoLs, at least in theory. I therefore explored this further.

Norwegian Military Professionalism can be regarded as our professional identity and constitutes a set of preferred goals, values, and attitudes in the organization (Johansen, 2019 pp. 139-140, author's translation). The Military Professional Culture in Norway was first commented on in the Chief of Defence's foreword to the Joint Operational Doctrine for The Norwegian Armed Forces (FFOD) in 2007. It has since gained a cultural foothold which is frequently referred to (Johansen, 2019, p. 139, author's translation). The concept or understanding of Norwegian Military Professionalism has also changed significantly after the above-mentioned version of FFOD was published in 2007 (Lunde, 2021).

Professional identity development, such as through the exploration of possible new identities (Ibarra, 1999) or self-awareness processes (e.g., Hall, 2002), occurs over the course of time. The development of Professional Identities occurs as a natural by-product of a progression through each career phase (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005). Career research has found that people actively develop their identities through acquiring the ability to process feedback about the self and achieve self-awareness (Hall, 2002). At the RNA, Midshipmen learn about effective Military Leadership through studies of literature and also practical training. In this sense, they have an opportunity to engage in fruitful conversation and critical reflection with their peers and teachers about multiple aspects of their dawning professional identity. Because, in *The Basic Pedagogical View of the Norwegian Armed Forces* (Norwegian Defence College, 2006), it is stated that one of the main purposes of Military Education is to develop "a critical reflective professional competence with the personnel" (p. 17, author's translation). This coincides with Schön's (1983) explicit naming of "The Reflective Practitioner".

As Military educators, I believe we therefore are obliged to liberate our students. As Freire (2000) puts it: "We should devote ourselves humbly but perseveringly to our profession in all its aspects: scientific formation, ethical rectitude, respect for others, coherence, a capacity to live with and learn from what is different, and an ability to relate to others without letting our ill-humor or our antipathy get in the way of our balanced judgment" (p. 24). The RNA's Leadership philosophy (Olsen & Espevik, 2009), states this: "Counselling and systematic reflection play a key role

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<sup>2</sup>Officer Candidates at RNA.

in achieving cognitive and emotional maturity” (p. 8, author’s translation). Also: “An essential pillar in cohesion is trust...The importance of trust and how trust is built and lost is, therefore, a necessary part of officer education” (pp. 58-59). These quotes may well illustrate which reality the RNA operates within. However, that has not always been the case. Let me therefore exemplify and reflect.

### **My Naval Leadership Education — Original Reflection**

The purpose of this section is to elaborate and reflect on my experiences with Military Leadership Education at the RNA and later as a Commissioned Officer. Some experiences made lasting impressions. RNA was not entirely what I envisioned. Let me first point out: Some of our Military teachers also oversaw certain administrative and managerial tasks in addition to being teachers in certain subjects. However, they were also Role Models in the sense of having higher ranks, such as Lieutenant Commanders and above. In other words, they had Positional Power (e.g., Van den Brink & Steffen, 2007). In this sense, there were dominance relationships between ‘us’ and ‘them’. At the RNA, we were mostly instructed to follow orders without questions. We were, however, somewhat sceptical of some of our Military teachers. Others, however, could engage us in fruitful dialogue, conversations, and discussions. I am grateful for that. I recall one of our Officers in our second year who was relatively strict and uncompromising in his behavior. By pulling rank instead of engaging us in meaningful dialogical learning activities, he imposed his own narrow views on us, which we were not happy with. He oppressed us instead of liberating our hearts and minds. I will again return to Freire (2005): “the oppressed must see themselves as women and men engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human” (pp. 65-66). Were we not supposed to become a better version of ourselves at the RNA?

As “oppressed”, we did not tolerate his actions. Because “when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection. In this sense, the praxis is the new *raison d’être* of the oppressed” (Freire, 2005, p. 66). His actions as “oppressor” became, for us, a possibility to engage in liberating actions. At that time, in 1984, this was unheard of. I believe, as Freire, that he did not trust us to be Reflective students. Still, “It is necessary to trust in the oppressed and in their ability to reason. Whoever lacks this trust will fail to initiate (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection, and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiques, monologues, and instructions” (Freire, 2005). That was exactly what he did. He imposed his ‘reality’ on us in the same way as he probably mirrored the military society at that time. As Freire exemplifies:

- a. the teacher teaches, and the students are taught;
- b. the teacher knows everything, and the students know nothing;
- c. the teacher thinks, and the students are thought about;
- d. the teacher talks, and the students listen—meekly;
- e. the teacher disciplines, and the students are disciplined;

- f. the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply (2005, p. 73).

I shall return to what happened next. As I mentioned, we were not at all happy with his oppressive actions. So, we decided to take swift action. Our class therefore wrote a note to the RNA's Management, in which we explained our concerns about this officer and his Teaching and Leadership methods. We were concerned that they were unsound. I recall this: We were initially met with a sort of indulgence. You couldn't really mean this? He was, after all in their view, a highly respected officer. In our opinion though, he loved control, and in the act of controlling, he killed life (Freely after Fromm, in Freire, 2005, p. 68). But "though I know that things can get worse, I also know that I am able to intervene to improve them" (Freire, 2000, p. 53).

What was at stake? It was our very *conscientização* (critical consciousness). For us, as for Freire (2005), this was about learning to perceive social contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (p. 35). As such, we were maybe rebels in our time. First, however, we asked the Management for a joint meeting with our class. As they had received our note, we confronted them with our concerns. As we expected, the Management did not at all believe us. I remember one of my classmates standing up in response and shouting something like this: "Well, you weren't here were you! But we were, and we tell you the truth!" The room fell cold and silent. Nevertheless, our note and the meeting afterwards spawned a few significant changes to our life at the RNA. We experienced enhanced dialogue, contrary to mere instruction or indoctrination. We also noticed that older Midshipmen became more lenient in their dealings with us younger ones. We could simply notice a change in attitude towards us. I will connect this to Freire (2005) again: "Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection" (p. 88). By means of a totality of reflection and action, we were no longer afraid.

As for dialogue and action-reflection, we may consider this as an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another (p. 89). That was exactly what we did; we transformed a perceived 'reality' into something different and better—for many. We reclaimed our right to speak our word and thus engaged in the liberation of ourselves and our fellow Midshipmen. We considered Dialogue as being imperative in this and necessary for such an achievement. Dialogue was simply an existential necessity; it imposed itself as the way by which we achieved significance as human beings (Freely after Freire, 2005, p. 88). To express this feeling, I quote Ellis "Red" Redding: "We were the lords of all creation"<sup>3</sup>. But how may all this relate to a Military Community of Learning? I will therefore in the next section critically reflect on some issues regarding my Military Leadership Education. According to Dewey (1933), reflection is aimed at dealing with a confusing or problematic situation. My reflections may therefore be relevant for shedding light on Naval Leadership Education past and present.

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<sup>3</sup>Quote from the film: *The Shawshank Redemption*, 1994.

### Critical Reflections

The term “Learning Community” became popular among educators in the 1990s (Graves, 1992). Communities of learning (CoLs) can be regarded as a collection of individuals working in close proximity, sharing a common purpose and passion—a desire to learn (Collarbone, 2001). This may well apply to Cadets at the RNA. Because people learn material faster and have a better attitude towards learning material when they learn in a participative environment (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978; Bruner, 1986). At the RNA, midshipmen are together most of their time on campus or at sea. Learning in such a community, the person who is being taught may therefore also be formed in this process. Critical reflections call to question the power relationships that allow, or promote, one set of practices considered to be technically effective. It assumes that the minutiae of practice have embedded within them the struggles between unequal interests and groups that exist in the wider world (Brookfield, 2009). Formation, as I mentioned earlier, is firmly embedded in the Norwegian military leadership education. This was not entirely the case before the Vassdalen disaster.

In 1982, when I was admitted to the RNA, I had one and a half years of previous Military service as a Private, a Corporal, and later briefly as a platoon NCO. In this period before RNA, I encountered several different personalities and educational environments. Being a learner, who I was—and still am, I am continuously in the process of acquiring new knowledge. This new knowledge cannot simply be directly transferred to the learners. By recognizing only the explicit character of knowledge, we underestimate the true effort required to transfer knowledge (Roux et al., 2006). Therefore, the transfer of knowledge can be regarded as a collective process in which the educator and the student engage in fruitful dialogue. Or, as Freire (2005) puts it: “The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also to teach” (p. 80).

I find it somewhat difficult to impose my views on others. I can only tell others of my experiences. They are and will always be mine and can thus never be challenged. By merely imposing existing structure and views on the world, we cannot achieve true learning. We cannot engage in “the hypocritical formula, “do as I say, not as I do” (Freire, 2000, p. 39). I believe Military teachers in higher educational institutions are obliged to liberate both themselves and those they educate. This must be paramount for all Officers regardless of where and when they serve. “Since liberation must be a permanent condition, dialogue becomes a continuing aspect of liberating action” (Freire, 2005, p. 139).

I seek enlightenment through learning in a sense somewhat similar to how Freire (2000) states: “Why not, for example, take advantage of the students' experience of life” (p. 36). Engaging in both my own experienced phenomena and their own perceptions, through dialogue, they and I may come to a deeper understanding of different implications of multiple perspectives of the experienced world. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it (Freire, 2005, p. 88). Also, “by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings” (Freire, 2005, p. 88). This, I believe, signifies the

dichotomy between the ‘narrower’ banking education, which resists dialogue, and a dialogical approach in which the dialoguers engage in critical thinking. Critical thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved (Freire, 2005, p. 92).

Turning to the RNA again, two purposes of Leadership development are not to think and act “correctly” but instead to “be in a space without foothold” (Freire, 2000, p. 69). Leadership Training Programs can be defined as programs that have been systematically designed to enhance leader knowledge, skills, abilities, and other components (Day, 2000). Also, “A learning environment characterized by support, where the counselled feels safe enough to try the insecure and is allowed to fail” (Day, 2000). “To learn effectively demands that one involve oneself totally in new experiences, openly without biases” (p. 70). However, are we not all biased in one way or another, either cognitively and/or emotionally? What complicates it further is the fact that we are all different. That is, all midshipmen also learn differently (e.g., Pashler et al., 2008). This is so even if the RNA strives to “Improve them to create a future reality” (Olsen & Espevik, 2009, p. 72. Author’s translation). Again, this calls for an enhanced understanding of perceived limitations. Which implications lie then for Military Communities of Practice?

### **Military Communities of Practice**

As Wenger (1999) describes, the CoP can be regarded as an entity bounded by three interrelated dimensions: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. Mutual engagement represents the interaction between individuals that leads to the creation of shared meaning on issues or a problem. Joint enterprise is the process in which people are engaged and working together towards a common goal. Finally, shared repertoire refers to the common resources and jargon that members use to negotiate meaning and facilitate learning within the group (Li et al., 2009).

As stated in the RNA’s Leadership Development Philosophy (Olsen & Espevik, 2009): “Man is learning by constructing his knowledge in interaction with his environment”. Also, “Man plays therefore an active and decisive role in developing, organizing, and apply knowledge” (p. 68. Author’s translation). This again fits with The Basic Pedagogical View of the Norwegian Armed Forces (FPG, Norwegian Defence College, 2006), which states that “Learning is an interactive process that consists of interpreting, integrating, and adapting new knowledge to the knowledge you already have” (p. 4, author’s translation). Also, “Learning takes place in a context, in the interaction between people, in the meeting with texts and other sources and in confrontation with concrete relationships and situations. Here the participants must be open for an active exchange of views and dialogue” (p. 5).

Let me therefore elaborate. Firstly, let me return to one of the main goals of FPG, which is to “Develop a critical reflective professional competence with the personnel” (2006, p. 9, author’s translation). Alternatively, put in other words, the goal is to create Reflective Practitioners. This demands, as Freire (2005) states,



“Dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (pp. 92-93). Secondly, if we, as Military teachers, are to liberate our students’ perceptions of their practical reality (as we should, author’s note), we must also engage them in fruitful conversation and dialogue to create shared meanings on issues or problems. Thirdly, by facilitating joint enterprises, we must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their situation in the world (Freire, 2005, p. 96).

My experiences at the RNA differ somewhat from the above. I mean, for one reason that we were subjugated as uncompleted beings. As such, we may also claim that we were unable to decide for ourselves, unable to objectify either ourselves or our activity, lacking objectives which they themselves have set, living “submerged” in a world to which they can give no meaning, lacking a “tomorrow” and a “today” because we existed in an overwhelming present (after Freire, 2005 p. 98). As nascent practitioners, this was problematic because we were, as Freire also states, “Humans, ... because they are aware of themselves and thus of the world—because they are conscious beings—exist in a dialectical relationship between the determination of limits and their own freedom” (Freire, 2005, p. 99). This lead me to the next section of this article, which is a study concerning the cadet’s subjective perspectives on recent Naval Leadership Education at the RNA. The next section expands on and complements my previous reflections. At this point, there seemed to be scarce research concerning Norwegian Cadets’ subjective perception of recent Naval Leadership Education. Therefore, a survey at the RNA seemed to be relevant as one part of the mixed method research methodology.

Mixed methods research is defined as a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods conducted by a researcher or researcher team, for the broad purpose of gaining breadth and depth of understanding or corroboration, within a single study or closely related studies (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). Mixed methods are still developing and will do so for years to come (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). The mixed methods approach “can produce more robust measures of association while explicitly valuing the depth of research participants’ experiences, perspectives, and histories” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 463). The present study includes a sample of cadets<sup>4</sup> at the RNA by gathering individual responses from them by distributing an online survey using MS Forms – a quantitative method (e.g., Kral & Allen, 2016). A total of 53 cadets at the RNA were asked to participate; a total of 45 Cadets completed the questionnaire (a response rate of approx. 85%). The research questions were designed using an amended or Likert-type scale (Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995; Grandy, 1996; Warmbrod, 2014). A Likert-type scale consists of a series of statements defining and describing the construct's content and meaning (Warmbrod, 2014).

## Methodology

### Participants and Design

Qualitative methods help provide rich descriptions of phenomena. They enhance understanding of the context of events as well as the events themselves. Thus, qualitative research not only serves the desire to describe; it also helps move inquiry toward more meaningful explanations (Sofaer, 1999). The present study includes a sample of cadets<sup>4</sup> at the RNA by gathering individual responses from them. A total of 53 cadets at the RNA were asked to participate; a total of 45 cadets completed the questionnaire (a response rate of approx. 85%). The research questions were designed using an amended or Likert-type scale (Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995; Grandy, 1996; Warmbrod, 2014). A Likert-type scale consists of a series of statements defining and describing the construct's content and meaning (Warmbrod, 2014). The specific research questions were developed and designed based on three normative documents which both educators and learners at the RNA were supposed to be familiar with; The Basic Pedagogical view of The Norwegian Armed Forces (2006), The leadership and Training Philosophy of the Royal Norwegian Naval Academy (Olsen & Espevik, 2009), and The Norwegian Chief of Defence's view on Leadership (Norwegian Defence Staff, 2012).

The questionnaire underwent initial revisions following suggestions by the head of military leadership at the RNA. Following additional feedback from professors at the RNA, final revisions were made to the survey. No data concerning age, gender, etc. was collected. Thus, the survey was completely anonymous. The participants completed a survey consisting of 16 statements. Two example statements were "Operative Leadership is often discussed between us cadets" and "I am very familiar with Mission Command (OBL)". The scale had seven response alternatives ranging from alternative 1-strongly agree to alternative 7-strongly disagree.

### Procedures

The research committee at the Norwegian Defence College University (NDUC), the RNA, and the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (Sikt) approved the study (Sikt-ref. 954463). After final revisions of the survey questionnaire, RNA provided additional comments about the survey's validity. One might therefore claim that the survey was satisfactory piloted. Before data collection, we prepared an informed consent procedure. The RNA and the participants received written information about the study's main purpose and were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. They were also assured that individual results would only be used in this specific research project. Also, consent was embedded in the questionnaire.

Data from the Cadets at RNA were collected after they had finished respectively two and three years of extensive team-based Leadership training. Data from the Cadets at RNA were collected three months before they completed their education programs. During their training, all Cadets had rotated in roles as leaders and

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<sup>4</sup>Military students at the RNA = midshipmen.

followers in fixed teams and participated in numerous joint exercises and group sessions. These activities provided them with thorough knowledge of each other in Leadership roles and as team members (e.g., Olsen, Johansen, & Hystad, 2021). They also have extensive theoretical education in Military Leadership.

The following section contains results from the survey at RNA. Quantitative data can be measured, more or less accurately because it contains some form of magnitude, usually expressed in numbers (Walliman, 2021). First, the phenomena under study were described as precisely as possible. I then needed to be able to interpret and explain the data. Also, a conceptual framework needed to be developed and data classified. Afterwards, concepts were built and connected to each other. In this way, the research questions were aligned with the overall purpose of the present study.

## Results

As mentioned above, my overarching research question was: “Does it seem to be differences between Norwegian Naval Leadership Education at the RNA now and then?” In addition I wanted to explore how today’s Cadets perceive their perspectives of their own Leadership Education. Quantitative survey results from RNA are listed in Table 1. Each question had two extremes, at 1 and 7, respectively, as mentioned above. My main purpose for the research was to explore today’s Cadets’ subjective perceptions of their leadership education and what the RNA emphasizes and/or practice. The second purpose was to explore their perception or the notion of formation (*bildung*). Another aim was to assess their knowledge or understanding of Mission Command (OBL). It is, therefore, necessary to categorize the survey questions. In Table 1, the questions are therefore clustered.

Table 1. Answers Provided by Cadets at the RNA

General Perception of the Leadership Education at RNA							
	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Alt. 2</b>	<b>Alt. 3</b>	<b>Alt. 4</b>	<b>Alt. 5</b>	<b>Alt. 6</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
<b>Q3</b>	2.2%	8.9%	40%	35.6%	11.1%	2.2%	0%
<b>Q7</b>	2.2%	6.7%	15.6%	24.4%	33.3%	11.1%	6.7%
<b>Q8</b>	4.4%	0%	4.4%	17.8%	24.4%	33.3%	15.6%
<b>Q9</b>	2.2%	8.9%	6.7%	15.6%	40%	22.2%	4.4%
<b>Q12</b>	0%	6.7%	15.6%	28.9%	40%	8.9%	0%
<b>Q13</b>	0%	8.9%	6.7%	11.1%	37.8%	31.1%	4.4%
<b>Q14</b>	4.4%	11.1%	13.3%	22.2%	40%	6.7%	2.2%
<b>Q16</b>	0%	2.2%	13.3%	15.6%	31.1%	24.4%	13.3%
Knowledge and Understanding of RNA’s Leadership Philosophy							
<b>Q1</b>	0%	8.9%	11.1%	17.8%	37.8%	22.2%	2.2%
<b>Q2</b>	6.7%	8.9%	35.6%	33.3%	13.3%	0%	2.2%
<b>Q10</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	22.2%	44.4%	33.3%
Perception of Connections Between RNAs Education and Practice							
<b>Q4</b>	13.3%	8.9%	22.2%	33.3%	20%	0%	2.2%
<b>Q6</b>	4.4%	13.3%	11.1%	31.1%	31.1%	8.9%	0%
<b>Q11</b>	6.7%	11.1%	13.3%	20%	35.6%	8.9%	4.4%
Perceived Effects of Being a Cadet							
<b>Q5</b>	2.2%	11.1%	35.6%	24.4%	24.4%	2.2%	0%
<b>Q15</b>	0%	2.2%	15.6%	51.1%	20%	6.7%	4.4%

The first and principal category is the Cadet's perception of RNA's Leadership Education, as stated in questions (Q) 3, 7–9, 12–14 and 16. The second category is the Cadet's knowledge and understanding of RNA's Leadership Philosophy, as stated in Qs 1, 2, and 10. The third category is the Cadet's perception of any connections between RNA's education and practice, as stated in Qs 4, 6, and 11. Qs 5 and 15 refer to their perceived effects of being a Cadet at the RNA. This concerns the extent to which the Cadets perceive being measured according to their leadership qualities and whether they perceive being "bound" or inhibited by existing Leadership praxis. Subsequently, I found the following:

Their general perception of leadership education stands out fairly clearly. A high percentage of the cadets perceive that Leadership Education, to a high degree, is characterized by openness, the emphasis on Reflection and Learning, and the freedom to think for themselves (Q 7-9). The Cadets also perceive high degrees of compliance between theory and practice in the educational setting, independent thinking, and freedom and independence (Q 12-14). When it comes to teaching Operative Leadership (Q 3), the responses became somewhat different, indicating that they are more unsure. Q 16 indicates clearly that the Cadets perceive that it is emphasized that they are to become Reflective Practitioners. Regarding knowledge and understanding of RNA's Leadership Philosophy, the Cadets perceive a good understanding of RNA's Leadership Philosophy but seem to be more unsure about whether the Philosophy is often a theme in the tuition—that is, the teaching at the RNA (Q 1-2).

A high percentage perceive a very good understanding of OBL (Q 10). Regarding the perception of connections between RNA's education and practice, approx. 55% of the Cadets perceive it to be a significant correlation between RNA's leadership education and its practice (Q 4). The Cadets often discuss Operative Leadership between them, and they seem to agree with the statement that OBL is often practiced at the RNA (Qs 6 and 11). The responses regarding perceived effects of being a Cadet (Qs 5 and 15) indicate that approx. 50% of the respondents seem to be measured by their Leadership qualities. Approx. 1/3 of the Cadets seem to be somewhat bound or inhibited by existing Leadership praxis.

Variants of the self-report method are numerous and can be organized in a number of ways (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). The most important limitation of the present study may be that the data are self-reported. Thus, future research should attempt to expand upon this study, for example, by using a follow-up study which investigates what teachers at the RNA perceive. Thus, exploring eventual differences. In that way, maybe obtaining an updated and expanded insight into recent Naval Leadership Education.

## **Discussion**

Similarity and difference are fundamental to Cognition<sup>5</sup> (Simmons & Estes, 2008). I did suspect to find at least some differences given the time span between

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<sup>5</sup>The mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses.

my own Cadet period and today's reality. Firstly, the results from the survey strongly indicate that the Cadets seem to have a good knowledge and understanding of what is stated in RNA's Leadership Philosophy, the Basic Pedagogical View, and the Norwegian Joint Operational Doctrine. These normative documents include independent thinking, reflection, and freedom of thought. As Freire puts it, "Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transfers of information" (2005, p. 79). These initial results may therefore indicate that the Cadets experience to a certain degree a kind of liberating Leadership Education.

The Cadets perceive a significant correlation between RNA's leadership and its teaching and practice. The latter result can be related to what Freire prefers to call "cultural action for freedom", about which he asserts that its goal must be to "conscientize" the people to awaken their critical consciousness (Eder, 1988). One might therefore claim that the RNA and their Military students have adopted a timelier Leadership Education and praxis aligned with modern management/Leadership literature. This may signify a turn towards enhanced adaptivity. Which also may encourage the Cadets to have a more constructively critical approach to both CoPs and CoLs in which they are a part of.

The above was not exactly the case in the 1980s when, among many things, these documents did not exist. In there lies a significant difference. We were more instructed or indoctrinated by our Military teachers. We were mainly supposed to take for granted what our teachers taught us without asking too many critical questions. In that sense, we experienced what Freire calls "The Banking Concept". The students are not called upon to know but to memorize the contents narrated by the teacher (Freire, 2005, p. 80). In the Banking Concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing (Freire, 2005, p. 72). However, we decided to liberate ourselves without our Military teachers' knowledge and understanding of liberating teaching methods. Much to their surprise at the time. This signified for us a turn towards a more flexible way of the approach to become Military Leaders. The results in the present study however clearly indicates that flexibility and adaptiveness has become much more present in recent Naval Leadership Education in Norway.

What I found somewhat surprising in the survey results was that as much as one third of the Cadets responded that they were bound or inhibited by existing Leadership praxis, and "only" 50% seemed to be measured by their Leadership qualities. I expected a much higher percentage, and I find this somewhat paradoxical. Why? Because RNA's Leadership Education should emphasize measuring the Cadet's abilities to perform as leaders. This is clearly stated in RNA's Leadership Philosophy. Also, in their praxis as Military Leaders, they will be measured by Leadership Qualities every year. This may be related to their seeming to be more unsure about whether the Leadership Philosophy is often a theme in the tuition at the RNA. The paradox also includes that they perceive a significant correlation between RNA's Leadership Education and its practice. This may coincide with the banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits (Freire, 2005). In this sense, I also find similarities between my own Leadership Education at the RNA

and today's Cadet's perception. The above-mentioned paradoxes are therefore interesting for further investigation.

Lastly, in this section, I will draw attention to Paulo Freire's *raison d'être* of libertarian education. He states that education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students. The ground is prepared when we consider that much of this thinking is found in the literature mentioned above, even if the results from the survey indicate that this is only partially fulfilled. The RNA seems to be on the right track but still not quite there yet. Therefore, the RNA should pursue the positive track it is on, and further develop both leadership teaching and praxis to fulfil today's needs for leaders who are flexible-minded and adaptive.

### Conclusion

Does the investigated Naval Leadership Education then and now differ in any way? The present study mainly investigated the Cadet's subjective perception of their Leadership Education at the RNA. There are differences, but also similarities. In addition, in this paper, I have also reflected upon some personal experiences as a Cadet at the RNA. I have investigated through a relatively short questionnaire some perspectives concerning "modern" or updated Military Leadership Education at the RNA. The purpose of this was to explore certain aspects of education and practice through the eyes of the beholders, the Cadets. Questions regarding Edification (formation or *bildung*, author's remark) and Operative Leadership have been to some extent also explored.

When one experience is made the subject of concrete, critical, and theoretical reflection, one can open clarifying perspectives and sometimes lead to astonishing insights (Lindseth, 2020, p. 100, author's translation). As we shift back and forth among perspectives, we may bring different elements of a situation to salience and highlight different features of the world. We must put our own practical knowledge to the test. As Lindseth (2020) claims, if we want to understand the connections in life, we need inner evidence (p. 96), that is, insight into connections (p. 89). Therefore, my two approaches may complement each other.

I will also point out that this paper's introductory research methodology originates first and foremost from Reflective Practice Research (Lindseth, 2020) and must not be confused with or compared to "evidence-based research" derived from natural sciences, which is conveyed through randomized controlled trials giving quantitative data (e.g., Larivière et al., 2006). Reflective Practice Research arises from the ideas of evidence-based practice (e.g., Kvernbekk, 2015; 2018). My initial approach in this paper lies, therefore, within the field of humanities, its point of departure in the experiences of the researcher - me.

### Recommendations

To further develop this area it may be helpful to supplement the initial survey findings with a follow-up study. This may further articulate the conceptual and empirical contributions, and to explicitly connect those contributions to work already published in the present study. A follow-up study should investigate what the teachers at the RNA perceive. Also, the findings regarding the survey questions may seem somewhat superficial. Participants can be interviewed for in-depth analysis of their views. I believe this would broaden both learners and practitioners understanding of each other's subjective perceptions. In addition, a longitudinal study which expands on this initial study, may provide even more precise and complementary answers. In this way, therefore also obtaining a broader insight into recent Naval Leadership Education in Norway. As I see it, Leadership Education and practice is still full of undiscovered intricacies and paradoxes.

### Limitations

There are limitations to the present study. Firstly, there are a limited number of research questions which may indicate that not every aspect of Naval Leadership Education is scrutinized. Surveys often also suffers the limitation of forcing respondents into particular response categories, thereby limiting the range of respondents (Simon & Goes, 2013). Also, the respondents were not chosen randomly. Thus the results cannot be generalized to the rest of the student population (Schuster & Powers, 2005). Lastly, another limitation of the present study may be that the data are self-reported. According to Devaux & Sassi (2016), people are often biased when they report on their own experiences. Therefore, any inferences must be made with caution.

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