

Norway

Presteheia 1. Age mixture / 2. The LP Model

This primary school (year 1 to 7) is an open-space school that uses mixed-age teaching and a research-based model for structured collaboration between teachers to improve instructional practice. Three open-plan areas constitute the physical setting for learning, with a large hall that is used for joint activities of the whole school (e.g., singing). Student learning is organized with individual week plans that are made by teams of teachers, and signed by the parents to show shared responsibility. The week plans allow students to influence activities during some individual working time, with teachers functioning as mentors. Learning objectives are tested in written assignments every two weeks. Much emphasis is placed on providing students with experiences of mastery by allowing them to teach other students, both in mixed-age classes and in collaboration with a day-care centre (e.g., students arrange reading sessions for the younger children in the centre). Mixed-age groups are also used to foster relationships between students of different years to reduce bullying and increase student confidence.

Main Focus of Innovation: LEARNERS, TEACHERS, ORGANISATION

Other Keywords: learning space

General Information

Name of the ILE: Presteheia 1. Age mixture / 2. The LP Model

Location/Address: Presteheia 10, N – 4633 KRISTIANSAND

Website: www.minskole.no/presteheia

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Rationale

Why do you suggest that it should be included in the project? How does it respond to 21st century learning challenges?

RE 1. AGE MIXTURE

With reference to the CERI attachment and Item 1 "Analytical Work" and the constructs "intra personal" and "active process":

We organize our teaching in groups with pupils of mixed ages. We have two main schemes:

Organization of the groups:

a. Years 1 to 4 have a total of 22 weeks where one hour per week has the same programme with the academic focus on 11 different activities*, thus we have two teaching periods with the same activity, but one teaching period per week:

*Literature group / Games / Physical exercise / Construction / ICT / Arts and crafts, one group with a textile focus and one with woodworking / Dancing and playing / Food and health / English.

Together with one school day where school activities are arranged out of doors this constitutes 108 teaching periods annually for four years.

b. Years 5 to 7 have 36 weeks where three hours per week for four weeks feature the same activities, a total of nine activities**:

**Technology & design / Mathematics / Sports / ICT / Arts and crafts, one group focusing on textiles and one on woodwork and pottery / Music / Outdoors school, focusing on natural science / Food and health.

This constitutes 108 teaching periods annually for three years.

Years 1 to 4:

One eleventh of the pupils per year are in a group of 10 to 15 pupils.

Years 5 to 7:

One ninth of the pupils per year are in a group of 10 to 15 pupils.

The two educational columns: Dialogue & socialization, and the learning pyramid.

"Dialogue and socialization" focuses on relation building between pupils who for the rest of the week do not socialize during the organized part of the day in school. They become acquainted with pupils from other years in a learning situation. This creates an arena where they speak with and not about each other, an important difference which in turn reduces bullying and increases security and confidence. Pupil self-insight increases, causing a larger Johari window to appear.

"The learning pyramid" gives insight into the setting that yields differing levels of learning effect. Being a teacher or teaching others gives an effect of 90 per cent. In mixed age groups pupils are often given the role of teaching other pupils, without this itself needing to be organized. This allows us to exploit the resource it is to be a teacher of co-pupils. Pupils also experience reinforced mastering because they at times know something others do not, or can do something others cannot, even with respect to pupils who are older than themselves.

RE: THE LP MODEL

This is a highly structured and explored system, and the background for it can be found by searching for Thomas Nordahl and the LP website. Prestehøia School was part of the two-year pilot project in the municipality of Kristiansand. We are now in the third year and have implemented this model in our regular operations. The pilot survey (T1) showed great interest and confidence in the opportunities provided by the model. The testing (T2) confirmed the perception that the model is efficient in many areas.

We believe that an essential reason we benefit so much from using this model is that, as an open-plan school, we have an automatic on-going dialogue in the staff that works similarly to aspects of structured peer supervision. We see that beyond the model structure there are large gains in openness when themes are presented in the work groups.

We have opted for a group composition that is virtually the same as in the original model with one exception. All members of the teaching staff are involved, which means that the headmaster, deputy headmaster and the head of the SFO (the after-school day-care programme) also are regular group members in separate discussion groups. Teachers and management alike state that this has been an element that has contributed to quality and increased insight, based on the LP model aim of having the widest possible perspective when working with the challenges raised by the teacher groups, i.e. a panoramic view of the learning environment.

How does it respond to 21st century learning challenges?

CERI's in-depth presentation of the projects states that:

"... providing information to students sitting passively at their desk is simply archaic.."

"... research on learning has shown that people construct new knowledge and understandings based on what they already know and believe. The importance of allowing students to take control of their own learning and, thereby, become active learners who are able to understand complex subject matter ..."

The mixed age groups in our opinion allow for precisely this type of learning arena. Needless to say, these arenas must be well thought out, well organized and ably led. We are an open-plan school where the groups of pupils that are distributed between the form teachers range vary in age and size, from 33 to 54 pupils. This also makes it easier for pupils to find someone to have a good and trusting relation with because they can choose from among more pupils. It also allows flexible solutions when it comes to deploying the teachers and other staff at our disposal. These can be ad hoc and long-term solutions.

The LP model strengthens our opportunities to find ways / solutions / insight into the working day in school that we are innovators and actors in. This opens for better adapted teaching because our overview becomes truer and more correct. This is not only seen through our own eyes, but also in view of the input we receive from our colleagues, including colleagues we do not work with on a day-to-day basis.

Evidence

Is there any evidence or indications showing that this initiative achieves the outcomes that it is aiming at?

We believe that T1 and T2 of the LP model give good indications. We are confident that with his research expertise Professor Thomas Nordahl can elaborate more on this than we have space for here. We are comfortable with our placement above the national level in the pupil, parent and teacher surveys we carry out on an annual basis. Needless to say, there is also room for improvement! Our response rate in the parental survey (69 per cent in 2008) and 100% for the two others lends credence to the numbers.

We are nevertheless of the opinion that those who respond do so based on the assumption that what they experience at our school is what is normal.

On the national tests we also score higher than other schools, but we also see that there is still some way to go before we have eliminated level 1 scores.

The feedback we have received from our many visitors, including Mark Vaughan and student teachers, is that Prestehelia School enjoys a good reputation. We also note that some people move to the district because of our school.

Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE

What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners' social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)

We refer to the attached PowerPoint presentation in English. Our vision is "En skole for fremtiden gjennom trygghet og aktiv læring" (A school for the future through confidence and active learning). This also appears to fit well with some of the basis for CERI.

Our week plans, signed by parents to have them share responsibility for satisfying the learning objectives which we test every second week in Years 5 to 7, also feature social goals. The core learning objectives are, needless to say, based on the sub-goals for Year 2, Year 4 and Year 7 of the Knowledge Promotion curriculum, but are also specified in more detail in the year plans and week plan.

Key terms such as these: "skill to act through confidence in own ability to master challenges", "high relational competence, solid knowledge and good attitudes to face changes", "succeed every day", "experience learning styles and develop learning strategies", "be ensured of good basic knowledge and skills".

Learners

Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?

We refer to the main points made about MIXED AGE GROUPS and the LP MODEL. Some of what we have mentioned above and will deal with below is thus not tied to specific pedagogy or methods, rather being on a didactic level.

Facilitators

Who are the teachers/facilitators? Who are the leaders? What are their professional backgrounds? What are their roles?

We refer to the discussion on the main points about MIXED AGE GROUPS and the LP MODEL. The formal training of our teachers is similar to what is common in Norwegian schools, most of our teachers being general teachers with four or five years of studies, and 20 per cent are pre-school teachers with additional training.

The organization of the mixed age groups in Years 1 to Year 4 involves all the teachers of these years. Nine teachers teach Years 5 through 7, some of these regularly also teaching Years 1 through 4. The roles they play are in keeping with a general Norwegian model using the entire range from the lecture model to the mentor/guide role, where the social pedagogy element that is not so prominent in the Pisa study has a focal role: well-being and confidence.

Organization of the ILE

How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?

The age-desegregation system is, as a system, explained in question 2 (RE 1. Age mix). As the allocated amount of time spent, it shows that the age mix/de-segregation is a far much larger system for the grades 5– 7 as it comprises 180 minutes for 36 of the 38 weeks the pupils attend school per year and goes on for each year adding up to a total of 108 lessons of 60 minutes for 3 years.

How do learners and facilitators interact?

As the activities are different, it is incorrect to say that what is indicated below goes for all of them all of the time. But although the curriculum is designed as part of the national KNOWLEDGE PROMOTION, the teachers for the group plan the detailed activities. And there is ample room for each teacher to give more (or less) space for interaction, and assessment a.s.o. As mentioned in question 2 of the first text (original application), part of our aim is to enable the pupil to become a facilitator/ teacher as well part of the time, this with regard to the efficiency of how best to acquire learning (The Learning Pyramid) and to give all pupils the experience of the fact that in many areas, also younger children know more than older ones. This boost to their self-esteem is a vital part / possibility.

Most of the activities included in the de-segregated groups are settings where creativity may be an important part, a part of a human being's brain used too seldom in our opinion. So therefore the arena for this, when meeting younger and older pupils, will widen and facilitate this quality.

What kind of pedagogy do they follow?

We find it a bit confusing and may be unnecessary to categorize the kind/type of pedagogy. Our school is in general largely based on pupil-participation according to the week-plan issued every Monday. The age mix runs parallel to this.

What curriculum is used?

As you may know, the current Norwegian plan: KNOWLEDGE PROMOTION, was implemented in 2006. The main change from the previously initiated plan in 1997, was giving the teachers a much larger space for choosing their own ways to reach the goals set in the plan. In my opinion it made the teachers again, much more than in the 1997-plan. So in the 2006-plan the pedagogy is given much more individual space and to me this suits well research showing that the best way to accomplish results is to give the teachers the possibility of using methods/didactics/systems they master. So even though we as an open-plan-school are based largely on intensive cooperation within the teams, the choice of methods etc may vary from teacher to teacher. Especially in this type of activity which is much more than the rest, a challenge for the teacher and his/her group.

Each of the seven school years occupies an area of an open-plan space:

Years 1 and 2 have a red area, with each year having its own main section, and in the middle between these two there is a common area with computers and a kitchen section. Before and after school these premises are used by the after-school day care programme (SFO).

Years 3 and 4 are in a blue area, quite like the red area physically. SFO occasionally uses this area when several activities are taking place and there is a need for more space.

Years 5 and 7 are in a green area. As this area has an additional year, Year 7 is in an expanded area. In general the area is laid out based on the same idea. This area also has kitchen space.

Each year team, consisting of contact teachers, teachers and other educational staff and assistants, has the total responsibility for the teaching. The teams prepare the week plans that are posted on our website on Mondays. They are free to deploy the employees as they see fit. There is virtually no other use of these learning premises so that the furniture and fixtures constitute an active educational element in satisfying the objectives.

Each open-plan area has an area head with time allocated for this purpose. This person is also a member of our educational management group, which has a weekly meeting. The headmaster and the deputy headmaster are also members. Minutes are kept.

Each open-plan area has weekly compulsory meetings on the work agenda. Minutes are kept.

How do learners and facilitators interact?

Many of the dialogues and much of the information on Mondays in the open-plan areas are related to the week plans. Everyone have a new plan each week, with learning objectives spanning one or two weeks. Pupil involvement is mostly found in the spaces set aside in the plans for influencing the use of available working time. Teacher mentor functions are also in place here as the premise supplier for the pupils' reflection.

Evaluations occur continually as needed, and we have changed the work plans from last year significantly, making them more detailed and precise with slightly less options for pupil choices.

What kind of pedagogy do they follow?

Even if most of our teachers have their basic training from the university college system, some of the further education is from the university level. There is reason to claim that when it comes to defining educational methods many styles are in use. As is apparent from some of the pictures in the attached PowerPoint presentation, we see more of a range of teaching styles than one model. Thus pupils and parents will experience the whole range from traditional lectures to inclusive-pedagogy models. We use variants of the New Zealand model, and have been inspired by Nylund School, Stavanger, and others. The key is the wide range, not any particular methods such as storyline. A key element, however, is LIFT.

What curriculum is used?

We use the Knowledge Promotion plan and municipal plans and standards and some of our own reading, writing and mathematics plans for Years 1 to 4.

Learning Context

In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?

The physical setting is three open-plan areas with a large hall that is used both for groups and joint activities, such as assemblies, where we sing together each month. We have a school library, music room, gym and arts and crafts room.

What does the physical learning environment look like?

The physical learning environment scores far above the national average, 4.08 against the national score of 3.06 in the 2008 pupil survey.

The outdoors area is being developed, as we are in the last year but one of the municipal project "Aktiv Ute" (Active outdoors), where a pupil group, parent group and staff group are engaged in drawing up a total plan for the outdoors area, highly required after 10 years of operation.

Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?

Our school receives no funding beyond what is granted by the local authority to each school. There is no community hall or other common areas. We cooperate with the day-care centres which send their children to us before school starts, and our pupils arrange reading sessions for them. They are also invited to Christmas celebrations where they meet their "big brother" or "big sister", who has been trained for their new tasks.

History of ILE

Who initiated it? For what reasons was it started and with what purpose? Have these changed since?

The local authority had a clear intention when the school was planned as an open flexible learning arena. The headmaster at the time drew up ambitious plans which the employees were aware of when they applied for positions at the school; this is the school they would like to help create. In my fourth year as the headmaster, I continue to see the same commitment of the employees in their efforts to create an inclusive school for all children, parents/guardians and employees. A key aspect of this was to establish close cooperation with the then Agder University College, now the University of Agder. The current headmaster has been appointed by the University of Agder as one of two external members of the board of the Faculty of Humanities and Education, and we are a partner school for teacher training.

Have these changed since?

As the new headmaster in 2005 I have paid attention to maintaining the good reputation the school has in the local community and academic communities. There are thus few clear changes, we have given more focus to clarifying and documenting the procedures and standards the school has developed over time.

When it comes to LP, this was initiated by the Kristiansand Director of Schools and the Pedagogical-Psychological Service.

Funding of the ILE

How is it funded?

Our school is funded in accordance with a municipal model based on a basic subsidy that constitutes approximately eight per cent of operating expenses, while the remainder is funded by the fixed pupil rates per pupil. Less than 1 per cent comes from rental income, lecture revenue etc.

Learning Outcomes

What are the learning outcomes achieved by the ILE, including academic, social, interpersonal and meta-cognitive outcomes? How is learning assessed?

The national tests as well as our own tests show that we are a school scoring above the national level, but not to any high degree. Many of our learning results are not mathematically measurable, as they concern such social learning objectives as inclusion, responsibility for own learning, development empathy etc.

The annual pupil, parent and teacher surveys yield acceptable figures.

Our school has many opportunities as we are an open-plan school, and we believe that we have a flexible learning environment. This gives arenas for cooperation and interaction for each of the years and also across each age group within the mixed age group schemes.

How is learning assessed?

The main system for our school is that every fortnight the pupils are tested according to the teaching goals set in their two previous week-schedules. They know that they will be tested and which goals to achieve. This is a written test, an assessment, to find out what they have learnt and they can compare it to what they themselves meant about how well have accomplished the goals beforehand.

Usually, the activities in the age-mix-groups are not directly tested in this test. This specific learning is achieved as part of the weekly 3-hour-periods and assessment is an integrated part of the work. It can be made through competitions etc, mostly among varying groups, but also individually. But testing is not a prominent part of this activity.

The number of teachers involved is indicated by the number of groups, 11 and 9, 20 all in all. To write about individual traits about this in detail will probably not be useful and will anyhow depend on a written statement from twenty different teachers.

You ask: Do they use formative assessment? If so, could you explain more about how they put this into practise?

According to Wikipedia there are a number of different definitions of “formative assessment”. Some of these can be defined like schools have functioned for hundreds of years. We do not think like this or aim for this, neither in the age-mix-groups nor in general. We think that all we do in dialogue, questions, discussions, etc. whether in groups set by the teachers or by the pupils themselves are intended to enhance learning/understanding through reflection and self-regulated learning. The bottom line is to promote the feeling of mastering skills, give pupil and teacher alike the insight needed by both to know what is achieved/learnt and what will be the best way forward. It is not to give grades or to grade the pupils as a mean of internal competition between group members.

Our LP programme gives us valuable insight into what we do. The LP structure forces us to expand our approach with critical views of our own practice.

Our pupil conversations give insight and good opportunities for adjustment of the individual learning arenas on the pupil level. As for most schools, this also takes place via the parental conversations we have every six months and the active dialogue we have in the Presteheia book. Based on the signed week plans there is written dialogue between contact teachers and each home about each individual pupil.

The national systems also contribute based on a special standard for follow-up of these.

Documentation describing or evaluating the ILE

Is there documentation on this learning environment? Is there a website? Films? Research reports or evaluations? Other forms of documentation? (please supply references or links)

Is there documentation on this learning environment?

Above we have pointed out:

- Annual national tests
- Annual pupil, parent and teacher surveys
- Annual municipal tests and standards
- Our own standards, continuing learning objective tests and weekly documentation of activities.

We also find that parents are an active factor (69 per cent response rate for the parental survey), and they are keen when it comes to demands and expectations in relation to what we do for each child and as a school.

We understand from the many visits we receive each year that we continue to be an interesting school. During the LP pilot phase we received two visits from Denmark, where the model was in the preparatory stage. Being a teacher training partner for the University of Agder requires us to maintain quality in what we do and in the guidance we carry out for our future colleagues.

Website

www.minskole.no/presteheia

Films

We have no official film. Student teachers own films of their practice sessions, and we work with Marte Meo methods on some year levels.

Research reports or evaluations

To my knowledge, before my time the school was the arena for a project that was considered successful among a sample of schools. This is nevertheless not the same as being the subject of research.

As a stage of the LP project two status analyses were carried out, T1 and T2. Professor Thomas Nordahl can probably elaborate on these. Our assessment of the figures is that we stand out quite positively.

The two visits from Denmark were experiences that gave us and the visitors a clear sense that we were doing well and that the critical issues were dealt with well. We subsequently received an inquiry from one of the schools about specific future cooperation.

Other forms of documentation

The current headmaster was the head of Høvåg School in the municipality of Lillesand from 1996 to 2005. The school was made a bonus school in 2002 and a demonstration school in 2003 – 2005. The headmaster was “the subject” of research in connection with the project called SOL (Jorunn Møller / Otto Laurits Fuglestad: ISBN – 13: 978-82-15-00826-4), which was the Norwegian element of SSLP (Successful School Leadership Project). I refer to pages 45 – 57.

Other information you consider to be relevant to describe the ILE

My subjective experience is based on my years of teaching lower secondary school, nine years as a teacher union representative and being the head representative in the municipality of Kristiansand for what was then Norsk Lærergag (Norwegian Teachers' Union), a delegate at five national meetings of NL. I was the headmaster of Høvåg School in the municipality of Lillesand from 1996 to 2005, thus contributing to developing a bonus and demonstration school, and from 2005 the headmaster of Prestehelia School.

I see a staff performing well above normal. They have a genuine eye for each individual pupil and the resources each pupil and the pupils have, and the role of homes in this.

The feedback I receive from visitors, users and student teachers gives us pleasure in our day-to-day work and guarantees that we deliver services of good quality.

Prestehelia 5. August and 17. March 2009

Espen Lange

Headmaster