

The Norwegian School Library Program – What has been achieved?

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Abstract:

The Norwegian School Library Program was a four-year, national project (2009-13) designed to strengthen the school library as an educational tool. The objective of the program was that school libraries be actively used in reading education and the promotion of information literacy. The University of Agder (UiA) managed the program on behalf of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, and it had several prioritized areas: competency raising through studies and courses, practice-related school projects and the development of a digital collection of ideas as well as teaching resources on information literacy. Upon the completion of the program in August 2013, 210 development projects had been carried out under its auspices: 105 Norwegian municipalities participated, and all counties were represented as well. University courses in School Library Studies were developed and two websites created.

The program required the principal to be project manager and the entire project group, including the principal, school librarian and participating teachers, were to attend a continuing education course. Commitment on the part of the owner of the school, the municipality, was seen as equally important. The projects placed great emphasis on achieving good forms of cooperation, both within the schools and with public libraries and local communities.

NIFU, Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education, evaluated the program and published their report in March of this year. This paper presents some of the initiatives leading up to the establishment of the Norwegian School Library Program and sums up the program management's experiences in the light of NIFU's evaluation.

Keywords: School libraries, Advocacy, Norway, Reading education, Information literacy

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Introduction

Upon the completion of the *Norwegian School Library Program* (2009-13) in August 2013, 210 projects in 173 primary and lower secondary schools were finalized, 37 as two years' projects. All the projects were aiming at integrating the school library into educational work, as a pedagogical tool in reading education and the promotion of information literacy. The

schools receiving funding for two years were resource schools in the program and had developed diverse models on educational use of libraries. At the completion of the program, 105 municipalities in all the Norwegian counties had participated in the program, and about 1000 teachers, school librarians and principals had attended compulsory courses under the auspices of the program. Two websites were designed during the program period, and a Bachelor's Program in School Library Studies was established at the University of Agder. This university, located in Kristiansand in Southern Norway, was managing the program on behalf of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training.

The program was designed to make sure the school library was anchored properly in the school organization and to prepare for lasting improvements. To receive funding the schools were required to organize their projects so that the principal was the project manager and the whole project group, the principal, involved teachers and school librarians, were to attend compulsory courses. All projects had to write a plan for the use of the school library, seeking to integrate the library into pedagogical work, improve cooperation between teachers and school librarians, and ensure support from the school management. The program also stressed the importance of cooperation between schools and public libraries, and a great many of the projects looked into new ways of establishing such collaboration (Ingvaldsen, 2012).

NIFU, Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education, evaluated the Norwegian School Library Program and published their report in March 2014 (Carlsten & Sjaastad, 2014). NIFU's evaluation is based on interviews with schools that had participated in the program, self-evaluations by the University of Agder and the project schools, and previous studies of school libraries in Norway. In this paper the project managements' experiences will be presented and related to the findings of NIFU. It starts out with a brief introduction to some of the initiatives that laid the ground for the program.

Initiatives leading up to the establishment of the program

The Norwegian School Library Program was the result of long lasting efforts in which many contributors worked together to raise awareness and increase knowledge about the need for good libraries in schools. Some of the initiatives that influenced the Ministry of Education to make the decision and also had an impact on the design of the program will be presented here.

The Norwegian Library Association (NBF) initiated the School Library Promotion Campaign in 2007. Fifteen national organizations joined, among them the Norwegian Association of School Librarians. These were special interest organizations for libraries and reading, unions of librarians and teachers, author unions, the Norwegian Student Association and parent representatives in the primary school system (Ingvaldsen, 2013). The Norwegian Library Bureau, the main supplier of books and equipment to Norwegian libraries, participated actively in the work as well. The School Library Promotion Campaign emphasized the fact that the most important task of the school library is to help realizing the educational and professional objectives of schools. The campaign was part of the international @Your Library campaign, supported by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA).

Make space for reading! Norwegian Strategy for Stimulating a Love of Reading and Reading Skills ran from 2003 until 2007 (Gi rom for lesing!, 2007). The Ministry of Education and Research was responsible for and funded the campaign. The plan comprised systematic work with reading skills and language development, reading stimulation and literary dissemination.

Make Space for Reading! led to a large investment in school libraries all over Norway. The public libraries had a high level of participation in this initiative as well.

The Møre Research Centre, on assignment from the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, completed a survey in 2006-2007 of all Norwegian school libraries at both the primary and secondary levels (Barstad, Audunson, Hjortsæter, & Østlie, 2007). The 2007 report showed that there were significant differences among schools in connection with opening hours, staffing, collections and library-related competency. In addition, the report pointed out that deciding factors for the development of the school library as a positive and integrated teaching arena for students were firmly placing the school library in the planning work of schools and cooperation among school personnel. The findings of the Møre Research Centre had a substantial impact on the design of the Norwegian School Library Program.

In 2006, the report *Library Reform 2014* was submitted to the Norwegian Ministry of Culture by the Norwegian Centre for Archives, Libraries and Museums (Bibliotekreform 2014, 2006). One of the initiatives proposed was a program for school library development in order to make it possible for school libraries to use their educational potential better. The report used both the evaluation of *Make Space for Reading!* and the ongoing survey of school libraries by the Møre Research Centre as a basis for this recommendation.

On 23 May 2007, the Norwegian Minister of Education announced that a national program for school library development was to be established. NOK 40 million were later designated for the *Norwegian School Library Program*, which was to run over a four-year period and focus on the school library as an educational resource.

What has been achieved?

NIFU evaluated the outcome of the Norwegian School Library Program both at local and national levels. The report has a divided conclusion. With regard to the implementation of the program conducted by the University of Agder, the evaluation report concludes that it succeeded. School leaders, teachers, school librarians and school owners at the municipal level report that the work performed by the University of Agder was very valuable. NIFU states that much has been achieved during the program years that was not documented before (Carlsten & Sjaastad, 2014). When it comes to performance at the national level there are still challenges, however. Both local and national issues will be elaborated on below.

Projects in schools

From the project management's point of view the Norwegian School Library Program had positive effects for the schools and municipalities involved. The reports from the project schools displayed great satisfaction; they told about useful processes of development. We observed that valuable knowledge was accumulated and spread. In particular the resource schools, with two years' projects, managed to develop models visualizing the use of school libraries as pedagogical tools. The project management's observations of the work in project schools are documented in our self-evaluation reports (Universitetet i Agder, 2013). Our observations are in accordance with NIFU's findings.

We experienced that the positive development in the project schools was, to a large extent, owing to the design of the program. In their project reports, the schools highlighted two essential factors: the principal's role as project manager and the participation by the entire

project group in the supplementary training courses provided by the program. Furthermore, embedding the activities in the school system through a planning process was essential to achieve a more deliberate and systematic integration of the library in teaching. The use of the library ought to be endorsed by the school administration and in the schools' annual plans and syllabuses, and as project manager, the principal has a general responsibility for ensuring that the experience gained from development activities will benefit the school with the completion of a project.

Anchoring the projects with the school owners, the municipalities, was equally important. The municipalities determined their priorities and subsequently submitted project applications to the program. This two-step application process ensured that both the schools and the municipalities needed to reflect on the roles and remit of the school libraries. Moreover, this process included an incentive to consider shared solutions within the municipality, between schools, as well as between the schools and the public libraries.

Outcome at the national level

Although the implementation by the University of Agder was regarded as successful, NIFU points at some remaining challenges at the national level. For instance, the goal that there was to be an increase in municipalities that implement the school library in education has not been reached if we look at the country as a whole. Furthermore, still only 29-32% of those responsible for a school library in primary schools report that they have formal library-related training whereas the performance goal was 50%. According to NIFU's report national performance goals had an unclear strategy. There was neither relevant regulations in place nor enough funding to help achieving these goals totally.

With regard to knowledge dissemination, NIFU acknowledges that resource schools established school library models, but assesses that these have not had a satisfactory impact at the national level. According to NIFU this is because of the lack of a political priority and an implementation strategy for the national level. NIFU's report concludes that the strategy is unclear when it comes to the goal of developing models for scaling within and across school districts. The report claims that

“no one - neither school owner nor national level – has had the responsibility to relate the models to existing infrastructures or for embedding models at the regional or national level outside the program itself. At the macro level, there is no implementation strategy developed to align to the political strategy itself besides the limited program at the University of Agder, which has the financial frames of a research project more than a national arrangement.” (Carlsten & Sjaastad, 2014, p. 9)

Knowledge dissemination was a key part of the role of the project schools. The schools had to describe how to communicate their experiences and a proper dissemination plan was an important criterion when funding was allocated. In the project management's reports it is described how knowledge was spread in many ways, e.g., through networks in which the schools participated, by principals, teachers and school librarians giving presentations, and by schools receiving study visits. Experiences were documented on the websites of the program, in publications describing the projects of the resource schools and in papers and presentations given by the project management. Taking NIFU's findings into account, we realize that the municipalities and counties involved ought to have been responsible for spreading knowledge

more systematically. In addition national authorities might have had a stronger responsibility for communicating knowledge through information channels at the state level.

NIFU also asks for effective tools to measure to what extent resources like a school library contribute to students' effectiveness in learning. The connection between school libraries and learning outcome is an important theme in school library research, and we need more studies in this field.

In Norway the school libraries are under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Research while the Ministry of Culture is responsible for the library sector. NIFU argues that this situation leads to strategies being weakly anchored at the municipal level. Both library associations, Norwegian Library Association (NBF) and the Norwegian Association of School Librarians, have worked for a stronger legislative framework for school libraries and the project management has supported this idea. Originally one goal of the Norwegian School Library Program was looking into the legislation and regulations of school libraries. This goal was not part of the University of Agder's mandate, and unfortunately it was not followed up at the national level either. More comprehensive legislation with a clear direction would have ensured more determined efforts towards implementing the program at the national level. It would also have given a stronger foundation for continued development of school libraries after the conclusion of the program.

The Norwegian public library legislation formerly had a clause prescribing cooperation between schools and public libraries but this provision was removed in a revision of the law in 2013. Those arguing against this change, highlighted the need to make sure resources and competences were shared at the municipal level. NIFU's report supports this argument.

Program websites

Two websites were developed during the program period. The website www.skolebibliotek.uia.no disseminates information about the development projects and program activities on an ongoing basis. Here, articles are also posted on Norwegian and Nordic school library developments in general.

The website www.informasjonskompetanse.no contains ideas for teaching programs on information literacy, examples of completed projects and web assignments. It encompasses a progression pathway with relevant competence goals from the syllabus and proposals for learning objectives related to information skills.

NIFU points to the fact that the Ministry of Education and Research has made no plan about continuing the sites after the conclusion of the Norwegian School Library Program. The report questions the use of public funding for building up resources like these without having decided whether the sites are to be continued. This is a valuable comment, even though it may be argued that this is the case with rather many similar initiatives. The Ministry of Education and Research prolonged the funding of the websites throughout 2014, and efforts are made to find a solution for the future.

NIFU's recommendations

NIFU's report contains a list of recommendations:

- that the University of Agder is given the responsibility to continue the national websites on school libraries and information literacy
- that measures are provided in order to reach national aims not achieved during the 2009-13 program
- that it is considered whether educational legislation should specify that all schools have a trained school librarian available during school opening hours
- that it is discussed how school libraries are to be equipped, and how schools and public libraries are to cooperate
- that a target ratio is set for the education of school librarians and that measures are provided over a long period in order to reach this goal
- that a new school library program is established, building on the successful work of the project schools, and that school owners are held accountable for dissemination of knowledge in a larger degree.

The recommendations are very much in line with proposals from the project management and the program steering committee. Those have worked to ensure that responsibilities and tasks carried out in the program are allowed to continue after the completion in August 2013. The Norwegian Library Association (NBF) adopted a resolution in 2013 that requested working for the continuation of the program and a permanent resource centre for school libraries in Norway. Both NBF and the Norwegian Association of School Librarians support NIFU's recommendations.

Conclusion

The *Norwegian School Library Program* was the result of long lasting work and a number of advocacy and professional initiatives, including campaigns carried out by library and reading organizations, reports at state level, and a survey of all Norwegian school libraries. The program was designed to make sure the school library was included in reading education and the promotion of information literacy. NIFU, Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education, completed its evaluation of the program in March 2014.

NIFU's evaluation shows that the schools participating in the program had a positive outcome and the implementation by the University of Agder was regarded as successful. School owners, principals, teachers and school librarians reported that the follow-up by the project management was very valuable.

At the national level there are still challenges though. The total number of Norwegian schools using the library as a pedagogical tool has not increased, and still less than half of the primary schools employ a trained school librarian. NIFU's report suggests unclear national strategies, weak legislation and lack of political prioritization as explanations. NIFU also emphasises the need to disseminate knowledge from resource schools more systematically through established communication infrastructure. The evaluation report argues that the school owners, the municipalities, should have a clear responsibility to spread information about their projects.

From the project management's point of view, main success factors of the program were the requirement that the principal had to be project manager and that the entire project group had to attend compulsory courses for the school to receive funding. Furthermore, it was essential that the school had to plan for the educational use of the library. The planning process ensured cooperation between teachers and school librarians and anchored the library in the school organization. Three key words sum up what established success at school level: planning, cooperation and anchoring.

The project schools reported that they learned much from participating in the program and at the University of Agder valuable competence was acquired. NIFU' report concludes that the projects have been innovative so that new knowledge about pedagogical use of school libraries is documented. NIFU recommends that the program is continued and also that the Norwegian school library legislation is assessed in order to consider minimum standards for staffing and equipping school libraries. This is in line with aims that the Norwegian Library Association and the Norwegian Association of School Librarians are working for.

The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research has been awaiting the conclusions from NIFU before deciding whether to continue the program. Institutions and organizations dealing with school library issues in Norway are now looking forward to new governmental initiatives to promote educational use of libraries.

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