

NORWAY

Oslo City Steiner School

Introduction

Oslo City Steiner School is a secondary school in Oslo. It was started in 2001 by a group of enthusiastic teachers who wished to perform basic changes in the Steiner school's secondary education. When they did not manage the changes within the established school where they worked, they broke out and started their own, new Steiner school. The school has to this day 450 students, and has become the world's largest secondary Steiner school.

This case describes the innovation and change process. Here the dramatic and difficult start has been especially weighed.

Why has this school been elected as a case?

1. The school has gone through a thorough innovation and change process
2. The innovation strategy that was chosen can be interesting to study, among other things because it is unusual in the educational sector
3. Today the school performs above average for Norwegian schools, in spite of using significantly less resources than the average
4. The school's educational view and pedagogical practice is to a large extent agreeing with the principles in "The Nature of Learning"
5. The changes have been performed in spite of resistance and conflict. It is therefore possible to study certain sides of the change processes in the organization that rarely make it to the surface
6. The case illustrates some important aspects on what can be called "The Nature of Change"

1. Aims

What were the goals of the innovation?

It was sought to create

- A plain secondary Steiner school in the city center of Oslo (breaking with the traditional Steiner school as a 13-year school)
- A school offering specialization/branches (breaking with the traditional Steiner school who only offers general studies)
- A Steiner school of common interest, also for 10th grade from public schools (not just for the “losers” from public schools)¹
- A Steiner school with a clear management structure (breaking with the traditional Steiner school which has a flat organization/management structure)
- A Steiner school with attractive work and salary conditions for teachers and leaders (breaking with the traditional Steiner school culture which has a weak personnel profile)

The most challenging part was to change the school’s content. The secondary grades of the Steiner school must be in continuous development. It was sought to break with the school’s tradition of “the common”.

More specialization and more in depth studying were wanted. It was the opinion that after the year of 16, in other words after puberty, there should be a place differentiating between thoughts and interests. The annual task was to be within one of the specialized subjects, and expand over the secondary grade. Here one should have a taste of university. Everyone was to find their own study branch where they could specialize, either generally/theoretically, artistically or practically.

The other challenging part was regarding the school’s management, decisive structure and decisive processes. It was sought to break with the collective and remove the so called “Administrative circuit”, which could consist of 12-20 persons, who were supposed to discuss towards consensus. Everyone could speak their mind, and actually stop suggestions, also those who weren’t to have any responsible for the implementation. Better agreement between authorities/influence and responsibility was wanted. It was sought to move from an “organism model” (with very flat organizational structure) towards a “management model” (with clear management roles and leading responsibility).

Regarding the students, a wider variety than before was wished for. Students from all schools in Oslo were wanted, not only from the 8 elementary Steiner schools (today 52 % of the students at Oslo City Steiner School come from Steiner schools, 48 % from public schools. Applicants come from all parts of the Oslo region. In 2010 there were applicants from 52 elementary schools in the Oslo region).

With the changes mentioned above, an innovative, developed and reformed Steiner school was wanted. With these actions it was opinionated that one could increase the ambition level considering student achievements.

¹ Traditionally the Steiner school has intercepted many students who wanted to change school, or needs that in their opinion can be better looked out for at a Steiner school.

How could such changes be implemented?

It is difficult to implement innovational and organizational changes in a school organization. An important reason is probably that schools are characterized by very long traditions, strong cultures and many fixed patterns. Changes in a Steiner school might be especially difficult because there is already a well-developed community of values and profession, there are many collective structures and the teachers strongly identify with their school.

Changes in an organization can happen in many different ways. There are different strategies for change.

This case will describe a change strategy that often is called the entrepreneur strategy or blooming strategy.

The entrepreneur strategy is often used in business when innovation is sought, less in the public. The reason for the entrepreneur strategy is that it usually is more difficult to change something old than to build something new.

The initiative takers to Oslo City Steiner School were two teachers with very high competence, experience and legitimacy in the Steiner school environment. One had been the manager for the largest Steiner school in Norway for several years. They had tried to change the school from within, but did not succeed. That is why they decided to break out.

2. Leadership and Partners

In April 1997 the two teachers agreed to get together in establishing a new secondary Steiner school located centrally in Oslo. They started the planning immediately.

In January 1998 they presented the idea. It awoke great resistance and stirred much uproar. The initiative of starting the new school was very badly received in the Steiner school movement in Norway, and awoke great resistance. Oslo City Steiner School was regarded as a threat both to the existing schools and to the Steiner pedagogical method. Some also meant that this was a “betrayal” against the foundation of values and traditions. Initiatives were taken to exclude Oslo City Steiner School from membership in the Steiner school society, though this did not succeed, most likely because the initiative takers were Steiner school teachers and Steiner school managers with very high competence and legitimacy. But in a period there were great conflicts, and the initiative takers experienced this as very uncomfortable.

In the beginning they had no partners, and no “friends”. They had to obtain this. Building alliances is the first step in such an innovation strategy. Soon 10 teachers who supported the idea came. They were immediately included in the planning.

The initiative takers worked intensely with this until the start in August 2001. All of them had a full time job next to this.

The project was strongly centrally controlled. The two initiative takers did in reality lay the premises and made the decisions.

3. Strategies and activities

Immediately after the decision of starting the project, they made a list of what needed to be done. Here are some examples:

- Application approval (department, Oslo municipality)
- Professional work with the curricula
- Decisions and regulations (Order regulations, admission regulations)
- Assessment, diploma
- Organization, management (Management, foundation)
- Financing
- Property, facilities
- Information, creating prospect
- Recruiting teachers
- How to organize the education
- Recruiting students
- Relationship to other schools

In the beginning, two boards were made: One foundation board responsible for buildings and financing and one school board (with responsibility for the pedagogical).

4. Context

What is a Steiner school?

A Steiner school is a private school approved by public authorities as a pedagogical alternative to the public school. In large parts of the public school there is in reality up to the single school or single teacher to choose their pedagogical methods. In the Steiner school, such “freedom of methods” is not wanted. The Steiner school means that there are certain methods and pedagogical principles that are proven to be better than others, both based on experience and based on science. These main principles are something that the Steiner school teachers must follow (these main principles are similar to the main principles coming out of the Innovative Learning Environment project – ILE – through the knowledge status “The Nature of Learning”).

The Steiner schools are the only school type in Norway working according to their own curricula. Oslo City Steiner School contributed in a significant way to formulate these anew. Ideas, plans and practice are in retrospect assessed as innovative both from the Steiner school society and the Department of Education.

The Steiner school equivalently weighs humans' emotional life and competence to act. One has to engage body, emotion and mind to make the teaching meaningful for the single student. Students are therefore presented with three branches of knowledge: Theory, crafts and arts.

The most important pedagogical principles are:

- The school's goal is to create a lifelong motivation for learning, through engagement, curiosity and wondering
- The students are presented with three branches of knowledge: Theory, crafts and arts. A wide register of activities makes it easier for everyone to master subjects.
- Art is not primarily a subject in the Steiner school, but a way all the subjects are gripped. The subjects are adapted to the single student and made personal.
- It is intended to have ongoing feedback and dialogue. This includes assessment of the student's development and school situation. This is an important part of the pedagogical work.
- Good teaching processes allow risks. The student needs the opportunity to practice, fail, master and try again.
- The teacher must also be in continuous development. The Steiner pedagogic style is demanding when it comes to the continuous development of the teacher.
- The teacher is to have a clear leadership over the class community and the student group. At the same time equality and mutual respect between teacher and student is weighed, as well as close and personal contact.

In one area the evaluation of the Steiner school students' knowledge level is made in the same way as in other schools, meaning the national tests (tests in the basic skills of reading, mathematics and English in 5th, 8th and 9th grade). Here the Steiner school students in Norway score almost 10 % better than the national average, after it has been adjusted to socioeconomic family background.

5. Resources

No owner was willing to invest in the new school, neither from public authorities nor the Steiner school society. It had to be started completely without resources, and loans had to be made. There were no security, but eventually guarantees for 1 ½ million NOK from private and ½ million NOK from other Steiner schools were contributed, so that loans for 2 million NOK could be made in the bank.

Of course this was far too little. One went from crisis to crisis, and lived from hand to mouth. This lasted until after starting the school in 2001. At one time the daily manager took up a large personal loan to be able to pay salary to the teachers.

When a Steiner school is established, it receives public subsidies equivalent to 85 % of the operating expenses, though there are not granted any support to cover the capital expenses. This means that the financing of the school building have to be done personally. This means that a school is to be run after the same quality requirements as for public schools, for approximately 65 % of the budget the public schools dispose. This is done first and foremost through:

- Parental payment. This is however limited up to 15 % of average operating expenses for public schools.
- Teachers make less money than in public schools
- Teachers work more than in public schools
- Students work more than in public schools
- The parents are mobilized to voluntary work.

For 2009-2010 the parental payment at Oslo City Steiner School was 22.000 NOK per fulltime student.

6. Development over Time

The entrepreneur phase

The first phase, until the start of the school in 2001, was characterized by innovative thinking, visionary work and many principal questions and declarations. In the beginning it was characterized by conflict. It was also characterized by hard work, full speed, many initiatives, primitive working conditions and absence of vacation and spare time.

The foundation Oslo City Steiner School was founded in 1999, and it was until the start of the education fall 2001 lead by an interim board.

Multiple crises had to be solved in the entrepreneur phase. The four biggest might have been the conflict between the Steiner school society, the question of financing, the question of government approval and the question of facilities.

It was begun to hire teachers in spring 2001.

Pioneer phase

When the school was started it was important to implement the plans, mobilize willpower and keep going. It was important to:

- Hold the pioneer spirit alive
- Think in long terms, build stone by stone
- Establish good and common norms and rules
- Build good relations
- Build pride, and a strong and solid organizational culture
- Make all employees take responsibility
- Make all students experience a social community and affiliation
- Make all the students committed

It was a stressful period for everyone. Today there are 61 employees at the school. In 2001 the school was started with 17 employees. In a period of 10 years, 61 persons have quit. This can mean that the process has been demanding.

The first two years one of the two initiative takers was both daily manager and board manager. He worked in a 140-150 % position. The third year, the other initiative taker came in as daily manager, while the first went back to teaching. Now a third person is manager. To be the manager of such a new enterprise can be both demanding and filled with conflict.

Consolidation phase

The four past years can be called the consolidation phase. Now it is important to bind the different sides of the school, the different activities, the different employees, the different students and the different subjects together, as well as building:

- The school as an organization and community
- A uniform and clear management for the school

The situation in 2001 is that:

- The school year 2011-2012 is the last step in the school's establishment and growth
- The curriculum work is final
- Establishment of new branches is final
- In August 2011 the school will have 15 classes for the first time, 5 classes per grade
- The staff is mostly in place
- The school has economic challenges: two special rooms, one hall and a library lack, but neither the economic or physical opportunity to expand exists.

7. Evidence of effectiveness and efficiency

It is usual to compare the results before and after this innovation, seen as Oslo City Steiner School is a new creation. It is therefore first and foremost today's results that are interesting.

Results/grades in subjects

There has been comparison between final grades at Oslo City Steiner School and the average of public secondary schools in Norway. Comparisons have been made in 19 subjects. The former scores significantly better in mathematics, Norwegian side language and physics. The school scores weaker than average in Spanish and natural sciences. In total the school scores somewhat above average in Norway.

It is subject when direct comparisons between Oslo City Steiner School and other schools are made, partly because they have different curricula and partly because their grades are presented differently.

Dropping out

The amount of students who have quit the school is 8.9 %.

Drop out after 2 years (not continuing education within 2 years) is 6.4 %

This is significantly much lower than the average in Norway. The numbers are from 2009-2010.

Work environment and teaching environment

The results from a student survey:

- 96 % of the students in every grade say that they find the school's intention of teaching centralized
- 96 % points out that the diversity in the different educational forms during the day is important
- 61 % means that the teachers help everyone to learn in their own level
- 67 % experience that the different subjects illuminate each other
- 86 % experience that things students have learned other places are put in context with the school's education

There is no doubt that the students are very happy with the school which they attend.

The point that scores exceptionally high is the diversity between the different educational forms such as theoretical subjects, art subjects and craft subjects represent. In all three years in lies between 95-96 %, something that shows that all types of students, boys and girls, from all grades and study branches and students from public schools and Steiner schools experience this as a very important motivational factor.

Other indications of the school's quality:

Applying

Oslo City Steiner School has significantly more applicants, in all branches, than what's possible to admit (average 47 % above the capacity)

Growth

Oslo City Steiner School started with 11 full time equivalents, 84 students and a budget of 7.3 million in Norwegian Kroner in 2001. As the school has been more known, the demand has continued to increase.

Today (2011) there are 63 full time equivalents, 438 students and a budget of 60 million NOK.

Oslo City Steiner School is now the largest secondary Steiner school in the world. The school does not wish to expand further.

"Competition" with other Steiner schools

Before the establishment of Oslo City Steiner School there were three secondary Steiner schools in the county. Two of them are now closed, the third one closes next year.

Resources

The Steiner school is run according to the same quality requirements as public schools, for 63-64 % of the budget disposed by the public schools (see paragraph about Resources).

Sustainable development

The school has not received any support from public authorities for development, neither professional support/counseling/guidance/encouragement nor economic support.

Many of the public schools have received extra external help and support in connection with “The Knowledge Promotion Reform” (“Kunnskapsløftet”).

“Young scientists”

Every year a competition between secondary students in all of Norway called “Young scientists” is held. 26 adolescents made it to the final. 6 of these came from Oslo City Steiner School. They received a first and a second place in the class for natural science and technology, and two second places in humanitarian subjects.

South Korea

In 2012 the school was visited by a television team from South Korea who made a show about Oslo City Steiner School. The reason was that the school in their opinion was the most innovative school in Norway.

Description of the school

Students

52 % of the students come from Steiner schools, 48 % from public schools. Applicants came from all parts of the Oslo region. In 2010 there were applicants from 52 elementary schools in the Oslo region.

The students are not distinguished by especially resourceful parents, more the other way around. There are no statistics on this, but this is a clear impression from the school’s management. It is however reason to presume that the students/parents have made a more active choice in school than what’s usual.

The students are highly motivated. The school explains this among other things with the weighing of teaching through the students’ emotions. Individual considerations are to be greatly made. All the students should experience a sense of coping.

Teachers

The school has in the school year 2010-11 all in all full time equivalents.

The teachers are competent and motivated. A reason for their motivation is probably that they have been a part of an innovative creation project, which in itself gives energy.

The teachers have a higher salary than what’s common among Steiner school teachers, app. 2-3 % under the public.

The teachers have fixed meetings one afternoon and one evening per week together with the other teachers.

Professional and personal development for the teachers is weighed. There are held courses, seminars, close co-operation in the school and monitoring of the teachers. The teachers allocate a week from their summer vacation for professional and personal development together with the other Steiner school teachers.

Management

One of the goals with the establishment of Oslo City Steiner School was to move from an “organism model” (with a very flat organizational culture and many collective processes) towards a “management model”(with clearer management roles and leader responsibility).

There is accordance between responsibility and authority.

Content

The Steiner schools have their own curricula approved by the central authorities. In addition to the professional goals (as defined in the curriculum), the school wishes to see schooling in a lifelong perspective. The school's aim is that it should help producing independent thinking, independent judgment and personal initiative. It is in this context that the school's weighing of artistic and practical subjects must be understood. The most important goals for the school are that the students shall:

- Learn to work independently, but also be able to work together and communicate
- Become innovative and creative, but also be able to think independently and critically
- Learn to solve problems, but also find good information fast and be able to use technology effectively

The number of hours of education is significantly higher than in the public sector. For general subject studies the number of hours is 16.6 % above the public, for professional studies 4 % above.

Organization

What is to bind the different sides of the school, the different activities, the different employees, the different students and the different subjects together are:

- The school as an organization and community
- A uniform and clear management for the school

The school weighs:

- Establishing good and common norms and rules
- Building good relations
- Build a strong and solid organizational culture
- Making all employees take responsibility
- Making all students experience a social community and sense of belonging
- Making the students commit

33 students per class

8. Success Factors

Two strong entrepreneurs

The most important success factor was that there were two very competent persons with strong willpower, optimism, strong engagement, implementation force and endurance. This was combined with having a good and thoroughly thought through idea.

Using the advantages of being a private school

Being a private school has its disadvantages, but also its advantages. It is possible to work more independently, more informally and make fast decisions. In many areas there is a stronger sense of freedom. It is easier to build up character, pride and solidarity in the operation than in public operations, where the requirement of uniformity is strong.

Pioneer spirit

The entrepreneur strategy can release a strong pioneer spirit. Something new that wasn't there before is created. You form the operation yourself. This releases initiative force and dedication. It is difficult to blame others. It is possible to have a great influence. There is a sense of responsibility and a strong identification with the task and the operation occurs.

The way forward: Both renewal and conservation

Almost all features of an organization have two sides, both a positive and a negative. All the things that was sought to be changed by establishing Oslo City Steiner School has also positive sides. For example: Specialization and in depth studying is good. At the same time it is important to uphold the positive in common subjects, working interdisciplinary and dividing lines. Oslo City Steiner School has broken off with several sides in the traditional Steiner school. But Oslo City Steiner School is still a Steiner school. The pedagogical principles (which first and foremost separate the Steiner schools from other schools) were not sought to be changed.

Changes easily lead to defense. In a changing process it is important to show respect for what has been, and not act condescending or arrogant. One has to make it clear that it is sought both to conserve and renew. When the initiative takers first were attempted to be excluded from the Steiner school society, they chose not to enter an open confrontation and conflict. They said they didn't even want to call it a conflict. They had decided to establish this new school, so then they just implemented it in a way that was to be as least dramatic as possible.

Good start

Oslo City Steiner School had a good start. It was budgeted with 60 students the first year. Additionally an optimistic budget was made (75 students) as well as a pessimistic (45 students). The result was that 85 students applied, more than what was hoped for.

9. Tensions and impediments

Intense internal resistance

The first and most surprising problem was the strong resistance, and the very uncomfortable criticism they received from their own colleagues. Next it was the strong sanction that the Steiner school society tried to put into force in the form of exclusion.

Economy

The project has had continuously bad economy (see paragraph about Resources). When the school was started, there were no money and loan guarantees had to be gathered. This was first and foremost received from private sector, but also some from other Steiner schools. This made it possible to take up loan in the bank. At first the initiative takers themselves had to take up significant private loans to be able to pay salary for the teachers. The project has therefore continuously lived with a high risk.

Public approval

The authorities hesitated a long time before approving the plans and the project was near a collapse.

Facilities

The real estate company wanted to break the agreement off after it had been made. The project almost collapsed.

Change in management

Management is often controversial. Different phases in a development run demand different types of leadership. Oslo City Steiner School has changed management several times.

Endurance

A different innovation process lasting for a long time demands a strong will and strong endurance.

What can others learn from this case?

About teaching processes:

- It is possible to make students work hard and to a large extent
- There are certain methods and teaching processes that are more effective than others
- The combination of the intellectual, the artistic and the practical is interesting, among other things before the artistic and practical can stimulate the intellectual

- The Steiner school pedagogy in secondary grades works equally well for those who have not previously attended a Steiner school

About the school as an organization:

- The synergy effect from weighing the school as an organization and community is big
- The key in a good organization is common norms, strong culture and equal basic views on teaching

About innovation and change:

- It is possible to manage basic changes in a school
- It is easier to establish something new than to change something old
- Change happens in phases and leaps
- Different phases have their special challenges. These must be solved before entering a new phase
- Changing processes must be managed and led
- Different phases require different leadership
- If everyone are to agree before making changes, there will rarely occur a basic change
- Change is not free from conflict. It requires both competence and courage