



Country Background Report Norway

1. Background – the contrast between everyday reality and the political framework

“The aim of education is to expand the individual's capacity to perceive and to participate, to experience, to empathize and to excel.” (Core Curriculum)



Leadership in education has become more demanding and complex. You have to deal with decentralization, accountability, implementation of new reforms and new approaches to learning. This new role also requires improved analytical and pedagogical competence, the ability to manage the contradictions and conflicts of interest, the ability to communicate well with the many different actors, both internally and externally. It requires an understanding of the academic and educational tasks.

In times of delegation of responsibility, teacher and school leader unions and school administrators at different levels have expressed concern about what might be called a “draining of school-based competence” at local school management and local authority level.

The political discourse in Norway for the time being is mainly focusing on how to improve the results in international surveys. We use more resources on schools than most other countries in the world, and the effects measured by e.g. PISA and PIRLS are not as good as expected compared to the resources spent. The answers to this fact are varying, depending on who you ask.

The right wing political parties ask for more focus on the “main topics”, more tests, more discipline, dividing students into skill based groups and giving marks even in the primary school (today students don't have marks until they start their 8th year).

Left-wing politicians (who are governing for the moment) also want more focus on language and maths. They keep up the practice that the right-wing parties established in 2002, with national tests in mother tongue language, maths and English language. Student evaluation for learning and documentation of skills are focused topics in the political framework now (2009).

Many Norwegian teachers feel squeezed by national and local expectations that are followed up by tests and public assessments. Some say that they can't use as much time as they believe is right on subjects that are not a part of the national assessment system. Things that can be easily measured have become more important and are given more time and value.

More generally, it's important to say that the Norwegian school system is based on the value of equality of every human being – despite his or her background. It's an aim for the Norwegian school system to reduce differences between students that are due to their home conditions. And almost all students attend their own local school, even if they have any disabilities. We have an inclusive school system and very few special schools.

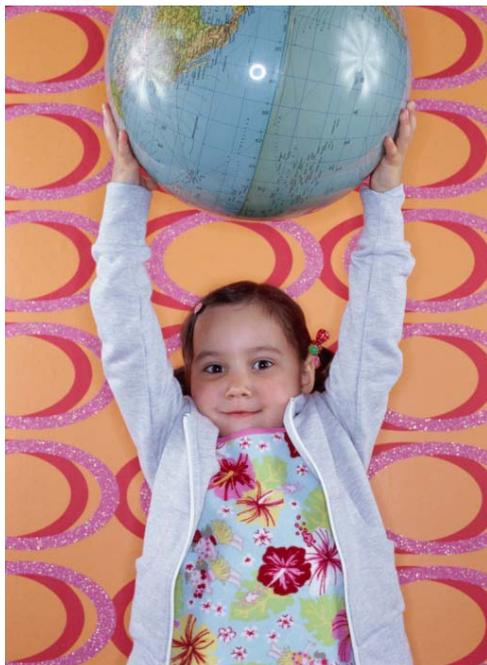
Our main challenge, in addition to improve our results, is the drop out in upper secondary school. As much as 20 - 50 % of the students within certain studies drop out during the 3-4 years they are supposed to attend these schools.

The upper secondary is not compulsory, but every girl and boy has a right to attend these schools, and it's free. The reason why so many drop out is not clear, but the fact that there is a heavy focus on academic subjects even in the more practically oriented studies might be one answer.

2. Context: School governance

- In the early 2000 Norway was governed by the right wing parties. They focused on results compared to resources spent and made a new national curriculum that was built up around specific learning goals that should be reached at different age levels. This was followed up by a national test system, to ensure that the communities and teachers followed up, and to have data that could tell if we did improve or not.
- This policy was said to give local freedom to decide how to reach the goals. At the same time the freedom is reduced by running all the schools and students through the same test system. This policy make school leaders and teachers focus harder on what is going to be tested, which might give less room for local priorities.

“Education must be based on the view that all persons are created equal and that human dignity is inviolable. It should confirm the belief that everyone is unique, that each can nourish his own growth and that individual distinctions enrich and enliven our world.” (Core Curriculum)



The national context

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training is responsible for the development of primary and secondary education, and they are the executive agency for the Ministry of Education and Research. The Directorate was established in 2004, and they are responsible for:

- Curriculum planning
- Examinations and tests
- Knowledge development
- International comparisons

The local context

In Norway each school has a head teacher who is the authority responsible for the pupils in school, acting on behalf of the parents. The principal's authority is delegated by the school owner, which in political terms means the mayor, on behalf of the politically elected assembly in counties or municipalities, or the chairman of the board in a private school. Administratively the exercising of authority is assigned to the chief municipal executive in each county authority and municipality, who in turn either delegates the power to a person with school-based competence, the chief municipal education officer, sector manager or person with a similar title, or directly to a head teacher.

Compulsory school

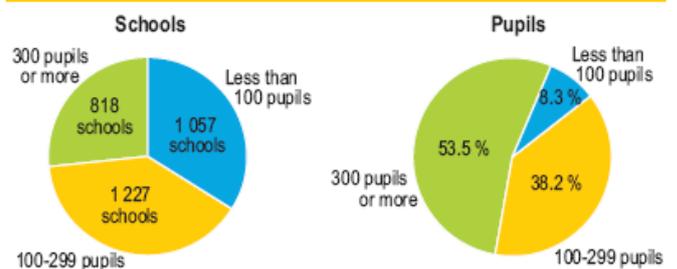
In Norway basic education lasts for thirteen years. Pupils start school the year they turn six. The first ten years of primary and lower secondary education are compulsory.

Primary school (grades 1–7)

Lower secondary (grades 8–10)

Norway has a scattered population, and the relatively large number of quite small school units in remote and sparsely populated areas is a typical feature:

Primary and lower secondary schools, by size (number of pupils). Pupils. Enrolment by size of school. 1 October 2007



More information: <http://www.ssb.no/utgrs/>

Upper secondary school

Upper secondary school (grade 11-13) is the responsibility of the 19 Norwegian counties. Nearly all students leaving lower secondary school enter upper secondary education. Around half choose one of three general academic programmes, the other half follow one of nine vocational programmes. Vocational education and training (Vet) face a big challenge. Drop out. One-third of VET students in the general third year do not complete it.



The Knowledge Promotion (The name of the national curriculum)

In the autumn of 2006 the school reform called The Knowledge Promotion was introduced. The objectives and quality framework for primary and secondary education and training are laid down in The National Curriculum for the Knowledge Promotion which applies to all levels of primary and secondary education and training and comprises:

- The Core Curriculum
- Quality Framework
- Subject Curricula
- Distribution of teaching hours per subject
- Individual Assessment

Five basic skills are integrated in the subject curricula. The five basic skills are adapted to each subject. These skills are being able to:

- read
- express oneself orally
- express oneself in writing
- develop numeracy
- use digital tools

School Leadership and practice

Peter F. Drucker: “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.”

Conceptual framework

In Norway there is a long tradition of wide local freedom for school leadership. Due to very different frameworks and conditions throughout the country, the schools have developed in their own directions, emphasizing different ways to reach the goals in the national curriculum. Even though there is a national curriculum and the legal basis is the same throughout the whole country, the politicians in every municipality are free to make some choices about what they want the schools to focus on, especially, e.g. subjects or ways of teaching. This means that both school leaders and their staff have to work within the framework that is built up both on a national and local level. This may be changed from time to time due to political changes at both levels.

During recent years the expectations for school leaders to be more professional leaders and less “leading teacher” are getting more and more obvious. Today’s head teachers have to deal a lot with economic and staff-related matters, which make some school leaders feel forced to give less priority to pedagogical leadership. But at the same time, the demands for following up assessment results are increasing, and there is a discussion about how to release and develop the school leader’s resources to emphasize more on pedagogical matters.

Norwegian head teachers are usually employed for a lifelong position, which means they might hold their positions for 20-30 years. During such a long period there are a lot of changes within the whole society and they have to deal with changing curriculums and political signals. They who stay at the same school for such long periods have a huge influence both on the school’s development and the local society they work within. Normally school leaders in Norway hire and fire their own teachers, which mean they have great power and responsibility.

Head teachers in Norway have various conditions for their leadership, depending on the politicians and leadership in each and every municipality. Some give very specific directions and expect school leaders and teachers to follow up their instructions, while others give lots of freedom to

their schools to find their own way to reach the goals. These different directions of leadership understanding influence the school leader's possibilities to execute their leadership. And it might in the next step influence the way teachers are led.

Many school leaders claim that they are squeezed between increasing expectations from both the political and bureaucratic level, in addition to a continuously growing load of tasks that the schools are asked to follow up on behalf of society. This situation leads to a demand for school leaders who are both educated and strong enough to deal with all the expectations and be able to make decisions about what are the most important issues to emphasize from time to time at their specific schools.

"Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality." Warren G. Bennis

Internal organizing within schools

The most common model in Norway is to have an own head teacher in every school, regardless of the size of the school. In small schools the head teachers will have to do some teaching, but in schools bigger than approx. 200 students, head teachers will not have to teach in addition to their leadership tasks.

Then the head teacher usually has a deputy head, who normally has to combine teaching and leadership. Bigger schools may have two deputies. Every school has a secretary, but here too there are various amounts of resources, depending of the size of the school and local priorities.

Since 1991 all Norwegian schools are obliged to organize a before and after school offer, and usually these leisure activities are run by an own staff, with an own leader. This leader might be a member of the school's leadership team.

Teachers very often are organized in teams, who spend some time every week to plan and assess their teaching together. These teams might have a team leader who is a member of the school's leadership team – still depending on the school size and local conditions. Generally speaking,

Norwegian schools are pretty free to decide how they organize their work.

The focus on teaching and learning

Teachers in Norway have a part of their total year of work dedicated to keep themselves updated on matters that are important to be a good teacher. They are supposed to work 43 hours a week for 39 weeks. One of these weeks is used for developing their competence, and it is up to the head teacher to decide (in cooperation with the local teachers' union) the content of this week. Then every teacher has got 10 hours a week for preparing and following up their teaching tasks, and to keep up with what's going on according to the subjects they teach. Then teachers have several hours every week to meet and cooperate with colleagues, and most schools also have a weekly meeting for all the teachers, organized by the head teacher and his or her leadership team.

Every municipality organize some kind of education for their teachers, on topics that are essential to follow up, due to national or local expectations for school or teacher development.

Many schools form cooperating networks to help each other in such processes.

This year (2009) there is a new national programme for teachers who want to improve their skills in some chosen subjects. The state covers 40% of the expenses, the local municipality also 40% and then the teacher is responsible for the last 20 % (and might work at their schools to make up for that part).

During the last 40 years there has been a growing tendency to organize schools in ways that make it possible – and necessary - for teachers to work in teams and to cooperate while teaching.

Open space school buildings are getting more and more usual in many places. Teachers have a special responsibility to follow up a certain group of students (up to 30, but more likely 15-20), and then they are in a team with other teachers who teach the same grade.

Teachers are responsible for organizing meetings with students and parents, to keep them informed, and to give and take feedback that

contributes to even better learning processes and results.

Head teachers are supposed to have personal meetings with every teacher once a year, to evaluate, set goals and share opinions on things going on in their school. Then the head teacher has a basis for leading the teacher, both for support and demands.

Restructuring and re-culturing school organisations

School leadership is usually distributed to a steering group, containing an assistant head teacher and team leaders. There is a local freedom to find the most convenient organizing of leadership within every school. In Norway there are schools with less than 10 students (!) and others with more than 1000 students, so it's impossible to decide what's right for everyone.

It is very common to organize groups of teachers and leaders to work on special matters, e.g. school development. They might lead a process to develop shared values and norms, following up matters that are essential to increase the school quality. But all such processes are supposed to involve the entire staff, students and parents before they are made the school's property.

Establishing and negotiating the direction of school development

Norwegian teachers, as well as students and parents, have a democratic right to influence the way a school is organized and run. Teachers are organized in unions, while students and parents have their own boards and meetings within every school. They all have a right to be informed and to share their opinion on pedagogical, economic and environmental matters. And school leaders are responsible for organizing meetings where these groups have the possibility to discuss matters that have an influence on their working conditions. This dialogue gives the school leader a solid basis for his or her leadership and decision making.

System leadership and cooperation in networks

Nowadays school leaders have great possibilities to keep in contact with other leaders thanks to new media and communication channels. Compared to the situation some ten years ago, the insight into other schools has grown and contributed to both inspiration and a positive pressure to keep up with other schools to achieve their goals.

This situation might lead to developing better school leaders and schools. And it might also make people more insecure on their own foundation – other schools seem to achieve so much, and they work in other ways than we do ...

As mentioned earlier it's common to establish networks of school leaders within every municipality. But there are rural municipalities in Norway that have only one school, and then it might be difficult for the school leader to find colleagues to network with.

Anyway, there are different ways to cooperate and to meet with other school leaders. The unions for school leaders have their own web sites and one also distributes a weekly magazine about teaching and school leadership. And there are conferences around the country, held by the high schools and universities responsible for teacher education. And by companies that produce books and materials for schools.

Many schools are also part of the teacher education system, giving the teacher students practical training during their studies.

Examples of good practice / success stories

In Trondheim (and probably most other Norwegian communities) all the head teachers meet once a month with their director to be informed and to discuss common matters for the schools in the municipality, following up the politicians' demands and our own goals and ambitions. The head teachers are also organized in networks that meet once a month to discuss the same matters more thoroughly, but also to support, inspire and challenge each other as colleagues. We share our competence and experience, and we solve problems together.

Once a year we do a study tour. We visit different schools within our own country, but also in other European countries. Some have even visited schools in Australia and New Zealand.

The network has developed into a very important arena for developing school leadership. Head teachers within this network feel so connected that they find it difficult to move to other jobs because they don't want to lose the connection with their colleagues. Leaders might feel alone from time to time, and that's why the network helps – both professionally and socially.

4. Recruiting and qualification of school heads

Until 2004, there was a regulation demanding three years of work experience as a teacher with formal education to become a principle. Until now there has been no requirement for formal leadership.

NSLF (The Union of School leaders in Norway) did an informal inquiry about recruiting school

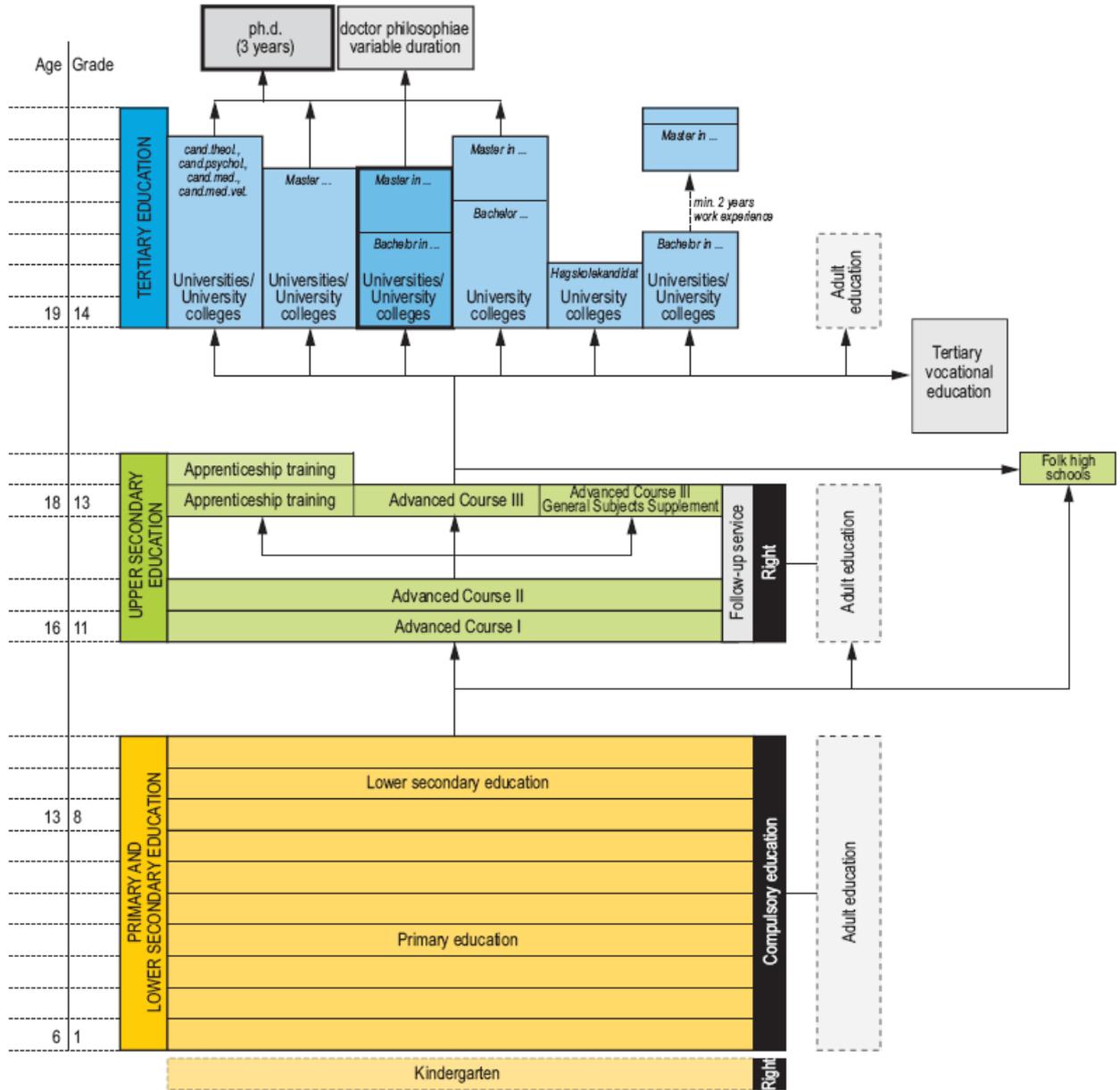
leaders for positions in Norway. The inquiry showed that there is a shortage of applicants for head teacher positions.

School leadership was examined by researchers at the University of Oslo in a survey conducted in 2006. It was found that 40% of school leaders had no formal education in management or organisational skills. As schools today have more open processes with regard to learning and learning outcomes, leadership is being assigned greater importance and the role of school leaders is changing in Norway.

A master in school management was introduced in 2003, but this is a voluntary offer. In White Paper no 31 (2007-2008) *Quality in school*, the Ministry notified that an educational programme for newly employed principals and other principals that lack formal leadership education should be created. Now (2009) this programme has been established, to make it possible for all newly employed principals to get a formal education, either before starting the job or combining the job and the studies.



The Norwegian education system 2009



Appendix

Literature

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- Common core subjects in primary and lower secondary education: http://udir.no/Artikler/_Lareplaner/_english/Common-core-subjects-in-primary-and-lower-secondary-education-/
- The knowledge promotion, curriculum
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