

Norway

Vigra School

This primary school for student's age 5 to 10 has the objective to find a suitable approach for all pupils instead of using special education, in particular with respect to the students' language development. Emphasis is placed on a good transition from kindergarten to first grade, by means of early diagnostic assessments and interventions when necessary. Parents are informed in several meetings ("Parents' school") about ways to best support their children, which is regarded as particularly important because the municipality has a low proportion of adults with higher education. Student learning is organised with weekly plans that specify learning goals, and weekly tests give feedback on the progress. Teaching methods include the use of an adaptive computer programme and language workshops which are given by special education teachers, allowing the students to make their own books and alternate among different tasks adapted to their level of skills. Teachers have regular meetings to exchange experiences, discuss pedagogical literature, etc. New measurements are evaluated systematically to further improve teaching practice.

Main Focus of Innovation: CONTENT, RESOURCES, ORGANIZATION,

Other Keywords: equity, technology-rich

General Information

Name of the ILE: Vigra School

Location/Address: 6040 VIGRA

Website: www.vigra.gs.mr.no

Rationale

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

The learning environment we have chosen is Reading and writing for class levels 1-4. Criteria for selecting this case were based on its difference from traditional teaching methods for reading and writing. We have optimised learning in this area so we can execute a broader and more suitable approach for all pupils instead of simply using special education.

The driving force for our reading and writing approach for class years 1-4 is our Language Workshop (Språkverkstaden), where pupils learn to make their own books, among other tasks. Pupils alternate between listening, speaking, reading and writing, and everyone receives tasks adapted to their level of skills. This method is used every day. At the end of every class everyone comes together for a discussion where each pupil can summarise what he or she has learned.

The pupils are very motivated to participate in the language workshop; competence aims for learning were included in the different stations in the form of play. The language workshop is the learning environment the school most often presents to display its success with the "Schools of Good Quality" program. (See our webpage www.vigra.gs.no, in the menu area "Modellforsøket".)

Vigra School applies a methodical process known as ICT in learning to read, starting in first grade (class level 1). We have been doing this for many years; classes are allowed to and use the workshop every day. The reader we use for first graders, (Gyldendal) has all its learning assignments available from internet so pupils can also become competent computer users from when they start schooling. We have an average of 2 pupils per computer throughout the school, but we also have a room with as many as 30 computers for little ones so teachers can take all 28 first graders at the same time. The pupils work at their own levels in the reader on an individual basis. With this overview, educators can keep an eye on each pupil at his or her particular skill level; adaptation here is optimal, and the chances for each pupil to be able to advance in reading and writing are very good.

That ICT is an integrated part of our school's reading and writing program is not accidental. We have built further on Arne Trageton's research on writing oneself to reading, alongside Jørgen Frost's model for use language workshops. Vigra School has developed its own model for a language workshop based on our teachers' knowledge and experience about what good teaching methods for reading and writing should be, combined with recent research.

I refer in particular to Report to the Storting #31, (2007-08) "Quality in School" page 37: "Learning conversations – a lot more than Norwegian".

Enhancing staff skills

Many of our teachers have worked at our school for many years – 6 of them have enhanced their teaching competence in the field of reading and writing before and during development work done at our school these last 8 years. The most important enhancement to teaching skills at the school has been internal; group time for teachers is used to update knowledge and is an arena for sharing experience and discussing how we will solve the many challenges we face. Recent professional literature for teachers was purchased and read, and discussions were held about current teaching practices. Our teachers are good at recommending new literature for one another, and we send new teachers to relevant workshops as often as we can. We use assistants in our largest classes, who cooperate closely with the educators to improve pupil reading skills every day.

Early intervention, good transitions and parental responsibility

Early intervention is a key word at Vigra School, and good transition routines for pupils leaving kindergarten to begin first grade at our school give us valuable knowledge about the pupils before they even begin school in August. Each pupil in first grade is assessed during the first week of school regarding reading ability, and all of them receive an adapted Norwegian reader suited to the level at which they should begin. Permanent routines for cooperation between staff members in the classrooms and special education teachers in the language workshop make it possible to follow each pupil's skill development in reading, and ongoing mapping of skills development helps each pupil move on to a higher level when they are ready to advance. The pupils are very motivated in this process and it is contagious; parents are given clear tasks at home to follow up on reading development of their child. Through our Parents' School (Foreldreskolen) held in the spring and by using contact parents for classes that hold meetings at the school, we are better able to point out basic expectations that we have to parents regarding reading that pupils should do at home every day. Recent reports based on research point to a connection between attitudes at home and knowledge about a child's learning outcome as being important information we can share with parents and advisory bodies at the school.

I refer particularly to the Report to the Storting #31, (2007-08) "Quality in School" page 46, where it states: "We expect a lot from everyone at Vigra School". Obvious expectations that everyone will follow up on the important practices agreed upon, and school leaders question whether we are on the right track when they discuss these expectations with teachers by looking at the teachers' weekly plans and by asking how these are structured, by visiting classrooms and speaking with pupils. Parents make important contributions to reading by working directly with the Parents' Council (FAU). We have created the Parents' School based a model used at Storhamar School in Hamar – and we have a special focus on the parents of pupils who will be starting first grade at our school. We arrange a meeting in March for these parents, and two meetings are held in early fall with particular focus on research about the significance parents have for pupil learning, and we hold an introduction to our methods for teaching reading and arithmetic. These measures are new – this is the second year we have implemented them in practice. I consider this an important measure in a municipality where the percentage of adults with higher education is about 17 %.

This kind of constructive cooperation between school and parents has gone on for many years now. With the goodwill shown by parents at the Parents School, we see this as an initiative that has been gladly received by all the adults. As head teacher, I believe it is of great significance for parents to be on track at an early stage to improve learning outcome among our pupils, as research shows; the parents of our pupils get to know one another and feel comfortable in each others' company, and the school is then able to give its pupils a highway to competence in all subjects and social skills.

Vigra school has been a Focus School for the teaching of reading and writing in the Municipality of Giske; we have also carried out a project called Model testing of adapted learning/special education (Modellforsøket Tilpassa oppl ring/Spesialundervisning) – an essential project that was initiated by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. The goal of this project was to better adapt teaching of all pupils, and thus reduce the number of pupils needing special education. The Educational Psychology Services (PPT) in Giske collaborated with Volda University College as the initiators of this project in cooperation with our school.

As we participated in the School of Good Quality Program for 2006-08, we were particularly chosen for the area of specialisation in reading and writing at school. (See the enclosed brochure)

Vigra School is now into its second period as a partner of the Comenius School Program. The theme of our first project was "Divided by Language, United through History". This was a three-year project that terminated in 2007; all classes were involved. We won the Comenius Award in 2007. The justification for the award states that "Vigra School has shown the ability to carry out long-term plans where international perspective is a central theme".

The project we are now involved in is two years long. We are cooperating with schools in Spain, Ireland, France and Germany. The theme is "Healthy body, Healthy mind and a Healthy school". This theme is of great importance nowadays; the focus on physical activity is important for all European schools related to a problem apparent in all European countries. The Parents' Council at Vigra is strongly involved in this project by participating in practical activities. All our pupils from class levels 1-7 participate.

Learning challenges in the 21st century

Putting more emphasis on basic reading and writing skills is perhaps the most important challenge for compulsory education in the 21st century. We know that about 25% of all pupils who leave compulsory school have so poor reading skills that they have problems using knowledge in upper secondary school and in working life. Reading skills and comprehension are basic for all other subjects a pupil will study throughout compulsory schooling. At Vigra School, we have put great effort into making all teachers better reading teachers; reading lessons are included in all class hours and all subjects for class levels 1-7. We have also put particular emphasis on year levels 5-7 the last two years.

Evidence

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

During the last ten years, we have developed and improved tools that make the school and teachers better able to provide pupils and parents with prospects that are based on pupil results. Weekly plans with goals for all subjects and diversified weekly plan tests based on just these goals give teachers, pupils and parents good feedback. The pupil plan called *My Practice Plan* (Min Øvingsplan) provides an opportunity to reach a bit beyond the curriculum or do extra work in areas where pupils, parents and teachers agree extra work is needed. Central educational surveys that have arisen alongside the national tests show that our pupils score higher compared with other pupils in the municipality, the county or across the nation. Vigra School was a forerunner in a pilot project to map out Norwegian language skills in grades 1 and 2.

We use the Carlsten Reading Test and Johnsen's Writing Test in our **yearly investigation** of Norwegian language skills, which are both well used and well known among most Norwegian schools. By comparing classes over an eight year period, we see clear evidence that measures implemented by our school are having positive effects on learning outcome. We stopped comparing our school to national averages in such surveys and investigations because it is most interesting for us to compare current class groups with previous classes and take a look at the measures we use and the tools we apply. We have **good pedagogical discussions** when we review results from these investigations and we **change how we use resources** if we find that pupils in a particular class are having special difficulties. In our experience, if we are to create good results over time as educators, we need to work **patiently and systematically**, and work must be **deeply rooted in school plans and in cooperation with our school leaders**. It is important that a school's head teacher demand practical application and results, that parents in the Parents' Council Working Committee celebrate our victories when performance is good and ask what measures can be introduced when results are not so good. None of our teachers should feel they struggle alone with professional or social challenges – this is a **joint responsibility** that characterizes our school philosophy. Our organization is as flexible as it can be to offer **early intervention programs** to help pupils when new needs arise.

In the last two years, the Municipality of Giske has put particular emphasis on the Conversations for Quality System (Kvalitetssamtalen) to map out progress and learning results among pupils every year in local schools. Politicians are interested in hearing more about how this system develops and about results from schools in the Municipality of Giske. We consider this very positive news.

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)

Vigra School has set a goal to be among the best schools in Norway where reading skills are concerned. We would like to see reading skills develop for pupils below the critical skills level and help raise their competence as much as possible. We have a job to do; we need to keep motivation up and inspire pupils with the joy of reading by the time they reach intermediate class levels – reading in all subjects is one of the measures we have introduced.

Where enjoyment and good social relationships between pupils is concerned, we must set a goal to improve the results of our yearly pupil survey that is taken by class levels 5 to 7 to show that fewer pupils experience bullying during school hours. We have put a lot of effort into this area at school and at home, and we are writing an anti-bullying contract to be signed between pupil, school and the pupil's home. School employees, the pupil council and the parents' council and parents' liaison committee (FAU/SU) have received input from all the pupils in order to write this contract, which will be given to each and every pupil at a formal ceremony. Parents are also invited. The contract shall be signed at home by the parents and pupils, after which it is returned to the pupil's contact teacher.

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?

When selecting a case, the target group is all pupils in year levels 1-4. At Vigra School, there are currently 104 pupils (112 pupils as of autumn 2010). Pupils are between the ages of 5 ½ and 10 years old.

Facilitators

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

All educators in year levels 1-4, assistants who work at these levels, team leaders for levels 1-4 and leaders of school administration - all these people have an important and decisive daily role in pupil learning and progress.

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?

Erling Lars Dale and Jarl Inge Wærness have written about **the seven differentiation categories** in their book entitled "Differentiation and adaptation in Primary and Lower Secondary Education and Training – Room for Everyone, and an Eye on the Individual". These men have been studying schools that have shown positive and sustainable development over time. They have found that these are schools that have developed differentiated learning opportunities and programs. We have been investigating Vigra School based on their model (page 157 of the book) and we know that we are well within all their categories by a good margin.

Curricula we use is based on **Knowledge Promotion 2006 / the Norwegian Education Act / the Norwegian Public Administration Act** – and other national guidelines used for schools these past few years: Recent regulations concerning individual assessment (1st August 2009), Homework assistance (August 2009), Physical activity (August 2009) and Early Intervention for class levels 1-7 as described in Item 2 above.

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?

Learning shall be done in the classroom, outdoors and inside, in the language workshop, in the computer room, in our *sponsor cooperation program* between 1st and 6th graders, and also between 2nd and 7th graders. The indoor physical environment is not optimal; it is not up to current required standards for school buildings, and we depend on financing to be able to make important changes to the building. The physical conditions are still no hindrance to development and good results.

Societal resources are certainly used because the school is subject to municipal authority. The Municipality of Giske is a good place for education – the municipal administration and politicians support and initiate development work and demand results, as every employer should. I should also mention our parent group and advisory committee, FAU and SU, that support our Vigra's work and which are driving forces in dispatching information to all the parents.

The state's Educational Psychology Services (PPT) is an especially important supporter of the school, in its systematic work and implementation of measures for individual pupil development.

History of ILE

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

Reading and writing as these are taught at the school today is a result of an experience from the school needing to raise competence levels in these areas to meet the needs of our pupils for adaptation. Learning in these areas is based on known and traditional methods for readership training, in connection with new ways of organizing learning using new tools. Taking a differentiated and adapted approach seriously at the school means that school teachers and staff must consider the children's different levels of development when the children begin school. This can be done by having good routines to cooperate with kindergartens and the 5-year olds there, investigating the children early to being able to meet the needs of a child just as he or she starts development. Having parents participate from day one is also an obvious goal.

Funding of the ILE

How is it funded?

State and municipal funds are used.

Learning Outcomes

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

National tests are used alongside internal investigations and survey that are repeated over a number of years. These show that our pupils are able to **break the reading code** and have more systematic reading comprehension **far earlier and during first grade** than seen in results from 8 years ago. This also relates to how the L-97 Requirements were different from Knowledge Promotion 2006, but this alone cannot explain everything. Development of **a framework plan for kindergartens**, where measures for reading improvement are the most important subject have influenced the school to change its practice in transition routines that we had used for many years.

Enhancing competence among educators, purposeful development work through many years anchored in leadership at school, and support at home create talented pupils who are motivated to learn.

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)

Webpage: www.vigra.gs.mr.no : shows the language workshop under the menu item "modellforsøket, where templates and examples of weekly plans are found for all classes and subject goals, learning styles/strategies, differentiated weekly plan tests for 5-7 graders, *My Practice Plan* and the form to document adapted learning that is sent to the pupils' homes twice a year.

The research report *Adapted Learning / Special Education – a model test* (Tilpassa opplæring / spesialundervisning - eit modellforsøk)

Report to the Storting #31 (2007-08), Quality in School.

Other information you consider to be relevant to describe the ILE

Vigra School's future goals: "WE FLY TOGETHER" was developed during school year 2003-04. This is visualised as a flock of geese in V-formation on their way, flying high and far ahead, as a symbol for teaching. Everyone must cooperate if we are to reach the goals we want to achieve. The geese encourage each other to stay in formation; they are social fliers and show empathy when one member of the flock is in a difficult situation. They reach their goal every year through loyalty, and by using common instinct they get the job done and fly thousands of miles to reach their goals.

The geese in flying formation are and will continue to be a symbol for Vigra School – a community and an obligation, empathy and willpower to continue the work of learning will describe our school. A motivated talented pupil who experiences a sense of mastery is our goal. (Web page www.vigra.gs.mr.no – about our vision. And our brochure)