
Norwegian Policy: Empowering School Libraries

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This article has two aims. The first is to describe and discuss how the political school and library systems in Norway interact to improve school libraries and reading. Empowerment is introduced as an overarching concept, and legal-based and legitimacy-based power as useful concepts to describe and discuss the interaction of the systems. The second aim is to present and discuss how the Norwegian plan Make Room for Reading! Norwegian strategy for stimulating a love of reading and reading skills, 2003–2007 focuses on empowering school libraries through selected strategic projects and financial support.

Introduction

Over the years, Norwegian school libraries have played an important role as lending libraries, but a much lesser role as an integrated part of teaching in school. Policy has been drawn up to rectify this situation that focuses on empowering the libraries. This article begins by outlining the status of school libraries in Norway in 2005, with a focus on empowerment. We then present the national strategic plan *Make Room for Reading!* (Norwegian Ministry of Church, Education and Research, 2003b, 2005). This is an interesting example of a government effort to highlight the importance of school libraries in the context of reading.

The Oxford American Dictionary (1999) defines *empowerment* as “to give power to, to make able; to authorize, license.” Using this definition as a starting point, we examine how current Norwegian policy is directed at enabling school libraries to participate in education through legislation, guidelines, standards, and strategies.

Rindom (2002), a Danish researcher on education, claims that traditional empowerment theory builds on humanistic values and refers to the educational theories of Freire (1993) and Habermas (2001). Rindom provides a framework for giving power to individuals or groups that perceive their position in society as deprived of power and locked into a hierarchi-

cal dialogue with an administrative system. According to this theory, empowerment would signify a symmetric dialogue between the school library and school at the micro and macro levels. Furthermore, the dialogue would be rational and knowledge-based. Although this interpretation of empowerment is helpful, we argue that a more proactive understanding of the concept may be fruitful in a hyper-complex society characterized by autonomy, flexibility, and initiative.

The term *power base* (Møller, 1996) is introduced to clarify the interpretation and use of the term *empowerment*. The concept refers to the base of power of a job or a specific function in society, which can vary from being rich in power to being deprived of power. The concept can be further divided into two forms of power: *the legal base* and *the legitimacy base*. *Legal-based power* refers to the legal framework of the job or function. *Legitimacy-based power* refers to professional and personal confidence in, and support for, the job or function. We assert that it is of vital importance that there be a good balance between the two bases. At the same time, it is important to indicate that there will always be a dynamic relationship between them and that they affect each other. *Legal-based power* must be as strong as possible in order to gain power in dialogue with representatives of professional and bureaucratic organizations on a national or local level where each party has equal standing. To achieve power through academic and personal skills, *legitimacy-based power* needs to be distinct and to have authority.

Status of School Libraries in Norway

The Legal Base

The Law

Basic education in Norway includes primary and lower secondary school (ages 6–15) and upper secondary school (ages 16–19). It is governed by the Education Act and Regulations to the Act (Norwegian Ministry of Church, Education and Research, 1998, 1999). The section that applies to school libraries states that all pupils shall have access to a school library. It also lays the groundwork for cooperation with public libraries. In both cases, the library must be adapted specifically to the school (section 9-2 of the Education Act; section 21-1 of the Regulations to the Act) and be open to pupils during school hours. No guidelines or regulations are given for either primary or secondary school in terms of staffing, budgets, space, or equipment for school libraries. Each school is free to decide how to implement the law.

The Current National Curriculum

The national curriculum is another important tool for empowering school libraries at the government level. In Norway, the curriculum for primary and lower secondary school has a specific section on school libraries (Norwegian Ministry of Church, Education and Research, 1996). This states

that the school library is of vital importance to educational and cultural activity in school. *Joy of reading and learning to search for information* are among its key phrases. The importance of school libraries is hardly mentioned in the national curriculum for upper secondary school (Norwegian Ministry of Church, Education and Research, 1993).

The New National Curriculum

A new national and comprehensive reform of basic education called "Knowledge Promotion" (Norwegian Ministry of Church, Education and Research, 2005) is due to be implemented in 2006. In this document, the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research outlines the main lines of future basic education. School libraries are not explicitly mentioned in the document. However, school libraries are crucial to certain areas, basic commitments, and basic skills.

From the basic commitments:

- "Stimulate in pupils and apprentices/trainees the development of their own learning strategies and their capacity for critical thought.
- Promote adapted teaching and varied working methods in the basic skills."

The basic skills:

- "The ability to *express oneself orally*;
- The ability to *read*;
- The ability to *express oneself in writing*;
- The ability to *use information and communication technology*."

The Ministry has stated that these fields will be given priority and focus in the curricula for all subjects.

Staffing and Budgets

The staffing of school libraries varies greatly. On average, school librarians work 5.48 hours per week in primary and lower secondary school. One third of school librarians have the required academic background: a minimum of six months of full-time study in school librarianship supplementary to their teacher's education (Statens Bibliotektilsyn, 2001). On average, school librarians in upper secondary school work 33.3 hours per week, with just over half holding certification, having completed a minimum of three years of library science (ABM-utvikling, 2003).

Counties have financial responsibility for school libraries in upper secondary school; municipalities have responsibility for primary and lower secondary school. The average annual grant per pupil, earmarked for books and other media, was NOK 184 in 2003 (Statens Bibliotektilsyn, 2001), varying from NOK 539 in one county to NOK 88 in another (ABM-utvikling, 2003).

The Legitimacy Base

School libraries in Norway have a highly variable base of legitimacy due to the decentralized political system and varying political priorities at the local level. Furthermore, there are great differences between schools due to educational philosophy and practice. Schools with a dominant teacher- and textbook-oriented practice often have school libraries that have little space and receive little attention. Schools with a more pupil-oriented practice and that use a variety of work methods have school libraries that have more space and receive more attention. Another key aspect of the legitimacy base is academic expertise in managing and using the school library. Norway still suffers from a lack of this expertise. We argue that school libraries in Norway, as elsewhere in the world, mirror the schools' academic level, ethos, and values (Willars, Sætre, & Berhard, 2002).

Empowerment of School Libraries Based on the Current Status

The existence of an ineffectual legal base and a variable legitimacy base means that the present empowerment of school libraries is unpredictable. Policy directed at empowering school libraries has been decentralized to the regional and local levels. This means that the dialogue between the bureaucratic and professional organization and the school library depends on a responsible approach and attitude to the legal base. It is further dependent on the content and quality of the legitimacy base, which varies considerably from one school to another. Increasing the power of the legitimacy base is the best starting point for empowering school libraries from a strategic perspective. School librarians professionally trained in librarianship and in the educational field will gain increased status by way of their qualifications. This will enable them to negotiate and discuss in their own "language" their educational exploration with school leaders and teachers and with students.

In future, experience in managing and using school libraries in education may lead to an improvement in the formal framework and legal base, because argumentation on the part of school library services will be improved and professionalized. This strategic approach does not imply that national policy is of lesser importance. More elaborate and robust legislation is required to arrive at a more predictable and visible position for the school library.

The National Plan Make Room for Reading!

Make Room for Reading!

Make Room for Reading! Norwegian Strategy for Stimulating a Love of Reading and Reading Skills, 2003-2007 (Norwegian Ministry of Church, Education and Research, 2003b, 2005) focuses on improving reading ability and promoting the joy of reading. The plan covers all children from day care up to and including upper secondary education. It targets teachers, librarians,

principals, and parents. It seeks to contribute to reinforcing teachers' expertise in reading instruction and use of the school library. It further attempts to increase awareness of reading as a prerequisite for learning in all subjects, cultural competence, and participation in a democratic society. The plan is dynamic and open to revision by local and regional institutions, including universities and university colleges. The 2005 revised edition was launched at World Book Day in April 2005. *Make Room for Reading!* should be seen in conjunction with another ongoing national project *The Cultural Schoolbag*, a priority program for cultural education in the school system (Norwegian Ministry of Church, Education and Research, 2003a). Starting this year, *Make Room for Reading!* (Norwegian Ministry of Church, Education and Research 2005) will run parallel to the new education reform *Knowledge Promotion* (Norwegian Ministry of Church, Education and Research, 2006), and *Make Room for Reading!* must follow the terms of this reform. Both plans stress the importance of reading.

Schools and municipalities receive annual financial support in order to implement the plan. In 2004, more than 200 projects were launched in Norwegian schools, covering reading habits, reading instruction, development of school libraries, boys and reading, and screening of reading abilities, to mention a few. One goal of the plan is for all schools to develop reading plans that incorporate these elements. On the local and regional level, schools are enthusiastic about the plan, and much creative work is being done all over the country for the benefit of pupils.

Empowering School Libraries by Making Them Visible Through Reading Projects

The main focus of *Make Room for Reading!* is on reading, literacy, and literature. The many reading projects will require a great variety of texts adapted to a broad spectrum of reading ability. School libraries will provide the texts, often in collaboration with public libraries. School libraries are poorly integrated with the curriculum in many schools (Rafste, 2001). The reading and literacy projects will give school libraries the opportunity to play a vital part in education and to become more visible. Teachers and school librarians will be able to join forces to transform pupils into better and more engaged readers. Another important issue in the plan is to develop progressive reading plans in all subjects and in all years. This strategy will give school libraries a unique opportunity to build partnerships with school management and teachers.

Empowering School Libraries Through Make Room for Reading! Projects

A district in southern Norway has received financial support to build a network for school librarians. They hold workshops together and exchange ideas on how to develop school libraries. This allows them to expand their legitimacy base and makes it easier for them to communicate with the for-

mal school system on an equal footing. Some schools in the network have applied for financial support to launch projects to stimulate reading. The school library has acted as a driving force for both pupils and teachers in these projects. School librarians have cooperated with teachers to draw up a good, rich selection of books for all pupils. The funding, although modest, inspires schools to work on reading and integrates school libraries as a vital part of their activity. The school library is made visible to the bureaucratic and professional organization through this proactive type of action; it is achieving empowerment.

The National Network for School Library Professional Development

Supplementary training for teachers and school librarians and networking are crucial components of the plan. The national network for school library professional development was established in 2004 as part of the strategic plan *Make Room for Reading!* Agder University College in Kristiansand and Bergen University College are in charge of coordinating the network. The main objectives of the network are:

- to define the school library as a subject;
- to analyze the need for education and expertise in the field;
- to initiate and develop studies in the school library field; and
- to facilitate the visibility of the school library as a learning arena.

The network functions as a meeting place for various target groups involved in school library issues and for discussion and coordination of these issues. It also allows discussion and influence on legal-based power at the national and local level. Representatives from all the universities and university colleges have been invited to join the network and will constitute an important voice in putting school libraries on the agenda at this level of education. This can thus be seen as another way of empowering them. In addition, school libraries can be empowered through collaboration with other networks, especially networks for reading, writing, and literature. Finally, developing supplementary teacher training is seen as an effective way to improve the legitimacy-based power of the school library.

Empowering School Libraries Through Cooperation Between Networks on the National Level

Building bridges between networks may be an effective way of putting school libraries on the agenda at the level of higher education. The National Center for Reading Education and Research established in the University of Stavanger will be a partner. The school library sector should be integrated with the research and courses offered by the center. The network for Norway covering writing, reading, and literature is another important partner. We have already developed the joint study *Reading Instruction, Literature and School Libraries* (see below).

Increasing the Legitimacy Base Through Teachers' Supplementary Training and New Studies

The supplementary training already comprises studies and workshops in four fields as follows.

1. Workshops on information literacy for teachers at teacher training colleges or university colleges.
2. Workshops on how to use school libraries as an integrated part of instruction in teacher training colleges.
3. A new 15-credit study module for teachers and librarians on reading instruction, literature, and school libraries.
4. A new 30-credit study module for teachers and librarians on information literacy at Agder University College. This college already has two other 30-credit study modules in school librarianship. Bergen University College has also developed three modules in librarianship with a focus on education.

Empowerment Through Strategic and Temporary National Plans

In many ways, *Make Room for Reading!* has been like a breath of fresh air for education at every level. All schools can apply for funding to initiate projects through which they believe their pupils will become better readers and more independent learners. By focusing on reading, the school library is made visible as a resource center for both printed and electronic texts; and a center for both academic and leisure reading. In addition, the school librarian may act as an integral contributor to literacy development. If the school library is poorly developed, reading promotion projects may make the invisible school library more visible. In addition, the school library may be challenged to respond to the need for more expertise and resources.

On the other hand, the strategic plan may widen the gap between school libraries and schools. This may happen because many schools do not have the expertise to draw up a project and write a funding application. Even if they do submit an application, they may not be sure that it is good enough. This may be the situation in schools with a weak power base. The plan calls for proactive and creative schools and proactive school libraries. Instead of empowering libraries, the plan could lead to disempowerment.

It is interesting to note that the plan covers all levels of education and aims to empower school libraries through both top-down and bottom-up strategies. The workshops and the new study modules that the plan has made available are positive ways to empower the legitimacy base of the school library. The same applies to the national network for school library professional development.

An important question to ask about a five-year plan is whether the duration is adequate to develop lasting results. The Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education is aware of the problem of good results from projects of limited duration fading away at the end of the project period. This

is why allocation of funds to local projects is the domain of the state education administration in the counties (county governors). These are responsible for setting priorities, following up, reporting, and initiating joint regional action. It is clear in the plan that the focus is on a lasting strategy for all parties to stimulate the joy of reading and reading skills. The plan will be evaluated by the SINTEF research environment in Trondheim from 2004 to 2008.

The plan has been received enthusiastically, and it will be exciting to see how the recommendations in *Make Room for Reading!* are implemented in schools and how school libraries are integrated as a result. It will also be interesting to observe the long-term effects on the joy of reading and development of school libraries as a result of the fires that have been lit. We are concerned that the fires may gradually die down unless the state takes other drastic measures to follow up on *Make Room for Reading!* in order to increase empowerment.

Conclusion

School library policy can be used to empower school libraries. Empowerment has been interpreted as a symmetric dialogue between bureaucratic and professional organizations on the one hand, and the school library on the other: a dialogue where the school library also has a say in decision-making and is proactive. The concept of power base, which consists of the legal and the legitimacy base, is introduced as a helpful concept. The former is the formal framework of the school library. The latter is the personal and professional confidence in, and support for, school libraries as an educational instrument. This conceptual framework has proven fruitful in discussing the empowerment of school libraries. We assert that there is a dynamic relationship between the two sides of the power base, so it is of vital importance that there be both strong legislation and highly qualified and skilled professionals in school libraries in order to achieve a proactive and symmetric dialogue on school library matters. School librarians must be professional in both librarianship and education if they are to gain status in their schools. Principals and teachers, on the other hand, must know about the potential of the library for contributing to motivation and learning.

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