

NORWAY

Spreading and sustaining innovative learning – A Norwegian approach

1. Aims

a) The learning to be changed

The Norwegian national implementation program called The Advisory Team is grounded on parliamentary report 31 (2007-08)ⁱ, «Quality in School», that states: The Advisory Team is to assist the school owners in improving their schools. A team of supervisors is established on a national level. Their task is to contribute to the development of schools and to supervise school owners and school leaders who are facing special challenges. The program is aimed at school owners and schools that have special challenges in the core areas for quality:

1. Students lacking in reading and math skills
2. Learning environments that don't promote learning
3. Students and apprentices who do not complete upper secondary education or do not pass their exams in upper secondary education and training

The background was that the government in 2006 passed a school reform (The Knowledge Promotion Reform)ⁱⁱ, with new curricula and increased local responsibility for primary education. In addition to the students' increased learning outcomes, the reform states in the basic principles for education that: “The school and apprenticeship-training enterprise shall be learning organizations that make it possible for teachers to learn from each other through cooperation on planning, implementing and assessing their teaching.”

Due to challenges related to the implementation of The Knowledge Promotion Reform and to changing the schools' practices, a number of large-scale national programs were started. Among these, the most controversial and innovative program was the Advisory Team' precursor, the “**Kunnskapsløftet – fra ord til handling**” (Knowledge promotion – from words to action) (2006-2010) (KFOTH).

b) The learners targeted

The learners targeted in this program are pupils at level 1-13. But to change their learning, the target audiences for the Advisory Teamⁱⁱⁱ are school owners, school management and primary education (year 1-13) students in municipalities with low scores or special challenges.

c) The environments and sites to be brought in. Was there a particular source of inspiration behind the initiative?

The Advisory Team is taking its inspiration, experience and ideals from the “Knowledge promotion – from words to action” program (KFOTH). Some of the measures introduced by the KFOTH and continued in the Advisory Team, are: Emphasizing both pedagogical practices and integral school organization, using external counselors (competence environments) and thorough evaluation of the schools' standpoint before commencing development work.

The two Norwegian ILE (*Innovative Learning Environments*) cases are taken from KFOTH.

2. Leadership and Partners

The program is led by the Directorate of Education and Training, and main national partners are KS (organization of municipalities), County Governors (the national education offices at county level) the University/College sector, consulting groups and practitioners.

The Advisory Team recruits school managers and municipal educational administrations from all over the country. In addition, the team can contact a group of competent resource persons when in need of training or guidance. These resource persons are brought in from among the civil servants, from universities and colleges or public and private consulting firms. The County Governors are contributing by actions of recruiting applicants for support from the Advisory Team of recruiting school owners.

The development work itself is to take place locally. Here, the political and administrative school owner is involved, and headmasters and personnel participate. Other local support groups will also be involved, depending on the guidance topic in question. Different competence groups and the local PPT (pedagogical-psychological support group) can be important actors in the post-counsel continuing development.

The supervisors are recruited based on the following criteria:

Supervisor 1: Experience as school owner

1. Experienced school or municipal administrators representing active and successful management of the school sector in his municipality (*City Manager, Municipal manager/Municipal School Administrator, County Counselor, County Education Administrator or equivalent*)
2. School or municipal administrators that can refer to good results of own development processes.

Supervisor 2: Experience as school manager

1. Experienced headmaster/managers representing sustained (*preferably more than 3 years of*) good management.
2. Headmaster/managers that can refer to good, even if recent, results of own development processes.

In both categories, formal qualifications or extensive experience in the counseling field is an advantage. Good management or relationship building skills can also be taken into account for certain well qualified candidates. Supervisor 1 bears, in addition to guiding the school owner, a special responsibility of coordinating the team and work as its contact. This implies continuing contact on the guidance process with the secretariat of the Directorate of Education, contact with the media and a special responsibility of monitoring the contract with each school owner.

3. Strategies and activities

The guidance is meant as a coach/mentor relationship, and focuses on the first phases of the municipalities' quality development programs. That's all that can be done in 1,5 years. This is why they also set the goal of building up the guided party's capacity of continuous quality development in his own organization. The phases the Advisory Team takes part in are:

1. Identify developmental needs: The supervisors participate actively in the analytical tools. They take part in organizational analysis and standpoint analysis – planning, execution and result interpretation. Here the school's/municipality's student scores, student survey results and other local conditions are evaluated. Through this process, the school/school owner identifies what areas are in development, and at the same time the supervisors identify what are the school/school owner's counseling needs.
2. Planning the development project: This guidance is given according to the discovered counseling needs and taking the guided party's standpoint into account. Also complementary external assessments of the school's potential and developmental needs are offered here.
3. Execution: Is guided based on the local need and on academic knowledge on learning organizations and change management, published on meetings and qualification seminars for the supervisors during the guidance program.

The Team of supervisors is national and governmental, but has no formal authority. The authority is placed with the school owner on the municipal level. It is therefore up to the municipal authority whether it will accept support from the team of supervisors. The aim for the team of supervisors is to provide a supervision that enables school owners and schools to implement national goals through local development strategies. The strategies are based on recognized needs uncovered through the use of national tests, student assessments or other tests. The experiences until now show that the needs are numerous and complex. The supervision is, however, primarily aimed at leaders on municipal and school level attempting to strengthen the school as an organization, and is based on a solid organizational and managerial foundation, using tools and methods that have been tested and proven effective. The supervision focuses

especially on the school owners and schools on a system level; how they function and how they can be developed further.

Tools for the team of supervisors are the tools for mapping, reflecting and analyzing the current situation are the Quality status tool, the Organizational analysis tool. One of the aims in Report to the Storting no. 31 (2007-2008) Quality in School is that all schools must have access to good self-mapping tools, like the quality status tool and the organizational analyses, and then receive guidance if needed in how to use these tools. We also use an External assessment methodology as a process for anchoring and starting development work at school level.

Guidance, practiced as national support for local development work through the Advisory Team, is a tool that the Directorate of Education and Training and public authorities in Norway have no tradition for using. In summary, the counseling given is characterized by:

1. Its supportive, not authoritative role. The latter has been the traditional role of public authorities.
2. The supervisors have no formal authority. Being guided is voluntary.
3. The leaders are guided (not teachers nor students). Guidance is given on organizational development, change management and system development.
4. The guidance has both an organizational perspective and a systematical perspective, and is to contribute to building the school as an organization, and the education sector as a collected system.
5. The supervisors are operational and work close to the school and its owner.
6. The supervisors' role is coach/mentor more than consultant and counselor. Direct counseling is given mainly on change management.

Recruiting the supervisors happens by announcing the position, and through regional informational meetings. During the process the qualified candidates are invited to a three-day training program with short individual interviews, before the supervisors are selected and the team assembled.

Further **training and competence development** of the supervisors takes place on meetings during the guidance process. These meetings comprise competence development, sharing of experiences and joint learning sessions in and across the team. The Resource Group participates in the meetings and contributes its expertise to the community and to each team. The supervisors are assembled in smaller teams responsible for 2-3 municipalities and their schools. The teams work with the schools and their owners on an individual basis during the process. School owners (political and administrative) are summoned in the beginning and end of the guidance process for joint competence development, sharing of experiences and planning.

In addition to underway communication, feedback and learning from meetings and input from both guided municipalities and the supervisors' municipalities, Quest back surveys involving all parties are conducted twice during the guidance process. The answers are taken as feedback for the supervisors and for central adjustments of methodology, teaching and sharing of experiences.

The guidance is supportive, to help schools and their owners start their local development work. Implementing changes in an organization is often challenging and difficult, and to manage a process producing good results, external competence is often needed. The Advisory Team gives no guarantees, but

can contribute to schools' and their owners' successful development work. A prerequisite for success is the active and responsible participation from all parties. Acceptance of the offer of guidance is an indication of wish and will for development, a basic prerequisite for change.

The guidance's goal is enabling the schools and their owners to continue their quality development work on their own, based on their acknowledged needs. Development work is a continuous process, comprising identification of needs, option evaluation leading to solutions, the implementation of these measures and evaluating them. Guidance from the Advisory Team will support the local work in all these fields.

The guidance considers the school and its owner as an overall organization, and considers how it works and how it can be improved. The supervisors contribute with knowledge, experience and counseling enabling the school to better meet the challenges coming to the surface when it's time for implementation and pedagogical changes. Some schools may additionally need development of competence related to basic skills, evaluation or other core tasks. The Advisory Team can contribute to finding the relevant competence groups, but does not offer guidance on these fields. The Advisory Team is never to assume responsibility for the development processes.

4. Context

In Norway, most schools are public. The Norwegian education policy is formed and implemented centrally, by the Norwegian Parliament and the Ministry of Education/Directorate for Education and Training, while the operational and quality development responsibility is placed locally. This means that the municipalities are responsible for primary education (years 1-10), the counties are responsible for secondary education (years 11-13), and for vocational education. The state is responsible for certain special schools, for example for the native population.

The local ownership was strengthened and emphasized in 2006 when the school reform “Kunnskapsløftet” (Knowledge Promotion) was passed. The challenge is that we have a number of small municipalities. School management is a local responsibility, leadership development is local, and the school owners often lack the competence and capacity to do this. For these reasons the government has started the Advisory Team to assist school owners in their needs for school development support.

Since Norway traditionally has had little control, access and evaluation of schools, the Advisory Team was seen as controversial, and efforts were made to reduce the risk of resistance in the education sector.

5. Resources

For their operation, the Advisory Team are assigned 44 million [NOK] a year, covered by the national budget. The Directorate for Education and Training is the responsible and executive body. The municipalities must cover whatever supplemental competence they wish to use in the development work.

For example, pedagogical or organizational development competence could be applied where these needs are discovered.

The Advisory Team is developed and administered by a secretariat in the Directorate of Education and Training's School development department, assigned approximately 4.5 WYEs. Supervisors are recruited from the education sector throughout the. Additionally, professional experts are contracted in qualification and development of the supervisors, and the Advisory Team has a Resource group with professional expertise supplementing the team's work.

6. Development over Time

Based on the experiences with the KFOTH, it was in 2007 decided that a Advisory Team were to be developed. The Advisory Team was piloted in two counties 2009-2010^{iv}, and the first regular portfolio of the Advisory Team was started 2011. During the next three years the Advisory Team's activity will cover the whole country except from Oslo (18 counties and 429 municipalities). About 30 municipalities have 80-100 schools in each portfolio, and they receive guidance for 1,5 years. During this period the activity has been continually developed, and now has a good structure. The Distribution plan is being followed, new portfolios are started each beginning of the year, and by the end of 2013 all municipalities in the country has been offered of guidance from the Advisory Team for the first time.

Since Norway traditionally has had little control, access and evaluation of schools, the Advisory Team's targeting of low-score and challenged schools and their owners met much resistance. This resistance was handled through a deliberate focus on voluntariness, and staking out the point that school owners that sought counseling was not regarded as losers, but rather as brave and flexible. Also the University/College sector and the public administration resisted the measure. For the public, the resistance was against the state interfering in local authority, while the University/College sector resisted the Advisory Team as a competitor and a professional challenger. This resistance is now turned to support, based on good results in terms of happy school owners and supervisors. Both the public administration and the high school sector has also been involved in the Advisory Team in such a way that the activity has become professionally and organizationally well anchored. In both sectors a change of attitude has taken place.

7. Evidence of effectiveness and efficiency

The effect that we know until now of is very happy school owners having received counseling, as well as very happy supervisors, seeing the guided municipalities' progress and earning important experience and competence for development work in their own municipalities and schools.

We also see that the Advisory Team has been an effective founding and distribution measure for the Directorate of Education and Training's web-based quality development tools and for the external school evaluation methodology. We observe that those tools are very useful, especially for the schools and school owners that have no previous experience, nor competence within quality evaluation.

Two Quest back surveys has been conducted, both of them showing a progressive and optimistic work both among school owners, managers and the supervisors themselves. The Advisory Team is to be evaluated by an external group of researchers. In this evaluation the 2011-portfolio will be central, since this guidance process has finished. Additionally, the researchers will closely follow the 2012-portfolio guidance. This work starts autumn 2012 and finishes by the beginning of the year 2014.

8. Success Factors

A main success factor has been the centralized foundation and development of the program, while the school development work has been locally defined and owned, thus both a top-down and a bottom-up approach.

Another important factor for handling resistance against state intervention in the schools' local quality development has been the premise of guidance voluntariness. In addition the supervisors are experienced educators authorized by being skilled peers, resulting in a kind of peer counselling.

A fourth important success factor has been – and still is – the school owners' commitment and foundation. Both the political and administrative school owner must support the Advisory Team' development work and continue on the same track for it to leave permanent impressions.

The two last decisive factors to be emphasized are the Advisory Team' focus on the school and its owner as a unit, and its focus on the professional quality of the counseling itself.

9. Tensions and impediments

Extent: A critical issue is whether the politicians consider 30 guided municipalities per portfolio to be sufficiently sustainable for investment. In comparison, school-based competence development is scheduled for all the country's upper primary schools within 5 years in another national program.

Recruitment basis: In such a small country as Norway with only 5 million inhabitants and relatively small competence communities, the danger exists that recruitment to the Advisory Team empties the competent and cooperating sector. The Advisory Team relies on skilled and efficient supervisors. Held together with other parallel state initiatives, the recruitment basis for municipalities wanting guidance in their development work could also dry up. This would be negative if it happens because the supervisors are inadequate, or if their work is ousted by other measures. On the other hand, it would be positive if it happens because the needs are met, and we have managed to build up the guided municipalities' competence for caring for its own continued quality development. The latter wouldn't be realistic in the short term, and the former does not yet seem to be a significant threat.

Political initiative: The Advisory Team is a political initiative in the way that the state enters in assistance where really the municipalities are the responsible level. With a more conservative, county- or

autonomous-oriented government, there is a risk that the political will to letting the state help the municipalities vanishes or disappears completely. Such a case would probably mean the end of the Advisory Team.

The need for competence development in organizational learning of the sector could be met, leaving no need for a state run Advisory Team. This would be positive, and is one of the goals. However, it is not likely to be met the next few years. On the other hand, the local competence will increase considerably the next years. Municipalities having received counseling should have increased their local capacity, but also the municipalities that provided supervisors will benefit from the resulting competence development. Supervisors take a lot of new competence and experience back to their municipalities, and it will be crucial for the municipalities to maintain and utilize this competence for the good of school quality development.

10. Sources

Ministry of Education and Research: Report no. 31 to the Storting (2007-2008) Quality in School (in Norwegian) <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/dok/regpubl/stmeld/2007-2008/stmeld-nr-31-2007-2008-.html?id=516853>

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