



**Directorate for Education
Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), OECD**

Innovative Learning Environments (ILE)

INVENTORY CASE STUDY

Valby early development centre and primary school, Larvik – an active learning approach

Norway

This learning environment consists of an early-development day-care centre and a primary school for children aged 1 to 13. Learning is regarded as a comprehensive and continuous process in which children act as active learners from the earliest stages, to smooth the progress from day-care centre to school. Learning is organized in groups, which remain constant during parts of the week, but the size varies according to the children's needs. Teachers regularly spend time with small groups of children to facilitate interactions. Pedagogy is inspired by social-constructivist ideas and open to alternative philosophies if useful for the children. Great emphasis is placed on staff professional development, which is organized by having teachers cooperate with a colleague project mate to do assignments, develop and reflect on good interventions and later share improved practice with the rest of the staff.

This Innovative Learning Environment case study has been prepared specifically for the OECD/ILE project. Research has been undertaken by Øyvind Sæther and Svein Andersen from the BI Norwegian business school together with Lone Lønne Christiansen from the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, following the research guidelines of the ILE project.

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Innovative Learning Environments (ILE) Project

Inventory case study: From principles to practice – an action learning process approach at Valby Oppvekstsenter (early development centre and primary school), Larvik municipality in Norway

This learning environment consists of an early-development day-care centre and a primary school for children aged 1 to 13. Learning is regarded as a comprehensive and continuous process in which children act as active learners from the earliest stages, to smooth the progress from day-care centre to school. Learning is organized in groups, which remain constant during parts of the week, but the size varies according to the children's needs. Teachers regularly spend time with small groups of children to facilitate interactions. Pedagogy is inspired by social-constructivist ideas and is open to alternative philosophies if useful for the children. Great emphasis is placed on staff professional development, which is organized by having teachers cooperate with a colleague project companion (mate) to do assessments, develop and reflect on good interventions and later share improved practice with the rest of the staff.

Main Focus of Innovation: TEACHERS, ORGANISATION

Other keywords: appreciative feedback, action learning

A. Aims, nature and history of the ILE

A.1 Background/National context

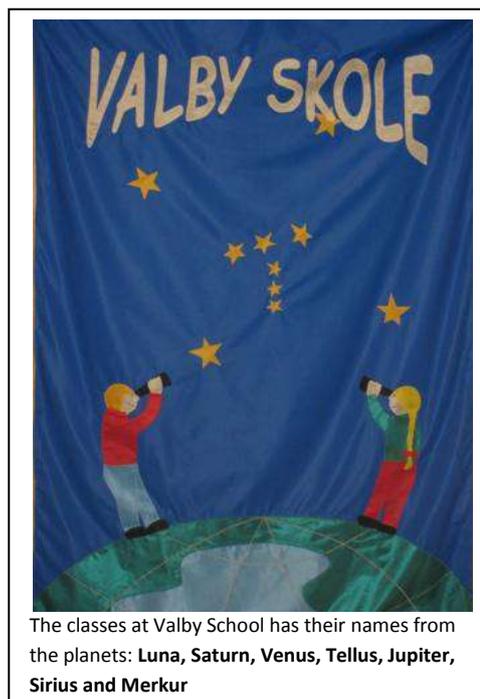
Education for all is a basic precept of Norwegian educational policy. Children and young people must have an equal right to education, regardless of where they live, gender, social and cultural background or any special needs. All public education in Norway is free of charge, while kindergartens have parental fees.

The Norwegian Parliament (the Storting) and the Government define the goals and decide the framework for the education sector. National standards are ensured through legislation, regulations, curricula and framework plans. The municipalities are responsible for operating and administering primary and lower secondary schools, whereas the county authorities are responsible for upper secondary education and training.

Legislation and regulations, including the National Curriculum, form a binding framework, but within this framework the municipal and county authorities, schools and teachers can influence the implementation of the education and training. Each school has a head teacher and various boards, councils and committees.

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

In the subject curricula the five basic skills are integrated in a way that is adapted to each subject. These skills are: Being able to read, being able to express oneself orally, being able to express oneself in writing, being able to develop numeracy and being able to use digital tools.

During the reform, new practices are developed in cooperation between local school owners (municipalities), school leaders, teachers, pupils and their parents. The case presented is an example of a local initiative that exploits opportunities in the spirit of this reform. At Valby school general principles and objectives are translated into practical and unique working models. This innovation is about starting a new school – Valby - and making it into a learning organization, building explicitly on an action learning strategy for school development.

A.2 Valby School

Valby School is located in the community of Larvik. It is a primary school. When started in 2000, it covered 1-4 grades; in the fall of 2011 it will expand to cover 1-7 grades. Today it has 167 pupils, approximately 15% are multicultural. The principal was hired in 1999 to be involved both in the construction process and to develop ideas about a modern and dynamic school. The construction project was well organized and staffed. However, the pedagogical project was left to the principal to develop on her own.



The staffs were hired from January 2000, for the start-up in August the same year. Three staff meetings were held during the spring, and one seminar where new teachers could meet and get to know each other. Apart from this the staffs were all occupied with their existing jobs in other schools. To compensate for this, the principal, together with four other principals in the city, created an informal network for school development.

A.3 The innovation story

The principal's, and soon the whole school's basic idea was that the Valby primary school should be "a living project", a continuous, never ending story of learning and improvement. From 2006, the kindergarten and the school became a common unit, an early development centre and primary school. Initially the principal was the first school headmaster with a preschool teacher background, and the teachers came from different schools and kindergartens. Due to this, they felt an urgent need to professionalize their pedagogy in one field at a time, starting with mathematics, then Norwegian and then English.

They formulated the schools aims as follows: At Valby School everybody experiences

- Safety and mastery
- That to help each other is natural
- That learning is both challenging and fun

Due to the never ending story-approach to school improvement, this school has been part of several development projects and programmes over the period from 2000 and until today, starting with being a Bonus School characterized with good use of resources and flexibility in organisation. The main reason for being nominated as a Bonus School in 2002 was that the school blended levels. The pupils were trained 1st and 2nd class together, and then 3rd and 4th class together. The school got permission for the experiment from the national authorities, but had to stop the experiment because of severe resistance among the parents.

During a local project from 2001-2004, they developed an interest for so-called action learning and in co-operation with Tromsø University established a project on this topic. Through the action learning approach, they experienced the benefit of using each other's practical stories to develop a better common practice. This approach was a working method which formed the staff as an investigating and learning staff. In 2004-2006 the school joined the national project "Room for reading" with the project "Sure, the boys can read!", and in 2007-2009, they joined the national "*The knowledge promotion – from words to action*" program with the project called "A head taller than oneself" in combination with a local project for coherence between kindergarten and 1st class in school. The project "A head taller than oneself" focuses a coherent learning path for kindergarten and school, where the children's core skills and learning drive are the aim and the main leadership tool is action learning. In this project they call the action learning tool "the project companion". Through these projects the school has developed, as has the pupils' arithmetic and reading skills, as well as their innovations for school development. As part of the development strategy, and to give energy and a feeling of mastery and uniqueness to the school, they have used the local media as a tool to tell the parents and the environment how good they are. Thus they have many paper articles to show.

Met the prime minister

Head of early childhood department in Larvik municipality, Jan Erik Johannessen and Valby-principle Marit Gravklev met the prime minister Jens Stoltenberg today to discuss schooling in Norway.



Foto: ANB

To make the children grow and to make the teachers grow, the innovative grips are:

1. Giving the children identity as learners and give them immediate response and positive feedback followed by active seeing each child and her/his needs.
2. Making the school a learning organization by systematic and positive feedback to the teachers through a system that promotes assessment for learning, sharing competencies and teaching tools and development, called The Project Companion.
3. A three party conversation in a year's planning wheel for coherence between parents, kindergarten and primary school two times a year and a new three party conversation for coherence between primary and lower secondary school. In those conversations, the main point is the child's identity as a learner, where knowledge, competencies, values and social skills are analyzed in the frame of an image of a robust and learning child. (The three party conversations could actually involve 4 parts whenever the primary contact in the day care for school children (SFO) participates as well)
4. A good system for the challenging/disabled pupils

B. Structures patterns and Characteristics of the ILE

The school was built in accordance with the pedagogical ideas of openness, taking benefit of differences, sharing, positive energy and focus on continuous learning and improvement. It is relatively traditional, with defined classrooms for the different age levels and special group rooms, but with a specific colour for each group of pupils, and with a certain openness correlating to the ideas of shared competencies, transparency and possibility to respond to each other, made by windows in the walls and in the doors between the classrooms and the corridors.

The staffs of teachers and leaders was put together with the idea to make diversity work positive, according to the idea that everyone is unique and must be given room to contribute with their different strengths to the community.



Cooperation with a research environment was initially based on the idea of action learning as a school improvement tool. Now, the cooperation works dualistic. The school benefits from having an external pedagogical coach/counsellor from the nearby teacher training College. All the teachers study counselling at the college this year, and the students from the College do their practical parts at Valby School.

B.1 The history of initial ideas, and the shaping of a common culture for learning in a new school

This innovation is about starting a new school and making it into a learning organization, building explicitly on an action learning strategy for school development.

The headmaster starts her story about the school and her leadership this way: *"In a school everything is about developing people in ways that gives learning effects. The pupils shall improve, the staff shall improve and the school shall improve as an organization. It is the job of the school leader to get these levels to intertwine in such a way that learning at one level gives effect at the other levels as well. As a newly appointed headmaster, first*

for building the school and then for leading it, I very soon experienced that it would be necessary for me and my colleges to know my position for the school leadership.

The most important tool a leader has, is "myself". To be able to use "myself", the leader must let her values make its mark on the school values. The values must then be written down in notions /ideas that the staff can agree on. Only then it is possible for the leader to handle ethical dilemmas in understandable ways that can be mediated by everybody in the organization

The values we agreed on at Valby School were the following:

- *We shall work together as a team*
- *All children are every ones' responsibility*
- *No teacher have all their lessons in their own class – everybody are supposed to perform lessons in other classes than their own, and to take responsibility for all children at the school*
- *Diversity is a resource*
- *What we expect from the children, we also expect from the staff*

As the values are used as basis for organizational choices and improvements at the school, they are regularly repeated, and have that way anchored in the organization."

The case illustrates how action learning is used as an explicit strategy for school development. The key challenge was to build a culture where everyone; school leaders, staff, pupils and parents, were committed to continuous learning and development.

Building shared values and culture with contributions from all members of the staff is a great challenge. The point of departure in this case was the principal's values and ideas. At the same time the whole staff should be allowed to shape the culture. Such a shared culture should, however, also allow for flexible ways to pursue key values in practice. Each and everyone should know the overarching goals as formulated in the national rules and regulations. All efforts should be directed towards realizing this "big" goal: *"To stimulate all pupils to realize their potential in ways that may benefit the wider society"*.



B.2 Hiring the right people for the "ideal school"

The principal's objectives for "the Ideal school" was formulated in January 2000 and summarized in 6 key points:

1. The pedagogical basis should be adaptability – not teaching
2. The possibility of the pupil should be the basis for teaching
3. Children should learn from children
4. Teachers should work as a team
5. Diversity should be exploited as a resource
6. Systematic collective reflection should form the basis for shared practice

An underlying idea was that everyone involved should be *responsible* for successful learning. They were to be *activated* through direct feed-back, there and then, in ways that contributed to *formative* learning.

When hiring the staff, interviews were structured around these main points, and the philosophy embedded in them was what the new teachers agreed to support when hired.

The following are examples of how the teachers imagined the ideal school in 2001:

“My dream is a school where the pedagogy allows the whole human being (teachers and pupils) to be engaged”

“My dream is a school where everyone is pulling in the same direction and where there are few fixed rules”

“My dream is that we were not tied to a yearly plan. That would allow us to continuously evaluate what we do and use our resources where they are most needed”

“My dream is that all should be equal partners”

“My dream is a school that is less dependent on the text book”

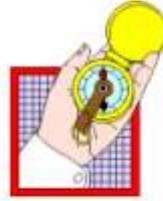
What the staff had in common was that they all dreamed about a school that should be “different”. However, discussions within the staff soon demonstrated that these dreams were not the same. Being “different” meant different things. Through extensive dialogue and discussion, the following question was formulated as a basis for the school: “How can we push the pupils ahead by engaging their potential?”

Reflecting upon school practices four years later, one teacher summarizes the experience like this: *“We have experienced that knowledge about each others’ practice is necessary to fully understand each other’s dream. You hear about the other’s dream and you think “yes, that is how I think too”. But the way the ideas are translated into practice may be quite different. Now, that we know each other, we have a better understanding of each other’s dream, and we see that differences in practice does not mean that we have different dreams or objectives. We simply manage challenges in different ways, and each need support to get closer to the objective”.*

B.3 Leadership for learning - the process model

The principal and the head teacher formulated their leadership challenge in the context of an action learning perspective. This relates to three key elements: 1) *Vision and main objectives*, 2) *Methodology and organization* and 3) *Collective learning*. These key elements are schematically presented in figure 1, and will be discussed below.

An Action learning process perspective - a never ending story



Vision & main objectives	Method & organization	Collective learning
<p><i>How to sustain a continuous process of development and improvement.</i> This included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The organization Valby school •The school leadership •The teachers •Every class •Every child •Development and improvement should include both the collective and the individual •What we expect from the children we should also expect from the staff 	<p><i>Log format</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •A log should be as close to the actual event as possible •A log is a description of a situation – like a running video •Description should not involve evaluation •A log should not be considered good or bad by others <p><i>Working groups</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rotation and sharing <p><i>Project companions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best practice • Similar challenges 	<p><i>New organizational and pedagogical practices emerge.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The log is read •Free associations among the staff – sometimes this means time for quiet reflection. •Through this process individuals recognize situations that they have experienced, and this creates new input for discussion. •Ideas and preliminary conclusions are tested against core values.

Figure 1: An action learning perspective – a never ending story

From a process perspective the short vision statement was: “How to sustain a continuous improvement process, “a never ending story”?”

This implies that:

1. The organization Valby school should be engaged in a continuous improvement
2. The school leadership should strive for continuous improvement
3. The teachers should be strive for continuous improvement
4. Every class should strive for continuous improvement
5. Every child should strive for continuous improvement
6. Improvement should include both the collective and the individual
7. What we expect from the children we should also expect from the staff

Change competence is the ability to continuously develop and improve. There is no fixed final objective. New opportunities are exploited, without losing sight of the “big” goal. To achieve this it is important to develop a shared vocabulary for identifying elements of change, often very small steps, and to prepare the organization for change. Anchoring of corresponding values, concepts and methodology required is not something that can be dealt with occasionally; it has to be an integrated part of everyday practices.

An important part of this was to ensure that everyone among the staff developed practice of using personal logs, in line with an action learning perspective, to support the development of a shared pedagogical model. A log is the teachers own diary or reflection notes. The headlines are: What is done, what is learned and what is smart, and the teacher writes down activities, processes and thoughts that may be shared between the colleges. The principal's dream about an ideal school represented the starting point for the development of a new pedagogical model. However, the practical pedagogical model could not be deduced from this. It required an active collective process using action learning. Key elements of this are presented in figure 1.

Traditionally, teachers are told what to do, through state and municipality plans and directives, text books with teachers guide and local leadership. The Valby approach is based on active and continuous engagement and learning.

C. The nature and Quality of learning taking place in the ILE

This point includes learning for the staff and for the organization as well as for the pupils. The idea is that "The results of development for the teachers are development for the pupils". In addition to learning for their own staff, the school has an appointment with the University College in the County, The University College of Vestfold, and their teacher studies. The school is a Partnership school.

C.1 The learning process for the staff and the school

The school has an action learning approach. In the learning process of the staff, the use of personal logs among staff members became important. When implementing the action learning model, a recipe was introduced that specified how logs should be created and used.

The staff described what the log should contain by laying down the following ground rules:

1. A log should be written as close to the actual event as possible
2. A log is a description of a situation – like a running video
3. Description should not involve evaluation
4. A log should not be considered good or bad by others



However, consistent with the overall values for the school, it was emphasized that there should be room for *individual adaptation, because:*

1. Everyone do not like/ are used to express themselves in writing
2. Writing a log is genre – a feeling of mastery must be present also in this
3. Some experience more discomfort than other in publishing their logs to others

Consequently, some created logs consisting simply of key words, some wrote comprehensive logs, and a few wrote their logs, but never published any of them.

Action learning is well suited for *anchoring and specifying* ideas and experiences. The basis for this was a clear structure for when logs should be used. Principles of *time and organization* specified that logs should be discussed in staff meetings every 14 days; alternating between work teams and plenary sessions. This provided a focus for collective learning. Rules for how this work should proceed created a *shared model* – a structured space for reflection. This increased the quality of learning outcomes, but it also required more time. The main structure was as follows:

1. The log is read
2. Free associations among the staff – sometimes this means time for quiet reflection.
3. Through this process individuals recognize situations that they have experienced, and this creates new input for discussion.
4. Ideas and preliminary conclusions are tested against core values.

Continuous systematic reflection and learning also contributes to a common *culture*.

The *outcome* from this model for action learning was threefold. First, action learning became institutionalized as a shared model for continuous learning and development. Second, new ideas and opportunities were identified and acted upon. Staff meetings became a professional forum for finding solutions accommodating shared core values as well as diversity within the staff. And third, these meetings became an important and valuable arena for the principal to exercise practical leadership.



From the project "Together for childhood"

The intention was that logs should stimulate individual development and growth. For this reason logs were to concentrate on situations that individuals experienced as challenging, welcoming support from others. After developing this way of action learning strategy for several years, also through participation in the national program *Knowledge promotion – from words to action*, this was organized in two ways. One was through working groups, to ensure exchange of experiences and sharing of best practice across different classes, class levels and disciplines. The other is through so-called *Project companions*. Teachers may choose colleagues that have done something of special interest to act as a coach or as a model for new practices.

Considerable time was used on logs relating to the concept of recognition. In the principal's log on recognition from 2002 it reads: *"As a principal I have to regard the teachers as my own "class". To me recognition is something quite different than praise. A statement like "you are good at this" is not recognition, as I see it. Each and everyone should feel that their work is appreciated, but it must be experienced as real appreciation. Recognition must contain something personal."*

C.2 A partnership school

In 2003 Valby became a so-called practice school for the regional college, Vestfold University College (HiVe). All the teachers participate in the partnership project together with the teachers and students at the teacher studies at HiVe. Two posts as teaching practice supervisors are distributed among the eleven teachers at Valby School. Two team leaders for practice are responsible for practice planning, and they arrange for the students to get the best practice from all the teachers at the school. In addition, the students get to know more of the arenas for learning and development at the school, because they participate in personnel meetings and meeting for teams of teachers as well.

The teachers at Valby School will not get personal payment for their partnership school work. Most of the fee goes to common competence-building and study trips among all the teachers. The school receives very positive feedback for their models and teaching practice from students and university college teachers. The school teachers realize also that working together with the students is of great value for the formulation of the common pedagogical grounds for the choices the school does.

In addition to this exchange of theory and practice, all the teachers at Valby School participated in guidance studies at Hive in 2010.

C.3 Applying the methodology

The methodology of action learning was applied in many different areas. One example is how the methodology was used to *create process standards* in various areas:

In a school there is a number of recurring core processes. Some of these relate to the methodology of action learning. In such areas standards are developed to summarize best practice to support the specific process and to help newcomers assimilate culture and methodology. One example is a standard for “Using project companions for personal development”. It is a fairly detailed guide for identifying suitable partners, building relationships and exchange experiences.

Another example of process standards created is the guide for the “Triangle dialogue” that takes place as a preparation for children entering first grade. It involves parents, educational leader from preschool and the new first grade teacher. (As described below). Standards for a similar dialog has been developed for a triangle dialogue for the transition between primary school and secondary school, as well as a guide for the dialogue between teacher, pupil and parents that are held two times a year.

A third example illustrates how the process methodology was used to *support projects of pedagogical innovation*: After several years focused on many smaller projects, like the one described above; the school applied for, and became part of the national school development project – *The knowledge promotion – from words to action*, and by this got support from the Directorate for Education and Training for the project “A head taller than one self”. The core idea was to make pupils the centre of for learning and development. This is part of the broader effort to strengthen an action learning perspective and develop the practical methodologies corresponding to this.

During this project the school was evaluated by external assessors as part of the program. Two assessors, used by the Directorate followed the training and the school days at Valby over a week. They delivered a report where they formulated an ideal image for the school, and which the school should strive for and was assessed against. The ideal image consisted of several bull points, but it was especially two that created special interest in the school personnel:

- The pupils know their learning goals
- The pupils know what is smart to do to reach get there

Those are the two points that the school consider as the crucial ones in their learning activities. They are regularly part of the debate at the school, and contribute when new thoughts and ideas are implemented. In working with the implementation of those points and others, and find out exactly when the learning drive is present in the classrooms, the *Project companion* was created – the specific way to run an action learning strategy at Valby school.

The fourth example is how the school works with challenging and disabled children (with special educational resources).

The school has a separate base for children with special challenges. In this base the values of exploiting each others' differences and that everyone can contribute is actively used and visible, in a manner where the children teach each other and learn from each other, where parents take an active part, and where children can participate in the regular classes when they are enjoying it as well.

On a visit to the base, we found that the students read to each other and helped each other with different tasks in an environment where staff were interested in challenging the children and make sure that they used their abilities. The pupils' mothers, many of them of non-Western origin, were invited to lunch at the base, bringing food from their home country. Both school leader and many of the teachers from the other classes came visiting, to taste and to give their appreciative feedback to children and mothers.

C.4 “The project companion”, a model for school improvement

Working method: “The project companion”

1. The teacher decides what topic she/he wants to be advised to develop (= the order)
2. The teacher chose a project companion (= a colleague) and presents the order
3. The project companion observes an appointed spell of work
4. The teacher and the project companion reflects together immediately after the spell of work
5. The reflection is shared with the rest of the staff in the “History Lesson”

An alternative way to learning with this tool is that a teacher invites her/him self to observe a certain teacher in a desired spell of work to get new ideas or tools for her/his own tuition.

“The History Lesson”

- a. The teacher tells her/his story
- b. The staff meeting asks questions of clearance to ensure their understanding
- c. The staff meeting asks questions for reflection
- d. The meeting highlights the points they can learn from
- e. Summing up and adding good tools to the “toolbox” (in this context the toolbox could contain the teacher’s different pedagogical methods, tricks, tips and aids)

The school reports (2009) that the teachers, through use of the project companion tool, can improve both their competencies in class management, they’re ability as a relation builder and their didactical skills.

This tool was developed at the school and is now used by the staff in the kindergarten as well. That is one of the results from combining two projects, one for improving the school, one for improving the cohesion between the kindergarten and the school for the children. (See the following)

In addition to the benefit of the tool for the teachers, the school leader states in her report from 2009: *“The project companion and the History Lesson have given the school leadership a unique chance to receive*

- *Knowledge and experience about the life in the classrooms*
- *A chance to get closer to each and every colleague*
- *Get insights in the competencies of all the staff, which expand the possibilities for individual support*
- *Get insights into each of the staff members’ contributions, and gives an overview of the totality. This is an important presumption for leading the work of improvement and change.”*

The teachers have discussed their experience with the tool, and some of their reflections are as follows: About what impact the processes have on their professional practice, the teacher states that it:

- Trains my ability for reflection
- Makes it easier to discuss my challenges
- Increases the self consciousness about my learning style

- Increases my awareness of what I do and why
- Helps to make the unconscious conscious
- Time for reflection gives me increased consciousness and possibility to make changes
- Makes me aware of the fact that I can only see parts of the picture from my position

About what this does to you as a teacher, the teachers states that:

- Rehearsal in formulating the grips and tools I use in my teaching practice
- I increases the awareness of the totality – many times, you do not realize what is going on with and between the pupils from a teacher position
- I get affirmation for my work – and many great and smart things in my “toolbox”
- I get to connect theory with my practice
- I get new ideas
- I get to know more pupils

About what the effect on the relationship between colleges, the teachers states:

- We use each others as learning masters
- We get to know each other’s competencies – also the ones that you do not work with on an everyday basis
- We get a common platform
- It creates openness and learning outcome
- I learn new ways of teaching from my colleges
- I get to know the other’s strengths and their competencies

The school sums up, after implementing their project “A head taller than oneself”: *“In this project we have created our own tool for school development – The project companion... We use the tool as a method that contributes to being a learning organization. By using the Project Companion we have focused on the certain teacher’s competencies within classroom leadership, learning goals and learning strategies.”*

C.5 Learning process and methods for the pupils

It is a goal for Valby School that the pupils have the identity as learners. The ideal for the pupils learning is the Learning sun, which is surrounded by and contains emotions (følelse), faith (tro), knowledge (kunnskap) and will (vilje).

The core value for the leader and the teachers’ behavior, either it is towards the pupils or each other is: To make the other one “grow”. That is the reason for naming their project in 2007 “A head taller than oneself”, and that is the underlying value for all communication. According to this the school wants to create motivation through mastery and immediate appreciative feedback.

The pupils in primary school in Norway do not get grades. In the report from the external assessment team in 2007, the principal and the staff was asked how the teachers gave appreciative feedback to the students. This is what the principal said:

“Appreciative feedback confirms the social part of the pupil. You cannot criticize more than the relationship can withstand. Creation and building of relationships must be in



place before giving any "negative" feedback. You have to give different feedback to individuals and groups, but it may be individual differences in how teacher perform it."

Her statement of different approach for the teacher at that stage is confirmed by the following quotations from teacher at 1-2nd and 3-4th level in the report:

"Give a lot of positive feedback, praise. Here and now. Say: "You can do more!" One pulls at least some forward with this. Asking specific questions about what they are doing, to push them further on. We have a pupils' conversation two times a year. Have station teaching, where the professional conversation and praise is an important part of communication. Specially challenging children are taken care of especially by special pedagogical teacher, but we are also aware that they need a little extra praise. "

"Praise and encouragement along the way. Trying to create learning situations where students can show their strengths. Display the child's progress in learning. To show expectations for children that they will do their best is learning driving. Give honest feedback."

The report characterizes the school as learning organization in the sense that: *"The principal actively participate in structured educational discussions. All involved feel that the principal takes an active part in educational discussions. The school has structured and scheduled meetings that distinguishes between information and educational development. For example, the information meeting on Tuesday morning, while the staff meeting where the development will be discussed are subject to Tuesday afternoon. The head teacher has high ambitions for teachers and children at Valby School to be in continuous development. This is also reflected in the strong commitment in this area. The principal is also the spring of 2008 an active part in the mentor role of all teachers as a project companion.*

The school has many qualities. In particular, it must be mentioned visible educational leadership with committed and motivated staff at the school."

The school works systematically with their pupils and the parents to motivate them and give the pupils an identity as a learner. In the school development project: "A head taller than oneself" Valby School formulated that the aim for the project was **a learning drive for children at school and in the kindergarten**

They stated that a presupposition for a learning drive is a coherent path for both kindergarten and school, where the child is involved in the development of:

- Social core competencies that are crucial for the best possible improvements and learning for the individual child
- Social core competencies with special focus on a successful minority childhood

A coherent path for kindergarten and school where:

- Stimulation of language in the kindergarten shall make a good foundation for further improvements of core competencies in reading and in expressing oneself orally and in written language
- Working with ICT as a core competency starts in the kindergarten

The personnel in the kindergarten and at the school and at the day care facilities for schoolchildren (SFO) improve their competencies in giving the children appreciative feedback to initiate learning drive in the children. The method for this is the action learning described above, using the project companion and shadowing to make good learning stories for reflection among the staff. The good stories with appreciative feedback give learning for everybody.

Used at the project "A head taller than oneself", the action learning method was practiced to reach the aim were the children look at themselves as learners, are goal oriented and enjoy their own progress in a learning environment characterized by drive, curiosity and motivation. In this environment the teachers work with appreciative feedback that is given to the children when they need it, and that is supposed to give the children

the experience of mastery, and learn them to understand their achievement. The work with ICT as a core competence supports this, and the learning situation is characterized of conversations that are supposed to create inspiration and drive for learning.

The common platform and understanding between the teachers created through discussions and learning of each other's practical work, is the basis for this approach. The school is an active learning organization in this matter, and the proposition is that this approach increases the learning outcome for the pupils as well.

The learning environment is characterized by this learning approach. You could feel and see it in the classrooms, where active pupils participated in the teaching process, in the hall and corridors, where the pupils met you direct and eagerly, and where the responses they got from the teachers were appreciative and direct.

On the question "How do you experience it when you have learned something new?", some of the children has answered as follows:

"I feel that my stomach is tingling", Marte (8)

"I get a bit different thoughts in my head", Sigrid (9)

"It is like a party in my head. The whole stereo is turned on", Ludvig (8)

"It can be a little difficult afterwards too", Gard (7)

"I just want to jump and make summersaults",

Nathanael (7)



C.6 The three party conversation at VALBY early development centre and primary school

Another example of how the school uses the action learning approach is the guide for the "Three party conversation" that takes place as a preparation for children entering first grade. It involves parents, educational leader from pre-school and the new first grade teacher. The child itself is usually not actively involved.

"The three party conversation is a talk between parents/guardians, the pedagogical leader in the kindergarten, the contact teacher for the new 1st grade and the primary contact at the SFO (day care facilities for schoolchildren).

The point that is highlighted most in this conversation is the point of "Identity as a learner". We have seen that this point has been crucial and has given important information to facilitate a best possible school start for the individual child." Ref: Brochure for Valby School

Year wheel for cohesion between school and kindergarten

<i>Month</i>	<i>Activity</i>
<i>August</i>	
<i>September</i>	
<i>October</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The pedagogical leader in the kindergarten who has "delivered" this year's 5-year old children function as the project companion in 1st grade at the school.</i>
<i>November</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The pedagogical leader in the kindergarten who are responsible for this year's 5-year old children function as the project companion in 1st grade at the school.</i>
<i>December</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Invitation to private kindergartens in our school district for discussion of how to work with the continuity between kindergarten and school.</i>
<i>January</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Meeting with private kindergartens, Valby kindergarten and Valby</i>

	<i>School.</i>
<i>February</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Kindergarten and school discusses the base for good continuity between kindergarten and school.</i>
<i>March/April</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Information about the project: "Together for childhood" and the tree party conversation* at the parents meeting in the kindergarten.</i>
<i>May</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Next year's 1st class teacher are project companion in the kindergarten</i> • <i>Parent meeting new 1st graders</i> • <i>Visiting day at the school</i>
<i>June</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Implementation of the tree party conversation</i> • <i>(kindergarten, school, SFO (day care facilities for schoolchildren) and parents/guardians participates)</i>

In this tree party conversation, the parents receive a preparation brochure from the school, where all the questions for observation and mapping of the child's social and technical competencies, values, and identity are mentioned. This forms the basis for the tree party conversation, where the tree parties together end up in forming aims and roles in the continuous work for the child's improvement as a robust and learning school child.



(See annex 1 for English version of this "Growth Dialog" document)

D. Impact and effectiveness of the ILE

D.1 Present situation - impact

The case demonstrates a systematic effort to apply an action learning perspective in school development. In contrast to other attempts to apply such a perspective, considerable effort has gone into developing and institutionalizing shared methodology and practice.

Through the action learning processes the schools shared working values are discussed and kept fresh. Core values and methodology are inherently dynamic, all the time open for development and change. Today all the teachers have participated in Studies in guidance and coaching at Vestfold University College, with their own practice as the main study objective. This is the fruit of the cooperation with the University College and helps increasing the ability to work with, and the effect of their own tool, the project companion approach.

The school was evaluated by external assessment group in 2008. Ahead of the assessment week, the school effectuated a quality analysis of the school. This was done by two national tools for mapping, reflecting and analyzing the current situation: Quality status tool and the Organizational analysis tool. This was, in the project done both before and after the project period, i.e. in 2007 and in 2009.

The school reports (2009) that their *“scores on both analyses and at the national pupil tests show a definite improvement at all levels that are crucial for learning pupils in an environment of urge, will and motivation.”*

They also state that *“The scores from Valby School at the Quality status tool are high on areas important for being a learning organization. The staff uses time and energy on pedagogy and change, and they enjoy it. There are no signs of reform tiredness (opposed to other schools in Norway at the time). The pedagogical leadership is strong, accepted and valued and the staff feels that their well performed work is supported and acknowledged.”*

On learning and motivation, which is crucial for enlightening the learning urge, the schools' scores are good. They recognize that the teachers have learned and trained different learning strategies. Learning strategies for both for mathematics, reading and memorizing have been tried out with the Project Companion, and the results are good at the national tests for pupils at the highest levels. The school has worked systematically with the national task of creating good learning aims for the pupils at all levels.

The pedagogical practice observed at the base for the challenging children was very sensitive to individual differences, and actively using the children's competencies. Diversity was used as recourse among the children. This inclusive environment was specially seen in this base, including the lunch with food from the different homes with the children and their mothers, and in the fact that the children themselves were used as learning recourse for each other. An indicator of a good learning environment for the challenging children at Valby School is that challenging children are applied for to this school from a much bigger district than the school covers itself.

The one day visit to the school showed an eager, positive and open atmosphere among the staff as well as among the children. The observers may easily walk in and out of the classroom, where the students and teachers will make a short brake for greetings and then continue with their learning activities. They are accustomed to the principal and other teachers observing their activity. We followed lessons in two classes, one for challenging children. In these lessons, the learning activity was characterized by learning activities were the competence of the individual student was used in the group and for the other students' learning. For example, one of those who could read among the challenging children, read aloud to those who could not. Concepts were discussed with the students and various games and techniques used to work with them. As mentioned, the mothers invited as well.

During the science lesson at the fifth level, we experienced one hour marked by active dialogue between students and teacher, in which learning objectives were clarified, prior knowledge, was lifted up. The teacher used concrete examples both from everyday life, in the shape of things she brought, and in discussion with the children about how mathematics is useful. In this lesson, another teacher was participating as observer in addition to another extra teacher to take care of a couple of weak students. The project companion in this case, had opted to learn from an accomplished colleague, and the two went through the lesson together afterwards, to give feedback and point out what was to be presented to the other teachers in the “history lesson”.

At the teacher's room that particular day, was a frantic activity around the fact that nearly every teacher was preparing for the exam in college, while the next few hours was prepared as well. The principal appears as a distinct and recognized leader, both for the staff and the children. She is particularly concerned about providing immediate and constructive feedback, both to her employees and to each student. The principle is a person

who likes to be a visible participant throughout the school. She has been keen to supplement her leadership by including people who are skilled administrators. She has, in accordance with the ideology, employed people who are very different and with different competences, in order to use the diversity. This, we observed most clearly in a well-functioning management team.

In 2007 the school scored relatively low on the pupils and parents' knowledge of learning and identity as a learner. In the classroom observation in 2010 we saw the students aware about this and about their own basis for further learning.

The fresh results from 5th grade national tests show that Valby school perform as the best school (of 13) in mathematics in Larvik municipality, and as the 4th best in reading in 2011.

D.2 Summing up

Valby School seem to meet many of the ILE-criterias for effective learning.

It is a shared value and a visible policy for the school to make learning central and to inspire the learners to understand themselves as learners. This can be seen, both in the classroom observation, in what the school highlights as important in their core documents and in the guide for the "Triangle dialogue".

Observations gave good impressions of a school where learning for both children and adults were social and collaborative. The demand and possibilities for learning from each other is important for the children as well as for the adults.

The concept of the "Learning Sun", to make the other one "grow", the reason for naming their project in 2007 "a head taller than oneself" and the whole idea of appreciative feedback is based on the idea of learning as dependent on the learners' motivations and the importance of emotions. This is a visible learning approach and a practical core value at Valby School.

The pedagogical practice observed in the classroom and base for the challenging children, was very sensitive to individual differences, and actively referring to the children's prior knowledge. Individual competencies and diversity was used at the school as recourse both among the children and among the staff, which makes the school an inclusive place.

The affirmative feedback to the children and to each other in general is experienced as a core value at Valby School, and was reflected in the behavior of the principle and the teachers, known as "appreciative feedback". However, the school still had challenges in making the learning aims more known and concrete for the children and for their parents.

However, meeting all those challenges in a recently good way, the most important characteristic of this ILE is the learning organization with its instruments, criteria and systems for sharing knowledge, and the strong and visionary leadership of the school.

Literature:

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<http://www.udir.no/Stottemeny/English/Education-in-Norway-From-Kindergarten-to-Adult-Education/>

Documents from Valby School

ANNEX 1. GROWTH DIALOGUE



Together in Growth Dialogue with parents/guardians



Vision:
The child searches – shares – is the learner

Respect for human worth
Realise him or herself in ways that are positive for
the child and fellowship
Mastery here-and-now for mastery tomorrow
Mestring her og nå for mestring i morgen

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The integrated human being

1.	Area	Comments
A	The searcher for meaning The creative The hard worker The cooperative The environmentally aware The educative	
<p>General education: Specific knowledge about human beings, society and nature that give general understanding and perspective; with competence and maturity to meet life's challenges – practical, social and personal - and with traits and values that help pupils learn cooperation between humans.</p>		

Knowledge and skills

2.	Area	Comments
A	The final goal of teaching is to stimulate the individual to realise him or herself in ways that are positive for community and fellowship	
B	SUBJECT AREAS FOR THE FRAMEWORK PLAN: Communication, language and text Body, movement and health Art, culture and creativity Ethics, religion and philosophy Local community and society Nature, environment and technical aspects Numbers, space and forms	

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C	LEARNING STRATEGIES	
D	KNOWLEDGE PROMOTION Being able to express oneself orally Being able to express oneself in writing Being able to read Numeracy Digital and computer literacy Subject areas	

Identity as learner

3.	Area	Comments
A	Trust in one's own ability through feedback about own development	
B	Keep focused	
C	Concentration	
D	Tolerate some resistance	
E	Endure the need to strive	
F	Flexibility	

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