

# Support for Learning in Schools

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MASARYK UNIVERSITY





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PRESS



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# Foreword

Support for learning in schools is a topic based on efforts to develop schools towards openness and quality. It is a topic that reacts to the changing shape of Europe, thus becoming a focus of attention in European and national documents of educational policy and strategy. Processes of learning in schools apply to both children and adults, evoking a variety of sub-themes such as organizational learning, peer support, school counselling, mentoring and reflection of practice. These are points that bring together the efforts of school politicians, researchers and, obviously, people from schools.

A common interest in the main topic has also brought together Norwegian and Czech authors, who have decided to create this book and offer it to readers involved in education and schooling. The book is a collection of studies aimed at a wide scope of support for learning in Norwegian and Czech schools. The authors present data of selected surveys on this matter as carried out in recent years. The results are a synthesis of research knowledge as well as a resource for comparison of Czech and Norwegian conditions and support mechanisms for the development of learning and improvement of quality in schools. Similarity, concord and difference in efforts to support the learning processes in schools are presented, while some possibilities for the further development of support of learning in schools are outlined.

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*Bohumíra Lazarová*



# Introduction

A key issue for every nation is how schools can be sustainably developed for students' learning to be deepened and improved. But sustainability will not simply happen and can't be imposed only by authoritarian governments. The transition to sustainable development in schools must be thoroughly managed, planned and administered. It also needs a purpose and a vision of where society is heading. Inevitably this will require institutional changes in the national schooling systems (Pearce, 1995).

In a world of rapid change the European educational systems need to adapt both the demands of today's knowledge society and the need for an improved level and quality for increased sustainability. They must offer learning and training opportunities not only for young people, but for all kinds of groups at different stages of their life (Collins & Salais, 2004). The need for better quality of education implies the need to make national systems of education more comparable. A main focus is to foster the effective use of technology, in order to encourage young people to learn new skills and the transfer of knowledge.

In this book a newly established collaboration between Czech and Norwegian researchers explore different kinds of supporting schools in their work with the aim of providing better learning for all children. Previous research of school development has often been influenced by dramatic social changes and more recently by the rapid technological change with new arenas for communication and learning. Increased social inequalities can be expected to lead to differences in children's and young people's life chances. To solve this problem schools may need a variety of support, apart from the traditional activities of teaching and learning.

We look into alternative options for support, focused on collective learning and activity rather than passively receiving help. We pay attention to the different kinds of culture which children and youth experience in different contexts in The Czech Republic and Norway. Empirically, we use a variety of studies focusing learning in schools from both contexts over time. Theoretically, we intend to bring together our research, as mentioned above, with an overall European perspective of sustainable school development for the future. An important part of our thinking is focused on democracy and humanism.

## School development

School development is an ambiguous concept open to different explanation and interpretation, depending on the choice of perspectives and approaches. Educational institutions are often deeply occupied in various ways to evaluate their performance and thoughts of how to explore and identify new ways of learning. Policy documents simultaneously emphasize that daily school operations must evolve towards a greater

goal attainment. Educational leadership and the teachers' professional responsibility are, according to the curriculum, to take place in active interaction between staff and pupils, and in close contact with parents and the surrounding community (Olin, 2009). School development facilitates both continuous improvement of the daily activities, and the questioning of limits and rules of a certain school.

Fullan (1993) states that providing better learning assumes that teachers combine their common assignments with the skills of change agency. This leads to a need for new approaches of daily work completed by specialists with different skills, such as consultants, researchers and psychologists. Their roles are mainly as change agents, with the emphasis on formal and informal work in a collaborative management of the culture for organizational renewal – and thus supporting better learning in schools.

Some believes that the change starts with reflection, in a process where new knowledge replaces old knowledge (Rolf, Ekstedt, & Barnett, 1993). Reflections on human actions and experience are unpredictable, and can be limiting and allowing, liberating and constructive, or oppressing and destructive. It is always relevant to ask ourselves who is narrating, and why (Gislén, 2003).

Strategies for changing and developing schools can hardly lead to sustained changes and flexibility to different powers of change if they fail to consider the whole picture (Scherp, 2003). Our global world leads to extended roles and perspectives for schools and the society alike. School development for social development in a supranational reality demands different preparations and methods for implementation than before. At the same time, there is an increased need for school actors to reflect on their own professional activity and the collective identity of the school.

## **The relationship between educational theory and practice**

In everyday speech, educational practice means the daily activity of a school or an educational institution. Researchers add to the meaning of the term, but have difficulty agreeing on a unified definition. By extending the educational practice to “practice in the home, school, preschool and other education and educational theory as a scientific discipline” (Wallin, 1986), educational research can focus on the limits and possibilities of educational practice in developing for better learning in schools.

Similarly, educational theory can be described as being methodic and systematic, which means that it describes, explains and understand what happens in every day in schools, but also that it makes guidelines for educational practice, which is sometimes seen as problematic.

The relationship between educational theory and practice belongs to a general view on scientific knowledge building. The vantage point in our project is a concrete educational reality rather than a limited method or philosophical thought. Our aim is to present a selection of possible theories, methods and techniques able to develop the educational activities and students' learning on several levels in a dialectic interaction.

Practice is paramount in this line of thought, to the extent that education is concerned with purposeful actions in the actual reality, and because the theory springs out of this reality. On the other hand, any theory established through interpretation of reality – and anchored in a set of values – can lead to a change in practice, and the resulting practice could be the basis for a new theory. “This reciprocal co-dependency might be called dialectic, and because neither practice nor theory is determined in advance, it might be called an open dialectic relationship” (Myhre, 1980, p. 188).

## Reflection of quality

Quality as a term is hard to define. It is even harder to analyze and explain the meaning of educational quality and quality in educational research. New technologies lead to new ways of thinking. A constant priority should be the debate on the benefits of the technological development and its consequences for students’ learning. One problem is the great quantity of knowledge and information that is continually produced in educational activities. Thoroughly considered strategies, methods and instruments that can make the flow of information and knowledge manageable are needed in order to develop schools.

A student and problem oriented method of working entails processes of knowledge, with demands for collective learning and participation. This obligates school agents to cooperate to achieve the best possible solutions to common problems. Exchange of knowledge contributes to an increased growth of knowledge in the whole organization.

Collective learning can be explained as insight and understanding of the interactive and communicative actions that identify the common task and how it is to be executed (Granberg & Ohlsson, 2005). Reflection on quality is to accept the educational challenge in creating the conditions for successful learning for organizations and individuals alike, and how these complete each other (Söderström, 2011).

Part one of this publication, entitled *Norwegian and Czech schools: Policy and practice*, first explores the topic of support for learning in schools from a European perspective, subsequently presenting an outline of issues currently discussed within Czech and Norwegian education. This part is concluded with a list of systemic support measures and selected initiatives of various subjects supporting school development and the quality of learning processes in schools. While the Norwegian authors focus largely on guidance and social support for families and schools, Czech contributions rather deal with initiatives aimed more narrowly at the improvement of teaching.

Part two, *Support of teachers in theories*, is more specifically focused on professional support for teachers and school development as a necessary condition for “better learning” in schools. This part presents selected theories on which many efforts to support teachers and whole schools are based. The authors describe theories of organizational learning, mentoring and other kinds of counselling as support mechanisms for teaching at both individual and organizational levels. Attention is also

paid to reflective processes; in other words, support for learning through reflection carried out by reflecting teams.

Part three of the book, *Learning teachers as seen through research*, offers selected results of recent research surveys focused on learning processes and peer support in schools. The Norwegian part presents the results of the research and development project *Learning and Assessment* and a few other projects in which the authors observed the effects of the use of reflecting teams in schools. The Czech author summarizes the data of evaluation surveys carried out in schools that had the opportunity to draw on a long-term support of mentors and counsellors.

The last part of the publication is a summary of the main similarities and differences between the Norwegian and Czech practices in selected issues of support for the learning processes in schools.

Our overall intent with this book is to provide a comparable image for learning processes in Norwegian and Czech schools, in the light of European demands on policy and practice. Research data reflect the professional specialization and shows some particular efforts and their impact on school practice.

# I. Norwegian and Czech schools: Policy and practice





# 1. Education for the future in a European perspective

Every nation has its own distinctive character. Sometimes we take the complexity of explaining and understanding the characteristics of other nations and ethnic groups too lightly. Knowledge and competence equalize differences between groups and increase young people's opportunities to choose career and achieve quality of life (Giota, 2014). Without knowledge, we find it harder to relate to the world around us, and our positions on various issues may appear vague and ambiguous. Categorizations and preconceptions lead to prejudice and widening gaps between people. One way to define equality is people's right to education.

As a concept, democracy is about equal worth and rights and the possibility for individuals to influence their lives. Bauman (2002) argues that the future of democracy depends on its ability to enthuse and engage young people in dialogues on important social issues. The Norwegian school's democratic mission is explicitly described in the general section of the curriculum; however, the school's curriculum lacks a clear definition of what is actually meant by democracy and how conversations and discussions on democratic values can be implemented in the teaching of various subjects. For the teacher, it becomes a matter of understanding the student's thoughts and opinions in relation to various environments, but likewise to comprehend and explain the environments in relation to each other. Stray (2010) suggests that teachers are given the opportunity to develop democracy education, based on their own perspective, with unpredictable consequences of differences in the implementation. An occasional view is that schools should not engage themselves in democratic nurturing, but merely in education and teaching. Nykänen (2009) concludes that teaching activities always nurtures, regardless of whether the term „nurture“ is explicitly outspoken in the curriculum or not. In the public debate the discussion and the free conversation between equals are often stressed as the bedrocks of democracy. School assessors often emphasize the deliberative conversation with its origin in Dewey (2008) as an ideal work form, though the conditions and opportunities for implementation may vary a lot (Premfors & Roth, 2004). A study of Norwegian teachers' experiences of the role of schools in democratic education (Samuelsson, 2013) stated that the discussions in the classroom are often more focused on social and emotional skills than on attempts of investigating the true meaning of democracy. The study shows that students better understand and respect the opinions of others when they are given the opportunity to freely express their own opinions in the classroom discussions.

The ability to acquire new understanding and insight into society's rules and guidelines is not obvious. Common accepted opinions are neither obviously generalizable nor automatically transferable to every context. Different issues require different approaches to formulate acceptable answers and contribute to the students' willingness to learn something new. To perceive and absorb the diversity of opportunities and

challenges of life young people need to acquire a deeper conceptual knowledge of what is actually happening. If this kind of knowledge will increase in traditional school education, young people can feel more confident that the future will be manageable and understandable.

### **To augment young people's understanding**

Philosophers have always argued about the true definition of the term understanding. To problematize our reality is an important source of knowledge. But a sentence that represents reality in a certain way does not itself say how it manages to represent reality in that way (Stroud, 2011). In school, teachers and students are processing complex and abstruse issues and problems. A challenge for every school is to develop the activities of teaching and learning from traditional ways of mediating knowledge, to a stronger emphasis on students' inclinations and abilities to learn. In these processes the pupils will acquire strategies for their studies and professional life, through basic skills and key competences.

Student active work forms and social training demands the teacher's flexibility and ability to handle conflicts. The teaching profession extends from a mediator of knowledge, into a catalyst of the knowledge society (Hargreaves, 2004). However, there is uncertainty about to which extent today's teachers are really oriented towards strategies of this kind. Ekholm and Scherp (2014) emphasizes the risk that the teacher's role as an active mediator of knowledge will be reduced to passive monitoring of students ability to find literature and how to navigate on the Internet.

A report from the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (European Parliament, 2015), concludes that many European schools are not able to effectively adapt traditional teaching to the new information and communication technology. One of the challenges is to teach pupils how to systematically use their own technical knowledge and skills in their daily work. The digital revolution is transforming the way children and young people play, access information, communicate with each other and learn. The report questions whether schools really manage to update their teaching and learning process in relation to today's digital requirements. The rapid development of technology leads to further questions about how schools in the future will be able to meet the constantly changing digital landscape.

Alongside strategies and teaching techniques, knowledge formation also needs to be based on mutual respect and humility towards new conditions and opportunities for learning. In the pedagogical renewal, different perspectives are being considered, and both students and teachers are respected for their knowledge. In The European Parliament's report (European Parliament, 2015) the Finnish educational researcher Kirsti Lonka describes how the increased use of new technologies as educational tools make the pupils learning turn into a journey of discovery. Student active learning based on the attitude that the students' skills are to be exploited and not their weaknesses to be resolved, can lead to genuine learning.

Whether a work form is student active or not depends however not only on the context in which it is applied, but on how the students' learning process is made up. It is important that the youngsters get help from their teachers to create new ideas about various phenomena to understand, explain and manage their environment. In the student active school, students get answers to questions that they pose themselves, as opposed to the traditional teaching with answers to questions that they may have never thought about.

An essential idea of the school's educational activities is to be found in the perspective of learning and socialization, as constituted in the students' interaction with other students and with their teachers (Säljö, 2005). Increased amount of communication and interaction in the school environment makes it possible to develop new knowledge on how the learning occurs and what comes out of it. One problem is that the traditional learning goals can be defined and measured on the basis of certain criteria, while the social skills and achievement are difficult to assess and predict the consequences of.

### **A complex field of educational policy**

A global challenge for democracy is that political challenges transcend national frameworks, while influence over the politics remains at a national level. When democracy is moving across national borders to a supranational level, important social issues, such as how we can achieve an equal level of education, have to be viewed in a broader perspective. Kemp (2005) notes that globalization increases young people's opportunities to move within and between different cultures, as active citizens of the world. Nihlfors (2008) suggests that globalization has the same effect on schools and learning as on other areas of society, with increased mobility and competition as a consequence. An equal education for all, where skills and talents are nurtured, places certain demands on schools and educational institutions. The increase in international comparisons also helps creating a complex field of educational policy (Ball, 2008; Nordin & Sundberg, 2014).

The recurrent PISA surveys (*Program for International Student Assessment*), conducted by the OECD, have had a major impact in the debate on education. However, Pisa is only one in a series of international student assessments carried out regularly, i.e. every third or fourth year. The aim of these surveys is to provide the basis for stable and accurate trend descriptions of students' level of knowledge compared to students in other countries. The results of these measurements make it possible to read the development of knowledge over time. Although those responsible for the knowledge assessments emphasizes that the rankings are not the area of focus, the surveys tend to get a lot of attention. Nations average level and trend are used by both the OECD and other international researchers in studies of various countries' school systems. International assessments of knowledge have been conducted for nearly 50 years, but in recent years they have been given a larger role in education policy debates on development. The pupil's knowledge is studied in a context of global competition and national school system. The focus on the assessments is related to globalization, competition and measurement trends (Skolverket, 2014).

In a study by McKinsey & Company (2007) some basic principles to achieve quality in education were defined. The first principle was that the quality of a school system can not exceed the quality of its teachers. The second principle is that in order to improve the results you also need to improve the instructions given to the pupils. Thus, the school has to deliver high quality instructions to all pupils. Jensen (2012) sees obvious problems in using traditional measurement and analysis to determine the quality of educational programs. The level of quality depends on which values we wish to promote in school. Educational equity requires that its basic qualities are ensured at every level of the institution. The national mission of education and training is realized through a regional and local educational responsibility. Critics claim that if the collective responsibility does not work as expected, the school is in risk of changing from a distribution policy instrument to an individual springboard for key players (Dahlstedt, 2007). Research shows that better learning is stimulated in a safe and orderly school environment with common, clear goals and guidelines, as well as continuous monitoring of pupils' learning and school development (Sträng, 2014).

### Europe 2020

In a European perspective, growth for everybody requires that as many as possible get into a job market with more and better jobs, especially for women, young and older. The education systems in the EU must therefore be strengthened and adapted to future needs, with particular focus on entrepreneurship and innovation.

The European Union has in their strategy *Europe 2020* (European Commission, 2010a) set targets for employment, innovation, education, social inclusion, climate and energy to be achieved by the year 2020. The member states will thereafter set their own national targets in each area. Concrete actions both at European and national levels will support this strategy. In the strategy, the European Union work for sustainable growth, based on two main initiatives. The first initiative is about helping people to acquire new skills and adapt to a changing job market. The second initiative aims to develop the job market to increase employment, reduce unemployment and increase productivity in order to create a sustainable model of society. The aspects of entrepreneurship and innovation need to be introduced early in the schools' teaching to prepare young people for the challenges facing society. The educational programs and the needs of the business world must be coordinated in a better way for Europe to fill the growing need for expertise in different areas.

In the Europe 2020 strategy there are two objectives in the field of education and youth which should be reached by 2020. The first goal is that the proportion of students dropping out of school should be less than 10 percent, and the second goal is that 40% of 30–34 year olds should will a postsecondary education.

In other strategies and action plans, goals such as reduced distance between education and job market and young people's active citizenship can be identified. To reach these goals, the EU has a number of tools available to the member countries

in form of funds and programs as well as national recommendations. All member countries are requested to create a strategy in line with national conditions, to work in parallel with the strategy at EU level. The guidelines for the Europe 2020 emphasized that representatives from all levels of society should be involved in the formation of the national strategies.

The European collaboration is not limited to the member states of the EU, thus dialogue and exchange takes place in consultation with the European Union's external partners, such as Norway and Switzerland. Europe's future prosperity depends on areas of knowledge, research, innovation and education to develop and remain at a high and consistent level. Basic social factors need to be adapted to the requirements of the job market, adaptability and creativity. Through the introduction of more and open job markets, both national and supranational, it is possible to guide and teach young people at an early stage on how to best meet future global challenges.

### **Youth on the move**

The initiative *Youth on the Move* (European Commission, 2010b) is expected to contribute to the development of knowledge and innovation, and is part of the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy. The initiative emphasizes the youth's role in the realization of the Europe 2020 strategy. Through high quality education, integration on the job market and increased mobility, young people's knowledge and potential skills can be used to implement the strategic growth objectives.

A lot of young people in Europe still drop out of school early, with a high risk of unemployment and social hardship at a later stage. An OECD report (2015) concludes that more than 35 million of the 16–29 year olds in the OECD countries are neither in employment nor education. The report shows that when education and work function as two separate worlds, it is hard for young people to make the transition into the professional world.

Youth on the Move aims to reach the headline targets of Europe 2020, which are by 2020 to reduce early school drop outs from 15% to 10% and increase the share of young people with higher education from 31% to at least 40%. These efforts are also expected to help the member states achieving the EU's headline target of 75% employment by providing young people with knowledge and skills for the future demands of the job market. Commission surveys show that 35% of the new jobs in 2020 will require high-level qualifications and 50% will require medium-level qualifications (European Commission, 2010b). A vital part of the work is to improve young people's study and working conditions, with collaboration at local and regional level on various issues, such as integration measures, guidance to choose the right high school programs, internship opportunities, as well as support to entrepreneurship and mentoring. Moreover, European education programs need to adapt to the knowledge society by focusing more on entrepreneurship, languages and ICT, which are important features in today's society.

Youth on the Move, emphasizes the importance of necessity-based training and investment in innovative knowledge and entrepreneurship. Another important feature of working life is international experience. Apart from language skills, there is also a demand for knowledge and understanding of other social systems. Personal experience through longer stays abroad is an important skill. The majority of those who actively move across EU borders' in order to study or work is between 25 and 34 years of age.

The main idea behind Youth on the move is to give all young people an opportunity to practice abroad. Through increased international exchange and the creation of more jobs, young people can get help and support to look for work in other countries after finishing education. Greater mobility augments young people's future employability and opportunities for new experiences and skills. With access to new knowledge, as well as language and intercultural skills young people will develop into global citizens (Kemp, 2005).

### **Lifelong learning**

One of the objectives of what is commonly known as lifelong learning is to promote equality and integration, and interact with educational institutions and the society as a whole. Besides formal education, development of vocational skills and experience-based knowledge are important factors in the context of lifelong learning.

In the European perspective there is a deep understanding of the importance of lifelong learning, based on the student's own responsibility and the teacher's ability to convey knowledge. The teacher's learning contributes to the student's learning, by presenting new perspectives that stimulate their natural curiosity (Holmqvist & Nilsson, 2005).

To form national strategies for lifelong learning is a challenge for the world's nations. In a global perspective, lifelong learning may be facilitated by the various learning opportunities, where young people can move more easily between different levels and institutions of education. In the European collaboration, the support for mobility is enhanced through programs and various forms of initiatives, linked to national and regional programs and investment areas. Lifelong learning requires that the nation's school systems develop knowledge in accordance with the needs of the individuals as well as the professional world.

Apart from traditional acquisition of knowledge through education, young people also need to learn how to make well-informed decisions for their upcoming adult life. Career counselling high quality guidance, with extensive involvement of representatives from the job market are important elements of lifelong learning.

To learn how to learn, communicate in other languages, develop knowledge and insight into the conditions of self-employment, can be considered as key competencies in lifelong learning. When young people's knowledge, skills and social competence are combined with the right attitude to different situations and contexts, it can contribute to self-realization, social community and an active citizenship.

In the Norwegian school, entrepreneurship has become an important and valued part of the education in both primary and secondary school. Education in entrepreneurship is preparing the young to face the challenges of working life and to get an identity in the local community (Sträng, 2015).

### Key competence and challenges

The Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission, 2010a) defines eight “key competencies” with an emphasis on critical thinking, creativity and initiative, as well as problem solving, risk assessment, decision making and constructive management of feelings. These key competences are:

- Communication in the mother tongue
- Communication in foreign languages
- Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
- Digital competence
- Learning to learn
- Social and civic competences
- Initiative and entrepreneurship
- Cultural awareness and expression

(Europaparlamentetets och rådets rekommendation, 2006).

The term “key competencies” has achieved great importance in the European school policy debate. Key competencies such as skills and attitudes are considered necessary for young Europeans if they are to succeed in both the professional and private life (European Commission, 2012). For lifelong learning, young people need to acquire the key competencies early, as a basis for continued education and preparation for adult life. After the completion of basic training, the key skills continuously need to be updated to meet their personal needs as well as the expectations on the job market. Lifelong learning provides alternative educational opportunities and flexibility that will discourage early dropouts.

The European countries have made great progress in incorporating the key competences in the national curricula and other governing documents, demonstrating a commitment to better align the school’s teaching to young people’s everyday lives and to the society they live in. But there are still challenges in terms of how to implement the reformed curricula in the best possible way. The extent of the reform work varies from national strategies to improve learning by focusing on all the key competencies, to that of only emphasize some of them. The Scandinavian countries early focused on the need to provide both school and society with relevant information to be able to face the expected explosion of knowledge. In this effort, the basic skills, or key competencies have had a main role.

In the Norwegian school the *Knowledge Promotion (Kunnskapsløftet)* was launched in 2006, a major reform of the school's content, structure and organization. Apart from traditional school subjects, such as reading, writing, arithmetic and oral expression, digital knowledge is now prioritized as a basic skill in the curriculum (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2006). One major aim of this reform was that the curriculum, through an emphasis on the relationship between primary and secondary school, should contribute to an overall understanding of the pupils' total education. National goals for school activities were complemented by increased local freedom for schools and teachers. The five basic skills or key competences were to be integrated both within and between different subjects, based on the possibilities and conditions in the teaching.

The concept of competence was later expanded with cognitive, practical, social and emotional aspects of pupils' learning (NOU, 2014). Broader competence was expected to increase the pupil's ability to solve tasks and face various challenges. Critical thinking, problem solving, and cooperation have always been essential for the development of society and is expected by many to become even more important in the future society.

At the same time, critical voices have been raised against the concept of competence's aptitude to compare different individuals the ability to perform certain tasks. To acquire competence through education also means to be able to carry out a work that requires certain skills. In the OECD and EU document, even ethical qualities were classed as competencies. Liedman (2008) argues that the concept of competence is also being used as a measure of quality. The division of competencies in knowledge, skills and attitudes give an impression of fairness and transparency. All parties involved are informed about the level of competence the individual pupil possesses. But, in what way will the school be able to assess the pupil's actual ability to perform outside the educational institution? Liedman stresses that the key competencies must apply to lifelong learning, with recurrent training. To create preconditions for lifelong learning in an increasingly complex society is emerging as a major challenge for Europe.



## 2. Main challenges for the Norwegian schools during the last decade

This part of the book deals with elements that show how developments in school and in the teachers' education are demanding processes. Various aspects are being pointed out as background for the necessity of continuous guidance in a profession that at all times must adapt to a complex and rapidly evolving society. Since the school receives its assignment from the authorities, it should reflect and prepare students for a society that is consistently directed towards the future. At the start of his career, a teacher has a basic education that will help him or her to manage various future challenges. With such a task, it is important that the teacher acknowledges that updates and adjustments of both own competence and interaction must be continuous processes that evolve along the way. It is difficult to be a citizen in the new modern world, but perhaps even more challenging to be a teacher who has to deal with all these changes. Society often expects the teacher to be ahead of the events. At the same time, the teacher is responsible for leading the school in the direction established by the authorities. Often, this can also be in conflict with professional judgement and decisions (Garbo, 2014).

Ethical dilemmas are no longer just an individual challenge, but also an educational and political challenge (Ohnstad, 2011). An example would be when politicians need other forms of assessment than the ones believed to promote learning and knowledge from the teacher's academic point of view. Test results can be used to establish the school's goals, while they were initially conceived as educational tools to promote learning. As a result, this can become a conflict between professional considerations and political governance. This will be particularly apparent if school results are being used as incentives for resource allocation in favor of schools and individual teachers with good results. Media often reports on conflicts and dilemmas where school management has been subject to performance pressure, for instance by payment of principals according to the students achievements (Oslo kommune Utdanningsetaten, 2013). Cases like this create unrest and poor group cohesion, because this practice may be used against the individual teacher as well. Politicians have proposed higher wages for those teachers who achieve the best results (Aftenposten, 2013). The debate in media shows that such suggestions derive from political ideologies that still believe that the teacher is working alone in the classroom.

This rapid change in both the political and professional landscape, along with financial constraints, may require other solutions to everyday school. In such situations, help is not obtained merely by seeking advice, but also in finding your own resources and alternative ways of working. These hidden resources may well be found in the individual teacher. Faced with such challenges, it might be necessary to consider other ways to empower the teacher in order to release new solutions to everyday challenges. This

could be increased awareness and extended pedagogical reasoning in the teaching. This book will show the results of one way or method that might help to create a better life for both teachers, school administrators, students and parents.

### The teacher education

During the period of reconstruction of Europe, Norway has been characterized by significant school reforms. The post-war birth rates have been steadily increasing, the population has augmented and society has evolved rapidly, with the development of industry and commercial interaction between nations. The need for a higher level of competence has been an urgent one, as society has become more and more advanced. In addition to a rapid development in agriculture and fishing, the industrialization has required large resources. In Norway, the oil production has contributed to a rapid growth in society in nearly all areas.

The schools constant adaption to keep pace with the growth in industry and trade has been imperative for the success of a rapid and positive social development. Thus, the teacher's education needs to address these challenges with research, development and reforms. At the same time, the school must help to safeguard the national heritage. The teacher should be an important cultural mediator and must therefore be ahead of the cultural development. This is similarly demanding for teacher's education institutions that are subject to continuous restructuring processes. Meanwhile, the concept of culture is being expanded as the diversity in society increases. The teacher's training must be part of this development, and the need for competence development is consistent with the challenges faced by every day school. The need for continuous guidance and development is required (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d.).

The first public teacher training (1826) consisted of short seminars (Store norske leksikon, n.d.). The professional level of the late 1800s was limited to reading and writing skills, and knowledge was related to the church's need to convey their message. After the *Local Government Act* was passed in 1837, municipal councils and school boards took responsibility for the training. The church had previously been the driving force in the training, but with the Local Government Act, the responsibility was assumed by elected members of the local community. This resulted in a change towards a broader range of knowledge and an important democratic upbringing. Democracy meant not only commitment for everyone, but also a need for more control and knowledge to lead the society into the future.

The education of teachers with a broader academic base was a natural consequence of a society that wanted the school to have more significance for the population. Into the 1900s, the teachers training consisted of a four-year course in addition to a two-year training building on the "*Examen artium*" (the academic certification qualifying students for admission to university studies). In the 1970s, the teacher training became a 3-year academic study, and a specialization in various subjects gave the teacher a more profession-oriented position in the school. Eventually teachers got the opportunity to

immerse themselves professionally through specialization and continuing education courses. The authorities stimulated to such education through economic incentives like student loans and competency-based salary. This is an ongoing process, leading towards the future master – trained teachers.

### **A short summary of the school's significance in society**

School has been a primary focus of all political parties. The notions of the educational contents, however, have changed according to the prevailing political direction. It may seem as if the government at any given time wants to mark their political position through new curricula and educational models. Either way, everyone has realized that the next generations will be significantly more dependent on specialization due to this rapid social development. Almost until the 1950s the school system in Norway was characterized by different curricula for children within and outside the cities, until a law passed on 7- year primary schooling for everybody in 1959. The aim was improved general knowledge and a platform to facilitate further education. Subsequently, the students had the choice between a predominantly craft based education (*Framhaldskolen*) or the more academic direction (*Realskolen*), which again gave the opportunity to choose upper secondary education. However, education beyond this level was associated with expenses. Thus, it was not very common to complete upper secondary education that provided opportunities for academic studies. With the law on 9-year compulsory education (1970), the choice between the craft based and academic based direction was abolished.

In the 60's, admission to universities included about 10 percent of the youth cohorts (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, n.d.), moreover, the choice of studies was limited. In 1970 the number of people who completed a short-cycle higher education was 162,714 while in 2010 the numbers had risen to 782,284. Hence, the expectations towards the school, was mainly related to the provision of a good basic education for all children, to give as many as possible the opportunity to choose a higher education. Public measures of financial support to education should contribute to this.

In line with the social development that gained momentum in the 60's, better and deeper learning in basic education became a topic for discussion. The population increased, influx of people looking for work in the industry and service in the cities increased, housing shortage required the development of larger residential units, and the car as means of transport together with new technical everyday inventions, contributed to the quickly changing society. The need for specialized training and competency increased, and schooling became more important than it had been before. This brought about a change in schooling, and the first nine-year compulsory school was introduced in 1963, though initially only as a trial arrangement in some designated municipalities. Educational research had come far and there was an increasing interest in differentiating teaching. The last two years of the 9-year compulsory school was organized so that the pupils, together with their parents, could choose the level of the education. In the

subjects Norwegian, mathematics and English, there were three different levels of choice. Moreover, the pupil could choose German as third language, an offer divided into two levels. It was also made clear that in order to be admitted to the gymnasium, pupils had to be assessed on basis of their performance at the higher level.

Upper secondary school (ISCED 3) had not yet had an emphasis on academic learning, but from now on the youngster's opportunities to acquire in-depth knowledge and obtain entrance qualifications for admission to universities and university colleges, was to be facilitated. However, this organization of education created both pedagogical and political debate that led to the dissolution of the level division within a few years. Apart from the unfortunate division of academic levels associated with this, various voices claimed that such a division led to an undesirable social development as well. Although the curriculum enabled trials with 9-year schooling in 1960, the compulsory 9-year school was passed by law in 1969. The new reform of 1969 contained both the right to a 9-year schooling, but also a duty to complete this education. It also became necessary to offer further education after compulsory school. But, the educational program was still based on the old system, and thus divided the young between a predominantly academic direction aiming at university studies and colleges, or a vocational education preparing for an occupation in industry or crafts. Anyone who had finished the compulsory education was entitled to an upper secondary education, but there was no obligation to complete the three-year upper secondary program. Though there were no duties associated with the upper secondary education, the rights were given for a period of five years. For many young people, this can prove a difficult time if they are not admitted to their program of choice. This might lead to major challenges for student, teacher, school and the surroundings, thus it became necessary to expand and specialize the teacher's role. From 1997, the school starting age was lowered to 6 years, resulting in ten year compulsory schooling.

## Planning

It has been necessary for the school to contribute in the various processes of change. The teacher's professional background and assignment has been challenged to seek new knowledge and to make frequent vicissitudes. In such restructuring processes, it is vital for the school that the employees are meeting the expectations and requirement of the political authorities. Restructuring processes are still part of school life, and demanding for teachers pursuing continuing education and guidance in work.

From 1974 onwards, the educational content in schools was regulated by a new National curriculum plan for the comprehensive school "*Mønsterplan for grunnskolen*". This was the school's governing document. "*Mønsterplan for grunnskolen*" (KUD, 1974) was made up of two main sections of which the academic part made it possible for students to choose optional subjects in their last years of training. Moreover, the plan differed between compulsory subjects and topics, and intended to provide all students with a solid and broad competence in social studies.

Ten years later, a new plan was launched, but delays caused by political decisions, ultimately made this plan the “Mønsterplan of 1987” (KUD, 1987). The Special schools were phased out by law in 1975, and the training of children who had pronounced individual needs for care and education was now to be offered in the school. Pupils with special needs should be integrated into their nearest school and get their education together with other children. Hence, many children experienced to get out of an isolated environment. For the schools this became particularly challenging in terms of providing good teaching. School authorities stated that education is a community matter, and that such integration strengthened a positive view of humanity and equality. It was important to understand that learning in a socio-cultural context created better opportunities for learning for all (Säljö, 2001, p. 155).

From the mid- 1980s primary education was characterized by increasing demands for professionalism (M87). The new reforms expected the teachers to participate in development and planning. School subjects should include new methods and mindset and largely be adapted to an increasingly complex society.

In 1997, the Education Act was altered to accommodate 6-year-olds in school. The debate around this law amendment, included worries about the transition from a preschool environment with a high number of adults, to a large group of pupils with few adults in the first school year. The transition should be secured by increasing the number of pedagogues and assistants at the new first level (NOU, 1995, p. 18). Moreover, the first year in school should be characterized primarily by preschool pedagogics. Before long, the staffing norms were somewhat eased, and today they are practiced differently. For various reasons, mandated pupil-teacher ratio in class was abolished by the parliament on the 12 of June 2003 (NOU, 2003, p. 16) schools’ freedom to manage its own personnel, together with financial constraints, may have been some of the causes for this.

The reform also resulted in another pedagogical approach that not all teachers were skilled in. This was particularly true of the concept “theme and project work” which was an overarching principle of the reform. Teachers had good expertise in lecture methods, whereas the reform required active learning with focus on interaction, or student active teaching as it was called. Haug (2003) points out that in this case, the school owner showed no responsibility for the competence improvement necessary for the new educational thinking.

Concepts such as theme work and projects were new topics in the curricula, without the schools being familiar with the significance. The terms were often mixed up, probably because teachers were not updated on the differences between themes and projects. School owners were too late with the necessary competence development in this (Kompetanse for utvikling, 2005).

This brought about a restructuring process both in school life and in the teacher training. The most important part of the training was to undertake various projects and make use of experience. There was to be more emphasis on the ability to think creatively and new, than on mere knowledge. The concept of self-regulated learning demanded that pupils could master to spend their time efficiently and to organize and adjust their own learning. This new way of working was unknown to teachers who up

until now had been mediators of knowledge. In M87, other methods were prevalent, which became very challenging for many, as the teachers lacked the necessary skills. The evaluation of this reform did not impress school researchers (Haug, 2003). Yet, lecture-based pedagogy survived. A new plan was needed, and the “Knowledge Promotion” took over, with the *National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion (LK06)*, (Læreplanen Kunnskapsløftet, 2006).

Attention was once again directed towards customized training and planning with a focus on local curriculum work. This led to a new restructuring process for school staff. Now the curriculum turned into a binding regulation as well. Teachers training followed behind and the curriculums are still in edit mode, as the school is changing.

The economic, technical and social changes occurred at unexpectedly accelerated pace after this. From the 1970s, the Norwegian economy was based on oil exploration, which solidified economic development. This created new opportunities, but also new challenges. Authorities eventually got increasingly need to put emphasis on this through changes in the school system. Reforms were lining up, and it was important to indicate political direction. Developments in school should be reflecting changes in society.

### **Norwegian school in an international context**

This section attempts to identify connections between the teacher’s role and the social development. How can focus on more knowledge and expertise contribute to a better society? What are the forces governing this development? Is it plausible that education in our own country relates to the development elsewhere in Europe? How does this change the teacher’s role and duties?

The challenges faced by the schools may be seen in context of what was going on outside Norway. Comparison with other countries’ school systems made the school significant, not only for the pupils. Today it is crucial that the pupils are globally competitive. The school is in the process of becoming more international. Hence, it might be necessary with more control over what is going on in school. The nation’s need for further expertise and specialization should affect the way education prepares citizens for new challenges. Norway has strengthened its ties with the international market through oil trade and investment. Yet, the major political parties have rather different agendas in conveying their political values and reality, because school and training involves considerable expenses for the society. Meanwhile, the attitude towards the results of the efforts made in school has grown more conscious. This may be related to their need to compare endeavors in school with other countries, which the authorities have found it natural to compare with. Today, it seems to be a growing urge to measure up to those who have the best results, various measures are applied in order to identify and record the pupils’ knowledge and progress. This assessment culture is thought to have internal educational purposes, but also to help directing the need for knowledge and expertise towards a more international path. Norway does not stand alone in the world or Europe, but must relate closely to other countries to maintain their own growth and social security. In

this manner, the school is also governed by a financial commitment to achieve common goals. With tools like National Tests, TIMMS, PISA and other international assessments, classes and students are being measured against each other. This has led to debate about which priorities are wise, and how society should organize education in the best possible way, but still be able to control the costs.

### **Growing need for expertise in the teaching profession and education**

The teacher education in Norway is greatly affected by this. The authorities are facilitating for a major continuing education scheme, and from 2022 a master degree in education will be a requirement. Moreover, all teachers, irrespective of previously approved teacher training will have to augment their expertise through a large continuing education project. The teachers' unions are supporting the suggestion, although they seem upset by the fact that requirements for higher expertise should be applied retroactively (Ministry of Education). In this context, experience does not count as expertise, but the number of credits in the basic subjects does. In 2016, the number of teachers in need of supplementary education makes up about half of the entire profession. Nevertheless, there is a plan of great efforts to ensure that all teachers get a master's degree. Admission to the new teacher education program on master level starts in 2017, but the work has been going on for years. This is also the reason for the considerable restructuring of universities and colleges, with merging into larger units and stricter admission requirements for new teacher education students. In 2014, Statistics Norway (SSB) presented estimates showing that the lack of teachers will be around 40,000 within short (Gjefsen, Gunnes, & Stølen, 2014). Subsequently, this was adjusted to between 18,000 and 20,000 within 2020. Moreover, it will be difficult for educational establishments to meet the continuing education requirements for teachers.

The pupils' performances in national and international assessments have been used to argue that teachers need more expertise. This debate is lacking alternative explanations for the results. Others would like the curriculum to include values that contribute to creativity and expression, in order to develop the children as "whole persons" (Falch & Strøm, 2009).

The teacher's role has changed considerably with the new curricula, customized training and more time for research and development work. A career of teaching, through 30–40 years in school, forces teachers to be both adaptable and willing to change in order to meet the role expectations. From being alone in a classroom with many students and a joint curriculum, the teacher will now be working in teams with other teachers and facilitate customized training for all students. In this setting, all students should be integrated in a learning environment that promotes learning and social skills regardless of learning abilities. This is a job that also requires a lot of the teacher's personal qualities. The reason could also be that the teacher training itself, as well as the organization of the study programs and subjects are under revision.

## Profession and loyalty

There are many challenges to come for the Norwegian school. The media draws a picture of the teacher subject to a fiduciary duty that may be an obstacle to his assignment and professional ethics. Even in an open democracy like ours, it appears that the general educational and organizational culture does not give individual teachers the opportunity to point out the flaws in school, but only to convey the professional voice from the classroom (*Sandefjord-case*). This may be one of the reasons why teachers are relatively silent regarding school development matters in media. It seems that individual teachers to a limited extent participate in the public debate. In political contexts, the teachers' organizations and school owners (municipalities), as well as leading politicians have the opportunity to engage in the debate. There is little to suggest that this would be of particular help in solving any of the major challenges. The public debate is characterized by limits on who might express their opinion on school matters and who may not. Bureaucrats and politicians refer to loyalty matters if a teacher makes statements about anything other than their own teaching (Sandefjord Case, 2014). From time to time, the discussions in the Norwegian media are characterized by the ethical boundaries between loyalty and professionalism. Politicians and bureaucrats appear mostly concerned about the school's main task being to deliver measurable results. Teachers however, want to give emphasis to the general section of the curriculum, which deals with the development of the students as a "whole person", with non-measurable values of ethically importance, like cooperation, endurance, gratitude, ideas, environmental awareness etc. (LK06 – General Section). This general section is now being edited, and is likely to be completed in 2017/2018 (Ny generell, n.d.).

Despite the fact that Norway has a strong national economy, it is a widespread assumption that Norwegian schools are characterized by financial constraints and a lack of overarching understanding. Many teachers express through their unions that this is distressing. Recognition of society's complexity does not make it easier to find good solutions for children with severe challenges. The teacher organization's statistics of schooling for children with special challenges shows an increasing need for special education, while economists want to suppress this need because it is expensive. The number of pupils requiring customized education (special education) increases during the 10 years of compulsory school. In 2014, the figure was 3.8% in the first grade and 11.2% in tenth grade, even though the Education Acts requirements on early intervention should indicate that it is wiser to invest in early mastery as a preventive measure. Obviously, this development worries pedagogues, economists and political authorities alike. This trend affects the teacher's workday as well. It is being discussed whether the use of unqualified assistants for demanding pupils provides a better educational offer, or if it only helps to curb unrest without having a direct or indirect educational effect (Stortingsmelding 18, 2011).



### Children with special needs

Since school gained ground in a relatively primitive society in the 1800s, this was also the beginning of a debate about the understanding of normality. Children were defined as normal or not-normal and even as “abnormal”. Who was considered suitable for learning and how much training children and youths should have, reflected the predominant values of the time. The Church’s need for training was limited to reading and writing skills in order to understand the fundamental matters of faith. Increasing need for trade and production, road construction and development of cities and a more modern society, made it necessary that some pupils had more knowledge than others. In Norway, a distinction between those who were given the opportunity and those who were not, had existed for a long time.

For centuries, Norway had been under Danish rule, and during this period, higher education took place in Copenhagen. In the building of Norway as an independent nation, a well-functioning school system was important. Likewise, it was an aspiration that all children should receive training. This applied even to those who fell outside the concept of normality. In 1881 a law was passed, that launched the special school system in the country. From now on, also the „abnormal“ children should receive tuition. As mentioned previously, it was traditionally a strong distinction between children’s schooling in the rural and urban areas. For children in rural areas the schooldays were shorter and the curriculum was lesser. This was a time of slow social change, which is reflected in the long lifetime of the curricula of 1889. A range of institutions for all kinds of disabilities was established, and eventually all children from the age of 7 were offered education. Children should have equal opportunities for education and partly to care, and the institutions would cover both needs. Although institutions for severely disabled children existed in the late 1800s, the 1950s and ,60s saw an expansion with continuing establishment of new special schools. These were schools for children with various learning disabilities, behavioral problems, milder hearing and visual impairment. But, the integration idea had taken root, and the law on special schools (1951) was eventually replaced. A special committee (*Blom Committee*) was working to abolish the law and succeeded the mid-70s. The integration of children with special needs started and children were now entitled to schooling in their local area or school district. Consequently, the normal school faced new challenges and a need for both more resources and expertise. In addition to requirements on age and aptitude, school maturity had previously been an admission criterion. According to the Education Act (Opplæringsloven, 1999) children should enter school from the sixth year of age. There is also a provision in the law that that opens for a one- year delay, based on an expert assessment of the child. When the child starts school it should be ensured that he/she receives the education they are entitled to through customized training. Many teachers report that this is particularly challenging, as it requires both resources and expertise. Likewise, the integration has been a challenge for the teacher training institutions, which have facilitated for further and continuing training programs in special education. In addition to special pedagogics being included in regular teacher training, it has also been established various master

programs directed towards education of children with major challenges. Today the vast majority of these children are integrated into regular schools. To many pupils, parents and teachers, this requires an understanding of the widened concept of normality. In relation to this challenge, schools and teachers may need guidance to find efficient solutions to the daily tasks and the necessity of coaching.

Today, most people would agree that the concept “abnormal” is unsuitable, but despite of this, the school is still referred to as the normal school. The concept of *normal*, is now used in a much broader sense, and covers the majority’s educational needs as well as the right to special education. Within these rights, various diagnoses are used as alternatives to the normality concept. The diagnoses are often related to individual understanding of a child’s abilities, but a systematic understanding is gaining ground. This means examining the causes and circumstances that result in some children having greater difficulties than others. The ability-oriented understanding of the normality term is in danger of being constricted. For many teachers, the consequence is increased need for guidance related to these challenges.

### **Ethical challenges in school**

In the context of a deepening education, greater diversity in everyday school and the schools extended mandate, teachers’ unions have also had the need to distinguish themselves as professional players in society. A professional ethical platform has therefore been endorsed in all schools in the country (Nesfeldt, 2013). This code of ethics should define the teacher’s mission in school and provide clear guidelines for the expectations of the teacher. Likewise, it requires teachers to be able to deal with various ethical dilemmas in their work. This both to underline that they are acting in a professional role, but also that they act in accordance with the ethical standards expected by the society. It is an overarching aspiration that professionalism is based on ethical principles, since actions in everyday school might be in conflict with political and personal interests, as shown previously. An example of this is the assessment culture, where teachers are required to report on student achievements in contexts where the results will be used for political purposes rather than educational. With safe ethical guidelines, it will be easier to act as a single professional group, rather than individual teachers alone in pointing out the ethical dilemmas. Unions stress that the individual teacher should not be put in situations contrary to their professional ethics, i.e. through reporting used for other purposes. *The Ethical platform* refers to two main areas, of which one is about ethical values and the other about the teacher’s ethical responsibility and respect of all parties involved.

In working with children from kindergarten to upper secondary school, teachers encounter increasingly explicit expectations about what these institutions’ responsibilities are. Such expectations can create ethical dilemmas when political decisions are governing the activity in the kindergarten, or the school has to deliver solid, measurable results. The preparation in the ethical platform is of course part of the teachers training, but

takes place at the individual institution as well. It is strongly linked to the teacher assigned task. Such ethical guidelines also reflect society's view of humanity and the prevailing values. The teachers' ethical decisions should be characterized by knowledge of diversity and be in accordance with the expectation that the teacher should be able to convey the message that every individual can contribute to the common challenges. Ethics is subject to various interpretations, but in both kindergartens and schools, the focal starting point has been "the best interest of the child". This is also reflected in the government's guidelines to cooperation between Kindergarten and child protection services (Q-0801). This means of course that there are many answers to what is best for the child, and that ethics alone is not able to decide this. This applies not least to how peoples take care of each other, and what is the behavior pattern in different contexts.

### **Increasing need for guidance**

Based on all these elements, work is being done to provide guidelines for kindergartens and schools to clarify the opportunities and limitations of individual teachers and individual schools. The workday may seem challenging, and at the same time, many teachers experience that the opportunities are being delimited. This is also the point of departure for our method of guidance; to find new ways, shed light on the teachers' role and make good ethical decisions based on the individual situation. Similarly, the school owner is seeking to facilitate for competence development and encourages the guidance of newly qualified teachers.



### 3. Selected issues that are current in Czech education

Since 1989 Czech schools have undergone a process of turbulent change. Decentralization has turned schools into legal entities and provided them with considerable autonomy. Most of the changes that schools have been through in the last 25 years are anchored in the strategic document *National Programme for the Development of Education*, also called *White Book* (see MŠMT, 2001), and the legislation documents created in 2004 (MŠMT, 2004). Today we find ourselves in the period of final revisions to and adoption of a new Education Act, which will present schools with more changes and challenges. The wording of the new Act reflects the *Strategy for the Education Policy of the Czech Republic until 2020* (MŠMT, 2015), a strategic document that follows Europe-wide trends of development. Two priorities are typical of this document: elimination of unequal access to education and reinforcement of the quality of teachers and teaching. It is considered fundamental to promote these ideas in practice and create corresponding procedures and standards of implementation (EDUin, 2014). As for current challenges related to basic schools, we have chosen three topics that in recent years and months have provoked a lot of discussions as well as emotion: pupils' educational results, inclusive education and professional development of teachers.

#### **Pupils' results**

Post-communist schooling legislation substantially relaxed the obligatory curriculum. *Framework Education Programmes* were developed at the central level; schools use them to create and modify their own curricula, and to a certain extent they are able to specialize. After some time it has turned out that although this relaxation, resulting in a two-level curriculum, has brought several advantages, at the same time it has deepened disparities among students' and schools' results. There is a lively discussion on the question of which of personal and social (key) competences or academic knowledge is more important for a pupil's life and further development. Voices can be heard recalling the traditional form of schooling, which accentuates academic knowledge and returns teachers to their traditional role.

There has been a long discussion on pupil results at lower secondary level (ISCED 2), with particular reference to the changing structure of classrooms because of the best students leaving for eight-year grammar schools. In the 1990s and, even more so in the first years of the new century, secondary education underwent significant changes: some schools merged, traditional study subjects disappeared, new ones originated and a fair number of secondary private schools (ISCED 3) emerged, some of them providing

continuation study programmes (ISCED 4). All this was motivated by the good intention to make secondary and tertiary education accessible to more applicants. Yet schools could not avoid the rules of the market, so in order to attract students in a period of demographic decline they compromised standards and some of them abandoned admission proceedings.

The transformation of schooling, particularly the transition from a knowledge-oriented model to a model based on competences, has generated new demands for the conduct of teaching and new requirements for forms of testing and evaluation of results. The verification of the current level of outcome expected by the *Framework Education Programmes* is a legal task of the Czech School Inspectorate. Another duty of this institution is to gather and analyse information on education and evaluate conditions for and procedure of schooling. In regular periods, schools selected by fixed criteria are invited to carry out electronic testing in various grades and in selected subjects. As a result, there is a database that provides information for participating schools, professionals and the public and, at the same time, is available to schools that choose to join the testing voluntarily in order to compare their pupils' results with others. Recent years have witnessed particular emphasis on the testing of 5th and 9th grade pupils (i.e. those proceeding from ISCED 1 to ISCED 2 and from ISCED 2 to ISCED 3). Apart from this official testing there are portals of other organizations and associations that provide schools with opportunities for testing and comparison (SCIO, CERMAT and others).

Pupil testing is not unanimously accepted, however. The risk that results will be manipulated and/or the curriculum reduced in order for pupils to prepare for testing and admission examinations for secondary schools or universities is often highlighted. Research has shown that some headteachers do not consider the results they generate comparable because of the different adjustments to educational programmes and testing conditions (Lazarová, Pol, & Sedláček, 2015).

In order for the requirements of basic and secondary schools to conform with each other at least roughly, uniform entrance tests for secondary schools are being discussed and uniform secondary school graduation examinations gradually introduced. An important argument is that a fixed minimum of knowledge has to be proven by those who wish to study subjects in which they will graduate. This measure should improve the quality of education in these subjects, but it entails certain risks and makes manifest shortcomings in the Czech education system in the measurement of results (EDUin, 2014).

This adjustment comes up against the requirement of inclusion (see below), which dictates optimum usage of each pupil's potential and as a consequence complicates the matter of evaluation of the performance of weaker pupils. The results of inclusive schools and the outcome of pupils with special education needs are therefore hard to evaluate, measure and compare by means of standard testing.

Starting from the 1990s, Czech schools have participated regularly in international surveys such as TIMSS (mathematics and sciences), PIRLS (reading literacy), PISA (mathematical, reading and scientific literacy), CIVED (civic education) and ICILS (computer and information literacy). In comparison with the results of other countries, those of Czech students are not considered bad, but they are not stable (significant

deterioration was shown by the TIMSS 2007 survey) and differ in various literacies. As for recent years, let us mention the PISA 2012 survey in which Czech students recorded mediocre scores (Palečková, Tomášek, & Blažek, 2014). Above-average results were achieved by fifteen-year-old students in problem-solving and financial literacy (PISA, 2014). Recent PIRLS and TIMSS surveys have shown improved results achieved by Czech students as compared to 2007 (MŠMT, 2011) and there were excellent results in the ICILS 2013 survey in which Czech students achieved the highest score of all participating countries (Basl et al., 2015).

Therefore, international comparison has become a powerful indicator of strong and weak points of education in terms of pupil results. On the other hand it does not provide clear interpretations in the national context. Big questions are yet to be answered as concerns the relation between teachers' professional behaviour/growth and students' results. As is the case in other countries in recent years, evidence-based education has become an important topic of discussion. Also, academics are carrying out a lot of practical and action research intended to produce evidence of the effects of various educational methods, so at last moving theory closer to practice (Starý, Dvořák, Greger, & Duschinská, 2012).

## Inclusive education

The vision of “open schools” was already mentioned in the *White Book*, but today there is much more stress on the openness of schools for all pupils, regardless of their particularities and disadvantages. With the accent on pro-inclusive behaviour of schools, the new amendment to the Education Act reacts to the frequently quoted but controversial D. H. Judgement concerning the assignment of socially disadvantaged pupils to special schools, passed down by the European Court of Human Rights in 2007. The Ministry of Education strives for restriction, if not abolition, of the practice of assigning children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds to off-mainstream schools (such as the so-called practical basic schools), in order to guard against malpractice. Currently, basic schools are obliged to accept all pupils from the vicinity, and it is expected that schools (basic schools in particular) will be open to students at various types of risk and disadvantage. The implementation of this regulation provokes a lot of emotion. The problem is not that school leaders and teachers reject inclusive education as a value, but they find it difficult to imagine a common education for gifted pupils on the one hand and the mediocre and mentally disadvantaged, including pupils with sensory processing, behaviour, emotional and personality disorders, on the other. They are afraid of not being able to manage classes with such a large diversity of pupils under current conditions, as:

- there are still many schools with physical barriers (although pupils with disorders and physical disabilities are usually welcome and experiences with them give no reason for doubts about overall inclusion); as the Czech School Inspectorate has found, only 22.8% of schools visited had barrier-free access in 2012/2013,

- there are still high numbers of pupils in classrooms (17 to 30 pupils are allowed),
- teachers lack experience of work with pupils with more severe disorders; neither were they trained for such work,
- classroom assistants are still rare and they vary in quality; their salaries are low and schools must regularly ask for them in relation to the numbers of disadvantaged pupils reported and put to check,
- schools are not automatically entitled to employ specialists such as school psychologists and special educators; their work is often organized as part-time jobs financed from the resources of the school and from projects focused on short-term employment (a special educator was employed in 16.1% of schools and a school psychologist in 9.4% of schools visited by the Czech School Inspectorate in 2014),
- pupils and their parents do not seem to be ready for inclusive education; there is a lack of explanation and information for the public (ČŠI, 2014; Lazarová et al., 2015).

As the Czech School Inspectorate has reported, almost 70% headteachers of basic schools can see obstacles to a higher share of inclusive education (ČŠI, 2014).

As in certain other countries, there are two extreme groups on the Czech scene: supporters of absolute/overall inclusion versus opponents of these changes (Allan, 2008; Clark, Dyson, Millward, & Robson, 1999; Hodkinson, 2012). An important topic of discussion is the fundamental idea of inclusion and the understanding of the terms ‘inclusion’ and ‘inclusive education’. Traditionally, discussions in Czech schools refer to ‘pupil integration’, and it is integrated pupils at whom various support measures financed from off-school resources are aimed. Our survey (Lazarová et al., 2015) has shown that schools seldom work with the term ‘inclusion’, tending to regard it as a political notion; as a result, different people in schools understand inclusive education as different things. An important matter is the location in which the school operates: some understand inclusion as being an open school in the local community, not scared of a high diversity of pupils, while others understand inclusion mainly as an obligation to educate pupils with special needs. In the latter, teachers are afraid of having to compromise previous efforts to achieve high quality of teaching. Also, headteachers point out organizational problems connected with the scheduling of lessons and teachers’ workload, which would have to be changed due to the individualization of teaching, i.e. distribution of pupils to smaller groups (Lazarová, Pol, & Sedláček, 2015). The implementation of support measures for certain pupils may also produce an increased administrative workload, with requests for higher allowances and justification of costs. It is evident that education policy is hastily overtaking the reality of schools and that schools are not ready for changes in culture and specific practice (Lazarová et al., 2015).

Inclusive education in the Czech Republic is currently supported by a variety of political and strategic documents (MŠMT, 2015) as well as nationwide (centrally controlled) and local projects. Some projects carried out in the past resulted in examples of good practice, but they do not provide convincing proof that inclusive education gives schools a new quality, that is perceived positively and generally accepted. Under these conditions, there



is a rising demand for assistants and other professionals and specialists who can support schools on their way to inclusive education. Within these projects some teachers are trained to become inclusion coordinators. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic is striving for system-anchored support for school psychologists and special educators. Mentors and consultants for teachers and school leaders are mentioned more and more often in discussions.

Inclusion is a political and ideological issue, so some schools may feel that orders are being issued from above. At the same time, it is evident that if inclusion is to be implemented successfully it must be accepted as a value, not an order imposed upon schools from above. In this respect, differences among schools are immense and discussions reveal a wide gap between policy and practice.

## **Professional development and the career system of teachers**

Inclusion is not the only demand placed on today's teacher education. In recent decades the content and form of in-service training have changed considerably. Competence-focused teaching requires new work methods and approaches to evaluation (difficult evaluation of competences, individualized demands on pupils, etc.). Several surveys carried out at Czech schools have evidenced that teachers consider in-service education to be an important component of their job. As to the content of in-service education, language and IT courses have been popular for years; increasing attention is paid to problems experienced by pupils with special educational needs and school counselling (Starý, Dvořák, Greger, & Duschinská, 2012). Apart from courses typically required, which offer specific development procedures in didactic competences in particular subjects, training that discusses the practice and personal development of teachers is increasingly promoted (e.g. Kasíková, 2013; Nehyba et al., 2014).

Besides courses and seminars, teachers learn from their colleagues. Many schools encourage teachers to visit each other's classes; there is not, however, much interest in visits to other schools, teacher exchanges between schools and stays abroad (Starý et al., 2012). Lack of cooperation among teachers is remarked upon often (teams collaborating in projects are an exception to this), as is a lack of peer support such as mentoring. Starý et al. (2012) argue that some teachers are afraid of telling others about their teaching, which they protect as their own know-how. So-called 'subject boards', in which teachers of the same or similar subjects meet to discuss the curriculum, textbooks, evaluation and so on, provide a basis for cooperation in Czech schools. Several projects support the work of internal and external specialists (e.g. education consultants, mentors) who can help people in schools to develop in terms of professional growth.

Currently there is an emphasis on educating whole teams of teachers in schools. Whole schools are involved so that the school's climate and culture can change gradually. Made-to-order education of teams is preferred by bigger schools (Starý et al., 2012). There is emphasis on workplace learning, consideration of experience and teacher self-evaluation. Nevertheless, some surveys indicate that Czech headteachers tend to

misrepresent learning at the level of the whole school. Contrary to their view, teachers admit that they rely on themselves in a lot of matters or opt for informal exchange of experience with colleagues (Pol et al., 2013).

Most Czech teachers express satisfaction with choices available for in-service education, but it is evident that a clearly defined responsibility for its quality is missing at the national level. Accreditation for educational programmes is based on presented documents only; the courses and their impact are not monitored. There is no system of evaluation of the effects of in-service training in school practice (Starý et al., 2012).

Following efforts to word precisely the notion of quality, an expert group was established in 2008 in order to establish a *Teaching Profession Quality Standard*. The Standard is considered to be an important tool for greater professionalization of teachers which should serve to increase the quality of their work basis for cooperation in Czech schools, as urged by curricular reform. The Standard describes the job of a professional and is interconnected with a comprehensive system of support for teachers and their professional growth (Rýdl, 2014). The Standard formulates the key professional knowledge (pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of subjects taught, didactic knowledge of content, knowledge of the curriculum, knowledge of objectives, purposes and values of education, knowledge of educational settings, knowledge of students and their characteristics, knowledge of oneself) and professional operations in which professional competences are reflected. The Standard describes four categories of quality criteria and indicators (tuition planning, learning environment, learning processes, pupil work evaluation, reflection of teaching, school development and peer cooperation, cooperation with parents and the public, professional development of teachers). All this is inspired by efforts to explain the concept of quality teaching to teachers (Kohnová et al., 2012). This document, too, has supporters and opponents among school politicians, academics and practitioners.

As for the professional development of teachers, no legislative requirements are stipulated and in-service education still fails to connect with the career order. Attempts to create a new career system for teachers have suffered from misunderstandings among the groups of its supporters, and the completion of these efforts has been postponed. The basic assumption was that the most experienced teachers would engage most intensely in both in-service training and education policy, assuming the roles of internal or external mentors and consultants, therefore operating beyond their immediate work in classrooms. For this reason, some expressed worries about the risks and negative impacts of the proposal for educational practice under discussion – mainly fears of a worsened school climate, a lack of clarity regarding the role and position of headteachers and “taking teachers away from classrooms and children” (because of the stress on dissemination), which in other words would mean de-professionalization of teaching (Janík, Příšová, & Spilková, 2014). Supporters of certifications, portfolios and testing committees as tools of teacher quality improvement found themselves in opposition to those who looked for quality improvement in the creation and dissemination of a learning culture in schools, under which it was not necessary to motivate teachers by a vision of career advancement. People discuss whether the vision of teachers as “agents of change in

schools” or even “campaigners of nationwide importance” should really be reflected in career advancement, or whether the appropriate place of teachers is in the classroom. The lack of clarity in the career system is a token of the somewhat chaotic atmosphere that obtains in Czech education. A survey of headteachers has shown that the main causes of misinformation, misinterpretation and the resulting worry and resistance are political instability and frequent changes (at the Ministry of Education) (Lazarová, Pol, & Sedláček, 2015).

Recommendations resulting from analyses of the current situation strive for more intensive cooperation between schools and the higher education institutions that prepare future teachers. Also recommended are involvement of assistant teachers and proposals for introducing creative days off for teachers. Discussions on the professional development of teachers always highlight the role of school leaders (Starý et al., 2012).

The three issues described were chosen principally on the basis of discussions monitored in teacher journals, internet portals and scholarly articles dealing with issues of education policy and specific practice in schools. It is evident that Czech education has taken a great step forward in recent decades, as it tries to react consciously to Europe-wide trends. Naturally, rapid change brings doubt and anxiety in its train. Some changes are difficult to fit into the existing culture, in schools and in society. The implementation of the challenges addressed here requires the backing of a number of internal and external supporters. Some of these matters will be discussed in the chapters below.



## 4. Landscape of support mechanism in Norway

Quality development is closely linked to quality assessment. At national level, a system of quality assessment administered by the Directorate of Education (*Utdanningsdirektoratet*) has been established. The overall objective of the national system of quality assessment is to contribute to quality improvement at all levels of basic education, in terms of customized education and improved learning outcome for the individual pupil. The quality assessment system will furthermore contribute to openness, transparency and dialogue around the school's activities and provide information to the education sector as a basis for decisions, founded on documented knowledge about the local and national situation. Locally, the system should form a basis for assessment and development work through facilitation for assessment and follow-up of results on the part of school owners and school leaders. It is intended as the basis for quality improvement in each school. "The different parts of the test and assessment system aim to meet different needs. The system makes it possible to see relations that may provide more information about the education than the individual test and evaluations alone" (UDIR, 2010).

This system includes elements such as supervision, to ensure common practice across counties in terms of interpretation and implementation of the Education Act (*Opplæringsloven*) and the Independent Schools Act (*Lov om privatskoler*), and the use of mapping materials to identify the need for individual support and organization at the level of the individual and the school. Summative and formative assessments make it possible to examine a pupil's knowledge in key areas of a subject, and, based on this documentation, to determine what efforts are required to improve the pupil's mastery of the subject. Moreover, there is guidance material that illustrates how school authorities, schools and teachers may use the system pedagogically. International studies make it possible to assess pupil competence in Norway as compared with other countries, so forming a basis for indicator development and policymaking.

By giving explicit functions to the different forms of assessment, it should be easier to see how they can complement each other and contribute to an overall assessment. It is obvious, however, that this essentially revolves around what knowledge and skills the pupils have acquired, measured in specific ways at specific times. Furthermore, the system contains guidance material, online conveyance of results and information about some of the activities going on in a school.

However, the question is how all the available information is helping teachers move forward. This requires analytical skills at school level, something the OECD report "Synergies for Better Learning" (OECD, 2013) points out with regard to the Norwegian school. The report recommends that the school leaders' skills should be improved in terms of their being able to analyse and follow up the results of the quality assessment system.

Systems of quality assessment should help reveal aspects of the schools' activities and thereby provide a qualified basis for taking action both nationally and locally.

Allerup et al. (2009) question how the aspect of learning is safeguarded in today's increasingly complex assessment system:

The current system with different user surveys and tests seems to make it difficult for teachers to distinguish among an increasing number of surveys, which are perceived increasing workload. Our data indicate that at present there is a great deal of confusion about what it is you respond to. Excessive complexity reduces the possibility of learning. In addition, it is demotivating. (Allerup et al., 2009, p. 13)

With this in mind, the authors claim that the current system essentially provides a basis for control, while the opportunity for learning that the system could have provided is maintained to a lesser extent. An overview from the Knowledge Centre for Education (*Kunnskapssenter*) reinforces this statement, based on experience gleaned from teacher assessments:

The inclusive literature contains descriptions of national systems for teacher assessment from Chile, China, Belgium and Portugal. Common for all countries is that the systems have dual purposes. They should both contribute to professional development (formative) and ensure quality and control (summative). The research shows a tendency towards a downgrading of professional development and that the control functions take over. Problems seem to arise when national intentions are to be implemented locally. If the assessment should lead to learning and professional development, it requires knowledgeable school owners and school leaders, and good collaboration between management and teachers. (Lillejord et al., 2014, p. 3)

This is also in line with the conclusion of Ekholm (Ekholm, 2004), who claims that schools are obliged to solve tasks outlined by the national authorities, although this may be carried out through local adaptation. Allerup et al. (2009) point out that consideration should be given to whether other instruments/procedures are suitable for creating a local commitment to a stronger assessment culture, or whether quality assessment should be organized in alliances with others with similar aims. "One should think through whether today we have instruments in the quality assessment system that maintain, in a good way, the teachers' and schools' need to master their own role in creating quality" (Allerup et al., 2009, p. 14).

Our conclusion is therefore that the data basis for future quality assessment in a greater extent should include both outcome indicators and performance indicators (process indicators) and that the assessment must be more didactic in its approach. The schools gradually gain possession of substantial information on student performance and achievement through national tests and test results. Furthermore, student surveys and different organizational analyses are applied. Teaching evaluation is also carried out in upper secondary education, and it is likely that it will be introduced in primary schools as well. Thus, large quantities of various types of data, mainly of a quantitative

character, are generated. Jensen (2012) discusses the extent to which different types of data are suitable for quality development in schools. Allerup et al. (2009) argue for a wider use of qualitative data.

Valid information about the qualities of core activities in schools show a requirement for greater use of qualitative data and dialogue as a supplement to the quantitative data. Focus should be directed towards the learning process and improvement of this, and the consequences this might have for both teachers and pupils. Quality assessment of the learning process should be based on actual pupil participation. It should be systematized as early as possible in the schooling and applied in both primary and secondary education. Pupils of all ages seem to be able to contribute to quality assessment and development in their own way.

### National initiatives

Other initiatives for quality development in Norwegian schools comprise various types of continuing education. For teachers, this is mainly related to the subjects of English, mathematics and Norwegian, in addition to assessment for learning and continuous assessment.

Likewise, many school employees are offered school leadership education, which may involve people already working as school administrators, as well as others who would like such a job in the future. Besides, support measures, such as guidance for newly qualified teachers and advisory teams to assist schools in quality development, are being developed, and an Educational Psychological Service offers courses in organization and leadership development. An increasing number of these initiatives are carried out online, through *Massive Open Online Courses* (MOOC).

### School support services

According to Norwegian law, all children in the country have an obligation to be schooled and a right to schooling. This applies to all children regardless of their abilities and skills, ethnicity or religious or cultural affiliation. It is a public responsibility that the child gets to school and receives a good, appropriate education. Even children with temporary residence in the country are obliged to attend school if their stay lasts for more than three months (Education Act § 2.1). Compulsory school applies regardless, but the law permits private tutoring under certain conditions. The Education Act gives the pupil the right to both school supplies and training in a variety of subjects. Children start school at the age of six, and compulsory schooling lasts for ten years (ISCED 1 + 2). There is an opportunity to defer school entry if special conditions present an obstacle to school entry when the child turns six. Furthermore, the pupil is entitled to three years of upper secondary education (ISCED 3), where he/she follows either a general studies (*studiespesialisering*) or vocational studies (*yrkesfag*) path (Opplæringsloven, 2006).

Since schooling in Norway is an obligation, schools must accept all children regardless of the prerequisites. Schools should be in possession of the necessary resources and expertise to ensure that all children are provided with an equal education. This equivalence is partly based on national regulations regarding the content of education, but also on different cultural conditions depending on where children live in the country. Consequently, a school in the far north or west of the country may have the same curricula while the activity and connection to the subject matter is rooted in the local culture, whether this is hunting and fishing along the coast or, elsewhere, characterized by agricultural or urban culture.

### Support agencies

There are three public agencies besides school which help to ensure that children and young people receive education and adequate upbringing, the first being health services. Health services have a responsibility towards children of all ages, and will assist both schools and parents with advice and help if needed. For the school, collaboration with health services is vital. They represent a part of the support services accepted by all. The healthcare service, through the public health nurse, meets newborns and their mothers after birth and follows them until they start school. It also meets children at kindergarten and school as part of the vaccination and health control programme. Furthermore, the public health nurse is able to arrange for psychiatric help, although this service is offered primarily to families, children and young people. Likewise, the child's GP has influence over welfare measures at school, as he or she can refer the child directly for psychiatric treatment or to other specialists, if this proves necessary. The service is public and regulated by the government through laws and regulations (<http://www.forebygging.no>).

The Education Act (*Opplæringsloven*) sets the framework for school activities. It also includes the right to special monitoring if necessary. A separate section of the Act (§ 5) entitles pupils who are unable to follow regular education to special education. This education should facilitate good and structured training for pupils according to their abilities. The responsibility for such education is delegated to experts at Pedagogical/Psychological Services, which is another agency with special obligations. A child who raises concerns at school or at home will normally be referred to Pedagogical/Psychological Services (*Pedagogisk Psykologisk Tjeneste – PPT*), through a collaboration between school and home. The child will then be assessed to determine whether special education is necessary. The conclusion reached by PPT is binding for the school owner (municipality) and thereby entitles the child to special education. PPT may also refer the child for further evaluation to Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (*Barne- og ungdomspsykiatrien – BUP*) or the Habilitation Service (*Habiliteringstjenesten*). The Habilitation Service is responsible for children and young people with congenital or early-acquired disability or chronic illness in the age group 0–18 years. These are children in need of long-term, multidisciplinary professional services that, amongst



other things, examine their need for aids or appliances. This is a municipal service for anyone who needs it (<http://www.habilitering.no>).

The third agency is the Child Welfare Service (*Barnevern*). Children who grow up in the country are also protected by the Child Welfare Act (*Barnevernsloven*) of 1993. The objectives of this law are as follows:

- to ensure that children and young people who live in conditions that may be detrimental to their health and development receive the necessary assistance and care at the right time,
- to help ensure that children and young people grow up in a secure environment.

This means that the Child Welfare Service, too, has assignments that are closely linked to kindergarten and school activities. According to legislation, it plays an important part in our pupils' lives. Thus, the Child Welfare Service is a major contributor to the safeguarding of a child's interests in everyday life. The Child Welfare Service has the authority to intervene if a child appears to be neglected in any way by his/her parents or other responsible authorities. The Child Welfare Act also gives the Child Welfare Service the authority to take the child into custody against the parents' wishes (§ 4.2) (Regjeringen, 2005).

The mission of school owners is to ensure that the school has sufficient expertise, including in special pedagogy, to provide the best possible education. This work is often organized through regular meetings between the various professions (interdisciplinary meetings). Likewise, the social services and the police may attend such meetings if necessary.

Since so many government agencies have the mission of ensuring that children in Norway grow up in good circumstances, every child should feel secure as a result of this. Nevertheless, in 2014 more than 53,000 children in Norway received assistance from the Child Welfare Services. Children are a vulnerable group, and it is not unthinkable that some numbers have gone unrecorded.

In Norway there are many agencies that work for a safe and sound environment for the nation's children. The community's main contribution is to safeguard the child's rights and make sure that those who work with children are competent and trustworthy. In guidance contexts, familiarity with the various rights of and opportunities for children is important. Guidance may be the beginning of changed perception of children and their situation, and thus be the start of a change process. From a systemic perspective, it is necessary to be aware of the many aspects of a child's life. Guidance of the person responsible for the child's education can be a trigger for a better and changed life for both the child and the child's family, and for educational opportunities.



## **5. Support for learning: Selected support activities and systems in Czech education**

The 1990s witnessed a change in the paradigm of school management in the Czech Republic. The accent was shifted to the inside of schools; from then on, in an externally delimited scope, they could do whatever they considered useful. Teachers obtained more liberty in the creation of the curriculum and primary attention was on the main process: pupils' learning. Greater autonomy for schools and teachers generated larger responsibilities, other procedures and, in many cases, more work, creativity and inventiveness. Teachers faced the need to acquire new knowledge and skills as required by work in transforming schools and society. Therefore, learning became an issue for both pupils and teachers.

Soon after the important changes in the 1990s it was evident that schools would need a lot of support measures from the outside as well as measures constructed on their own. Some of the activities from the outside supporting processes of learning in schools will be described in this chapter. We will focus on current support information and material and human resources available to Czech schools. We will present selected institutions which provide various types of support from the state or local administration authorities, non-profit organizations and other subjects. Also, some important programmes and projects for schools will be presented. We do not have pretensions, however, to making a complete list of available options. The aim is to present a framework of support mechanisms and their objectives and forms as available for schools in the Czech Republic.

### **Support for learning in schools from the government and local administration**

It is necessary to mention at the outset the legislative support that has been provided by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic (MŠMT ČR) since 2004. Currently in preparation is an amendment to the School Act that will facilitate access to support, particularly in terms of handling pupil diversity (see the part on inclusion in Czech schools). In the first place, easier access to personal support from assistants, school psychologists and special educators is promised to schools. These are people who can become agents of change and boost the processes of learning.

The Ministry has responded to the continuous, sometimes turbulent changes society and schools with calls for projects that draw on structural funds. In the area of these EU funds, the Ministry of Education administrates the operational programmes *Education for Competitiveness and Research and Development for Innovation* (cf. MŠMT, n.d.). Through

these projects, schools can access interesting financial resources that may support the quality of teaching and cooperation in schools, and therefore learning too. However, in recent years two fundamental drawbacks have appeared in the context of project support: (1) heavy administration workload related to the materialization of these projects; (2) topics of project calls do not always react to the needs of schools. As a result, in their efforts to get money schools sometimes enter projects that are far from subjects potentially useful for them, thus renouncing the sustainability of outcome (Lazarová, Pol, & Sedláček, 2015). The Ministry tries to react to this by (1) calls for projects with simplified administration (templates) and project counselling for schools; (2) transferring the responsibilities for thematic project calls to local administrations. As a consequence, so-called Local Action Plans of Education Development have originated, based on the real needs of schools and providing a basis for the formulation of project calls.

Nevertheless, it is also clear that project calls aimed at regions should correspond with the strategic documents of Czech schooling policy and the priorities defined for national development projects. For instance, the priorities for 2016 within the development projects of the Ministry of Education are Czech language teaching for the needs of foreign pupils, conditions for basic education of underage asylum-seekers, free-of-charge preparation for basic education of children of parents from other EU countries, and so on (MŠMT, 2016).

The administration of many of the most extended projects is entrusted to institutions directly governed by the Ministry, such as the National Institute for Education (NUV) and the National Institute for Further Education (NIDV). The mission of the National Institute for Education is to back in a versatile way general, professional, artistic and linguistic education and support schools in their pedagogical, psychological and career counselling and in-service teacher training, all this with a stress on lifelong learning and EU cooperation (NUV, n.d. /a/). The Institute is in charge of the creation of the *Framework Education Programmes* and helps schools to create their own education programmes and implement them in teaching. One of the projects the National Institute for Education was entrusted with, *Support for Regional Action Planning*, focused on secondary and vocational schools in order to harmonize their support with the educational strategy of the Ministry of Education. Its aim was to guarantee methodological and supervision support in the use of action planning at the levels of Regions and schools. A regional plan of education stipulates the priorities and specific steps necessary for the achievement of the objectives of education policy as based on desirability, urgency, benefits and justification by real data and analyses. Recent years have featured increased interest in mentors, who may become an interesting benefit for quality improvement in teaching and cooperation in schools. The project *Lecturers and Mentors for Schools* (NUV, 2014) was based on the assumption that lecturers and mentors can have a great influence on education. It counted with strong, large and direct support for schools in their improvement, aiming at better quality and accessibility of trainers and mentors who are familiar with practice in various fields of education (2014–2015). A recently completed successful project, *Road to Quality Improvement (Cesta ke kvalitě, 2009–2012)*, was focused on school self-evaluation; it has produced a set of self-evaluation tools that have been

verified in practice and may represent a first step towards development and learning. At the same time, a network of schools originated that would be supported in evaluating themselves and exchanging experience. People from schools had several opportunities to receive feedback and inspiration from partner schools.

Another terminated project, or rather the multiple projects *Education, Information, Counselling (VIP I – Career, VIP II – Development of School Counselling Centres, VIP III – Development and Methodological Support for Counselling)* were focused on the quality of counselling services in education and were useful for the development of learning processes in schools. School psychologists and special educators supported by this project have outlined a new procedural approach that is going on in schools. They commented on the strong potential for the development of teaching, quality and comfort in schools. Nevertheless, these projects, which were carried out between 2005 and 2014, have revealed an essential problem: the lack of sustainability of activities once the financial support of a project has run its course. Not even the latter projects could result in the creating of a meaningful system of employment for school psychologists and special educators (NUV, n.d. /b/).

Since 2012 the National Institute for Education has been administrating RVP.CZ, a methodological portal serving as major methodological support for teachers as they create school education programmes. Its original aim was to set up a platform on which teachers could inspire each other and share experience. Typical content of the portal comprises information about how to create specific chapters of school education programmes, promote innovative teaching, cope with the development and evaluation of key competences and so on. These incentives are intended to inspire teachers (RVP, n.d.).

Another institution already mentioned as directly governed by the Ministry of Education is the National Institute for Further Education. Through a network of regional offices this Institute sees to the professional development of educators in schools, educational institutions and non-profit organizations in which people work with children and young people. It acts as guarantor of the fulfilment of tasks emerging from national priorities in education and objectives of the Ministry of Education; at the same time its education offer reacts to the needs of schools (including at the level of individual schools) and educational institutions. Educational and other activities provided by this institution are supported by the government, co-financed by schools and, frequently, financed for the most part from European funds (NIDV, n.d.).

It is also necessary to mention that new opportunities are emerging in the field of international cooperation. Major responsibility for international cooperation is borne by the Centre for International Cooperation in Education and its component (DZS, since 2007), the National Agency for European Educational Programmes (NAEP). The National Agency coordinates European educational programmes in the Czech Republic and mediates the use of EU funds in the branches it is entrusted with. The basic mission of the Centre for International Cooperation in Education is to help to disseminate European education policy in lifelong learning while adhering to the national policy of education, implementation of European educational programmes as appropriate and

the fulfilment of tasks rooted in government resolutions, bilateral agreements between governments and the decisions of the Ministry of Education. The programmes run by the Centre for International Cooperation in Education cover a variety of fields of education: *Erasmus+*, *Eurodesk*, *Euroguidance*, *Norway Funds and EHP Funds*, *CEEPUS* and others. Their target group is not only schools, other educational institutions and students in this country; they also support foreign students in the Czech Republic and Czech teachers abroad. It is evident that Czech teachers' experience of foreign stays is an important factor in the development of learning in schools (DZS, n.d.).

### **Programmes and projects of other support subjects**

One of the independent platforms active in its response to issues of schooling policy and practice is EDUin. Declaring impartiality and openness, EDUin is financed from projects and private resources and aims to mediate information for the public about current developments in education, objectives of its reform and comments made on these developments by specialists. Apart from the focus on the public, EDUin has created a network of institutions and professionals and is publisher of an electronic information weekly (bEUDin) with discussion and comment that can serve to inspire schools and people in them. Also, EDUin has published a list of schools (the interactive *Map of Czech Schools*) that are involved in various programmes in the long term, so both the public and professionals can become familiar with current projects (EDUin, 2012).

A similar focus on information and discussion is adopted by the Standing Conference of Education Associations, which is a voluntary (non-profit) grouping of educational associations, programmes and civic associations striving for support and protection of progressive changes in education. Another aim is to mediate the exchange of opinions among educational initiatives, non-profit organizations, the state administration, self-administration and the public. The Standing Conference organizes a variety of events such as round tables, conferences and publishing activities (cf. SKAV, n.d.).

Another important actor in this field is AISIS, a civic association whose original intent (dating back to 1998) was to promote changes in ways education is applied, particularly at basic schools. Today's clients of AISIS are schools of all levels plus leisure-activity institutions, non-profit organizations and state administration bodies. The education target group at AISIS comprises teachers, headteachers and children as well as parents and school-establishing entities. In partnership with commercial companies, AISIS works on charitable and innovative projects given names that indicate their goals: *I'll Succeed*, *E-Study-Room*, *Elimination of Bullying*, *We Can Understand Money*, *Schools in Motion*, *Healthy ABC*, *School for All*, etc. The advantage of these programmes is their compactness, long-term focus and the variety of schools and teachers involved, potentially creating networks for the exchange of experience, cooperation and collective learning (AISIS, n.d.).

Important educational support for schools is provided by the charitable trust Step by Step, which is the Czech branch of an international project of the same name, guaranteed by Children's Resources International Washington, D. C., an American

non-profit organization, and supported financially by the Open Society Fund. National programmes within this project are under the umbrella of the International Step by Step Association. In the Czech Republic, this innovative programme was introduced in nursery schools and promoted to the primary level of basic schools in 1996. Today there are some 100 nursery schools and 70 basic schools in the Czech Republic that claim allegiance to Step by Step. The crux of this educational programme is child-oriented education. It applies methods of reform pedagogy and advocates cooperative teaching and pedagogical constructivism. Major emphasis is placed on a stimulating environment, modern teaching methods, good evaluation, cooperation with parents and in-service teacher training (Step by Step, n.d.).

In recent years, the project We Help Schools to Succeed (*Pomáháme školám k úspěchu*), supported by the Kellner Foundation, has gained renown. Most attention is paid to school culture, which has a decisive impact on how children learn, what results they achieve and what relation to learning they create. The Foundation aims to support schools as they aspire to be an ideal school which children like attending, where they learn to the full and with pleasure and where both pupils and teachers experience success and always feel like improving. On a long-term basis the Foundation supports selected schools in their efforts to improve the quality of teaching and creates a network of learning schools that are focused on the success of every single child. It supports financially the education of teachers, reflection on practice, school networking and the work of school specialists such as educational consultants, mentors, assistants and school psychologists. In 2015 the Kellner Foundation collaborated with over 400 teachers and, through their mediation, supported over 6,000 pupils.

It is also worth mentioning a web portal named *Learning Online* (cf. Učení online, n.d.) that supports the exchange of experience among teachers. The website is created by visitors who publish practical instructions for teaching. For these contributors the portal works free of charge and encourages teachers to share their know-how and open their virtual classrooms to colleagues. There are many more of these portals, educational institutions and non-profit and commercial organizations working on a nation-wide scale or in regions, focusing on various issues. Some organizations and programmes are aimed at current topics, e.g. *We Learn in Context*, a project implemented by ARPOK, a non-profit organization helping teachers to cope with pressing issues such as poverty, migration, responsible consumption and so on (ARPOK, n.d.).

Also, there are continuous non-commercial and commercial programmes and projects offered by a number of organizations focusing on the use of modern technologies in schools. They strive to popularize modern educational technologies, support e-learning activities and present their benefit and importance for modern schooling (EDULAB, n.d., Škola online, n.d., etc.).

This quantity of institutions, educational programmes and projects clearly evidence the wide offer of support from which Czech schools can choose the options they prefer. In the Czech Republic, support for schools is offered by a variety of subjects; their quality should be guaranteed by means of accreditation granted to their programmes by the Ministry of Education. Yet commercial offers are in no way subject to controlled

regulation. School headteachers do not commonly complain about a lack of educational support but about the differing quality of programmes. They rely more and more on time-proven providers. In recent years, topics that potentially develop the learning climate in schools have been particularly popular. In many instances these are related to the education of mentors, coordinators and counsellors whose work in schools can support peer collaboration. A noticeable shift is seen in the fact that educational activities focused on any subject (special didactic procedures, information technologies, etc.) are accompanied more and more often by reflection on practice and mentor support. There is strong inclination to continuous support, team education and school networking.

Unfortunately, support activities carried out as projects do not usually result in systemic change, and they lack sustainability. On top of this, education is not connected with the career order of teachers, which has been in preparation for several years. For example, although the training of mentors is supported by European projects, their function is not (and, as it seems, will not be) formally anchored in Czech schools. A further challenge is the evaluation of education and support for schools. Commonly there are no clear documents addressing the impact of support for teachers and school leaders on the improvement of teaching, learning processes and pupils' results.



# Conclusion I

In recent decades, the Czech schools have been in an ongoing process of change towards greater decentralization and autonomy for individual schools. The current situation is focused on the adaptation of a national strategy for education, which most probably will lead to further changes and challenges. This strategy is intended to meet European standards, according to equity, with the elimination of unequal access to education and increased quality of teaching and learning.

The Norwegian way of supporting schools seems to be closely linked to issues of quality assessment at all levels of the educational system. The purpose is to provide different forms of customized education and to offer an improved learning outcome for the individual student. The quality assessment system refers to initiate a continuous pedagogical dialogue among schools.

## Fairness and inclusion

According to OECD (2016) equity in education has two main dimensions. The first dimension can be explained as *fairness*, which means ensuring that personal and social circumstances, as gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin should not be obstacles to achieve educational potential. The second dimension is *inclusion*, ensuring a particular minimum standard of education for all. In concrete terms everyone should be able to read, write and do simple arithmetic. The two dimensions are closely intertwined: combating early school leaving will help to overcome the effects of social deprivation which often causes school failure. Fair and inclusive education is a powerful leverage to make society more equal.

The Norwegian schools have a policy of preparing young people for a consistent and sustainable national society, as well as being an active and integrate part of Europe. Ethical dilemmas and societal challenges sometimes lead to conflicts between the professional and the political levels in decision making. The responsibility for an organizational decision is not always collectively anchored and referred, which may threaten the overall targets of human rights imperative for people to develop their capacities and participate fully in society.

Fair and inclusive education is, according to OECD, an important societal task for every school system. If young people cannot develop enough skills to participate socially and economically generate, it may bring to higher costs for health, income support, child welfare and security. Increased migration poses new challenges for social cohesion in many European countries, while others still face long-standing issues of integrating minorities. Inclusive education for migrants and minorities is one of the keys to these challenges. It is evident that both Czech and Norwegian schools

are reacting consciously to the rapid societal changes, although some changes can during a transitional period be difficult to incorporate in the national cultures and educational systems.

### **In-service training of teachers**

The demands on teachers and teacher educators are increasing and changing. School actors are called on to play a key role in the improvement and modernizing of education. To meet these expectations they have to develop their own knowledge and skills. Initial education and continuous professional development of the highest quality, and access to support throughout their careers are both essential (European Commission, 2016).

In Norway there is a remaining public view of the traditional teacher, working alone with the students in the classroom. Rapid changes in the political and professional landscape, together with a new situation of financial constraints, require school improvement of another kind. For the school a main question is how to activate the hidden personal resources among the teachers and how to develop new and alternative methods for better learning.

In both the Czech Republic and Norway there is a discussion of the optimum competence for teachers and knowledge for the students. Reforming teacher education has become a popular policy in many countries around the world. Norway is on the threshold of implementing a new five year Master's degree for all primary school teachers. In the Czech Republic voices are sometimes heard of recalling traditional form of schooling and teachers returning to a more traditional role of an academic schoolmaster. On the other hand there is a general assurance that competence-focused teaching requires both new work methods and approaches to evaluation.

### **Collaborative practice**

The Eurydice report (European Commission, 2015) states that European teachers generally express that they need more professional development linked to tailoring, diversifying, and innovating teaching practices. There is a mismatch in terms of topics between teachers' stated needs and the content of the professional development they participate in. The presence of collaborative practice in schools seems to be positively linked with teachers' levels of satisfaction – both their satisfaction with the profession and with their work environment. Among the different aspects of collaboration, job satisfaction is found to be most strongly linked to a collaborative school culture of mutual support with other teachers and school leaders, followed by the opportunity for staff to actively participate in school decisions.

Collaborative practice at school is also positively linked with teachers' perception of how their profession is valued in society. In this respect, teachers appreciate a decentralized system where staff, parents and students have a role to play and a voice regarding the

running of the school, and where teachers and leaders can cooperate to mutually support each other.

The Eurydice report states that formal and traditional forms of in-service training, such as courses, workshops, and conferences prevail in almost all education systems. However, there is a diversity of forms of professional development activities emerging. This reveals an opportunity for European countries like Norway and the Czech Republic to co-operate and learn from each other in how to promote new forms of teacher education and training, such as networks of teachers, mentoring and peer learning.



## II. Support of teachers in theories



## 6. Organizational learning as condition

### Leadership for Organizational Learning

Leadership for learning must be linked to both learning theory and organization theory, which is about how organizations work. Whether leaders succeed in exercising good leadership depends on many factors, but the ability to get the members of the organization to work towards common goals is vital. In this chapter, we show how this is thought in the LOV/LaA project (see Chapter 9).

Leadership can be understood as processes between the members within the organization (Møller, 2006), where the focus is on the core activity of the school, which is learning. In the interaction that takes place between the members, their understanding, attitudes and ways to solve cases will change. Learning occurs, both individually and in the group. This can be seen as a form of professional leadership, distinct from the administrative tasks that also fall under the leadership's responsibilities. In our context, professional leadership is the topic, and we will use the term educational leadership in our presentation.

Wadel (1997) argue that educational leadership largely revolves around safeguarding learning and renewal of school:

Educational leadership is linked to the achievement of learning in organizations and thus plays an important role for development and change in the organization's culture. Essential to the exercise of educational leadership is the establishment of learning conditions and development of learning systems that ensure learning and renewal of the organization. This means that the educational leadership is of particular importance for the development of the part of the organizational culture that can be described as the organization's learning culture. (Wadel, 1997, p. 39)

Educational leadership is about learning among school members, both individually and collectively, which requires that members interact and have regular dialogue both horizontally and vertically within the organization. Reflection on own practice across the organizational levels in the light of theory and empiric evidence, is required to develop a justified practice. Systemized reflection is a way to involve the employees in the execution of leadership.

Developing systems to ensure learning, renewal and change, requires the development of sustainable structures at various levels in the organization. In school, this means classroom- and school level, so that learning transpires as a continuous process between all members at all levels, and both established and new knowledge is shared between participants and implemented by everyone.

During change in organizations, the educational leadership, will among other things be related to initiating reflection and awareness about the existing values and practices in the organization. Crucial in educational leadership will thus be the development of learning conditions and learning systems that enable the learning of new knowledge, skills, practices and values. (Wadel, 1997, p. 48-49)

Based on an ideal understanding, this implies that all stakeholders, be it school owners, leaders, teachers, pupils and parents should be involved in reflection on practice based on an overall understanding of the school's undertakings.

Educational leadership, as Wadel defines it, can be seen in relation to Peter Dahler-Larsen's description of an evaluation culture: "Evaluation is essentially a gathering of knowledge in order to control and /or enhance an effort" (Dahler-Larsen, 2006, p. 9). He points out that evaluation, as a basis for development in school, is problematic and contradictory and can be carried out in many ways and in many areas. Meanwhile, he argues that development in school based on certain key conditions is achievable to a certain extent, for instance by shared experience, a language suited to express the problems, reflection on practice and activities in light of theory and empirical evidence, so that the reflection has legitimacy beyond the local context and give scientific justifications for practices and activities. Moreover, he believes that the evaluation must be based on relevant information (data), and that the results must be used actively. This involves identification of "good practices and activities", as well as testing and change with the support and participation of the members of the organization. Based on such an evaluation culture can be synonymous with a school that continually raises critical questions about its own activities and practices to identify areas with potential for improvement. Hence, it is all about a school where organizational learning is central. In Table 1 Wadel's, understanding of productive educational leadership is juxtaposed with Dahler-Larsen's description of organizational learning (evaluation culture).

Wadel believes that educational leadership must create awareness of the activities in the organization. Dahler-Larsen points out those teachers must be able to justify their practices: "Method responsibility means that a teacher is able to justify his choice of method based on scientific knowledge" (Dahler-Larsen, 2006, p. 80). The teachers' experiences from practice in the classroom should form the basis for reflection in the light of theory and research. Considering Wadel's idea that educational leadership aims to create systems that ensure learning and development, it should be possible to justify practice based on theory, research and central governing documents (curriculum, laws and regulations). Justified practice is perhaps the strongest learning enhancing structure to be developed in school.

Another example of such a structure is peer observation. By cultivating the qualities defined in the form throughout the organization, you will be able to develop a practice that is justified, and at the same time works as a system for learning and development in the organization. However, this requires shared experience and reflection to be done according to the components of the procedures, to ensure that relevant data from the core activity form the basis of these processes.



**Table 1.** Correlation between key elements of productive educational leadership and evaluation cultures

<b>Productive educational leadership</b> (Wadel, 1997) <b>Leadership for Organizational Learning</b>	<b>Evaluation Culture</b> (Dahler-Larsen, 2006) <b>Organizational Learning</b>
Participation at all levels Distributed leadership	<b>Rooted</b> School owners Management Teachers Students and parents
Reflection on own practice	<b>Reflection on practice and activities in light of theory and empiricism</b> Use of relevant information , analysis of practice Development of a functional language and terminology
Interaction	<b>Sharing of experience</b> Developing a culture of sharing and using Collective orientation Development of a learning community
Application of new knowledge Change	<b>Evaluation is used constructive</b> Verification, identification Testing Change
Development of systems to ensure learning and renewal/change	<b>Justified practice and activities</b> Learning enhancing structures: – participation – reflection – cooperation

The juxtaposition of Wadel and Dahler-Larsen suggests that educational leadership involves organizational learning at both organizational level and classroom level. Consequently, this is more about leading an educational organization than guiding teachers in their classroom practice, although the development of pedagogical activities is based on the classroom practice.

### **Reflection on practice and activities in light of theory, empirical evidence and governing documents**

A critical point in the schools' organizational learning is whether sharing experience is reflected in the light of theory and valid research. Reflection involves critical questions regarding practice and experiences, in order to be better prepared to face the different situations in the future. It may involve distancing yourself from the situation to which the reflection is related. It also requires the allocation of time for reflection outside of teaching hours, because it is difficult to reflect while engaged in teaching. Schön argues that reflection has a central place along with trials to develop new understanding and change in practice (Schön, 1983).

Reflection can and should, be carried out as an individual and a collective process. The individual teacher should reflect on own teaching for his or her own sake, likewise should teachers reflect together on their own and each other's practices. Collective reflection will help you to benefit from others' experiences and knowledge through input with other approaches and perspectives. To reflect with colleagues is also necessary to develop a collective understanding, consciousness, and practice that safeguard the school's tasks, and make the school appear as a professional organization. Meanwhile, it is necessary to try out new practices more systematically.

Reflection is also required for the school to be able to exploit more of the potential that lies in all schools, that is the individual's knowledge and experience, which to greater or lesser extent still seems to exist as tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966). To systemize reflection through fixed procedures is among the most effective measures to improve the quality of practice. It creates collective awareness and transparency in the teacher group, which in turn has a greater impact on pupils than teachers acting individually. The greatest effect on pupils' learning is achieved when they interact with various professional teachers over time. Many schools seem to possess the knowledge, experience and expertise to cope with various challenges in everyday life, if only they manage to make these factors available to everyone (Jensen et al., 2014).

Moreover, systematized reflection makes it possible to link theory, research and values more closely to practice. This requires, however, reflection to be done in the light of theory and research. Through such correlations, teachers can develop justification ahead of the learning process and readiness for choices along the way. The teachers become more confident in their professional performance, individually and collectively. A starting point for reflection may be experiences, events or observations made by colleagues or management. Reflection is prompted by teachers asking each other questions rather than someone telling or instructing others what to do.

Allerup et al. (2009), points to the importance of developing systematic and collective reflection about what is being achieved in schools, and how such a culture can become part of the daily routines in each classroom and each school, amongst management, organizations and school owners. LOV/LaA specifies that such reflection should include the school's activities just as much as the individual teacher's practice.

Having become acquainted with LOV, the concept of “ reflection on own practice “ has made me reflect on my practice to a much greater extent than previously. It has also opened for thoughts about how some reflections leads to other reflections, and about how, and to what extent, my practice changes where a change is opportune. It has also created a general awareness of context in my own teaching and in the school’s approach to the teaching. (*teacher’s statement*)

The leaders said that participation in the project has contributed to reflection on classroom practice and school activities, and that it has led to evaluation and changes at individual level and school level. The reflections seem largely to be of educational/didactic character, which also would imply that the changes become apparent in classroom practice, this is further reflected in what this leader reports, “the training has been more research based than experience based”. The statement indicates the development of justified practice in line with research findings.

At the same time, several leaders expressed the view that the practice has become more uniform across classes, which has resulted in a greater degree of collective orientation. The question is, however, what research should form the basis, and who should make this decision. Research is ranging from basic research to different forms of contract research that can be adapted to serve the clients’ interests. There are differences in both quality and validity of the research, as well as in the schools competency in assessing the research. Furthermore, there is extensive use of evidence-based studies whose purpose is to find out that something works, without necessarily emphasize why or how. Current theory and research can include both individual learning, group learning and organizational learning

Schools can connect shared experience and reflection in different ways to theory and research. The easiest way is if the school staff agree that they individually have a responsibility to justify own practices in light of theory and research, both in planning and evaluation of teaching. This requires that teachers spend some time to discuss and find relevant research and current theory that supports the educational program. Such practice must be developed to an extent and in a manner that is not experienced as an additional burden on the teachers, i.e. by spending some of the schools planning time and the teachers’ duty hours.

Another way is that school staff participating in continuing education programs bring knowledge of recent research and theory from their studies back to their colleagues, and the school uses this actively in the planning and evaluation of practice and reflection among colleagues. The same can be done when schools participate in national initiatives on topics like assessment, basic skills and classroom management. Many teachers and administrators participate in various forms of competence development that enable them to contribute to reflection in the light of theory and research.

Some schools use literature as a starting point for developing justified practice. They choose current and relevant literature on the topics they wish to use as a basis for competence development. The teachers prepare themselves by reading relevant material that will form the basis for educational reflection i.e. once a month. This requires that one find literature that relies on relevant theory and research. Teachers can also be

encouraged to present findings from research that can be discussed collectively at school. Much research is presented in various journals and there is plenty to be found on the Internet, i.e. on the website of the The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, n.d.). Another possibility is to get newly qualified teachers to explain what they have learned about theory and research during their training that may be relevant in the educational reflection in schools. Assuming that schools are interested in how these teachers can contribute.

School owners, who have employed educational consultants or supervisors, can use them to extract relevant theory and research for work in the schools, in order to raise expectations that the teachers justify their practice in the light of this.

Discussions on ethical guidelines for schools, teachers and leaders, should also include the discussion on justified practice, based on the question whether it is ethically acceptable to practice teaching without support in theory and relevant research. Justified practice is also about the school's and teachers' professionalism. Professional teachers should be able to explain why they do what they do and how they know what effect this has on their pupils. The curriculum should possibly be more explicit when it comes to developing a justified practice and require that the teachers are able to explain their practice in the light of theory and research.

Many schools are “practice schools”, part of the field experience for universities and colleges with teacher training programs. In this cooperation, it should be possible to use students to analyze and evaluate the practices they observe in the light of theory and research, and talk to their practice teachers about how they justify their practice. This could even be added as a topic in the practice cooperation between schools and educational institutions.

Furthermore, it should be possible to clarify the requirements for justified practice in the school's national and local quality assessment systems, which can in turn be monitored through supervision services.

Although the feedback from leaders is often related to teaching and classrooms, we also find statements saying that the measures can help create reflection on “one does what one is supposed to”, i.e. whether the activities are in line with an overall understanding of the school's mission, what we describe as reflection on the school's social mandate. This becomes evident in the following statement:

I feel that we have made more people think about what really is most important, to teach well or to hasten in order to get through the syllabus. (*leader statement*)

This type of reflection, however, seems to occur very rarely in the schools we have examined. When we talk with leaders and teachers in the schools, we often hear that teachers are experiencing great pressure to get through a sufficient quantity of material. In secondary schools and upper secondary school this is also affected by the demand that teachers must be able to document that their pupils have received lessons covering everything requested in the competence aims, this in case they should receive complaints about the overall achievement grades and final assessment.

One can question whether the quality assessment system is too much focused on pupil achievement in subjects and basic skills, making it difficult to implement a practice oriented towards the overall objectives of the curriculum. Examples of such objectives may be to develop a deeper understanding, the importance of being a learning individual, strategies to master various complex challenges, and consciousness and development of values. It is the leadership's responsibility to demand justified practice, and it is the responsibility of each individual to verify that it is justified.



## 7. Mentoring and other consultations as a way to peer learning

The previous chapters referred to selected activities that support learning processes in schools. In this chapter, attention will be paid to specific persons whose mission is to promote such changes in school that will lead to development of the main tasks: education and training. These are the experts who have been contributing to the development of quality of teaching through the work with adults—in particular teachers and school leaders. They support learning processes and, more generally, they advocate changes in culture of schools. Such people are often referred to as *change agents* (Erchul & Martens, 2010; Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001; Tomala, Schilling, & Trybus, 2013 and others). An agent, respectively change agent, is perceived as the one who acts and supports people and organizations in shifting their work in favor of higher quality and better results. His/her position in schools can take many forms – but abilities to initiate and manage changes are important (see e.g. Bolam, 1975). It is obvious that the people in the roles of change agents have various foci and specializations. These may be school leaders, teachers (Badley, 1986; Lukacs & Galluzzo, 2014), young students and the aforementioned internal and external cooperators and specialists such as facilitators, mentors (Thornton, 2014), educational consultants, coaches and researchers with the competence to work with data. This chapter focuses only on the work of consultants and especially mentors in schools since the subsequent research from the Czech environment concerns mainly their work.

### Various concepts of consultations in schools

At the beginning, it is necessary to clarify some terminological ambiguities. Who is a mentor and who is a consultant? The role, mission and professional intervention of these change agents are not clearly defined, they are viewed differently and may overlap in many aspects. In Anglo-Saxon literature, a school consultant is often perceived as the one who provides professional intervention within solution of problem situations or cases. Erchul and Martens (2010), for example, consider school consultants to be those who specialize in solving problems related to behavior of young students and supporting health in schools. Caplan (1963) defines consultation as a process of interaction between two professionals: the consultant, who is a specialist, and the person seeking consultation, who asks for assistance in relation to the current work-related problem. From this perspective, the notion of consultation and consultant evokes problem solving, for example, also methodical support of teachers by school psychologists, special education teachers and other specialists. In the Czech environment, people in schools with the

aforementioned focus (problem solving) are rather called school counsellors (educational counsellor, school or counselling psychologist, etc.), who provide methodological and advisory support to teachers in problem situations. Similarly, e.g. Nastasi (2005) relates school consultations to specific topics, such as communication support of families outside the mainstream of schools and considers consultants those who facilitate negotiation and the search for consensus in order to ensure cooperation and equality in education.

In the Czech school environment, the concept of a consultant is bound to the support of teachers and schools in connection with certain school-political changes, for which schools and their teachers have not been prepared well and need support. These included, for example, the creation of school educational programs or currently also inclusive education (there are frequent references to the so-called coordinators of inclusion who provide the teachers with consultations) (cf. Šteflová, 2008).

The role and mission of school consultants, however, may not apply to pre-defined tasks only, respectively, they do not necessarily have to be focused on solving situations. Tomala, Schilling and Trybus (2013) pay attention to the role of consultants in the role of evaluators and researchers, who view a school as an organization, they can identify areas of development of the school and promote a specific change. These people will probably have a closer relationship with the school leadership. Similar efforts could have been recorded in the Czech Republic in the 90s, when there were (rather sporadic, within the framework of international projects) offers for education of school consultants. It was expected that they would be able to support school leadership development processes in the post-revolutionary period, when Czech schools experienced a whole range of turbulent changes. Using the support of external professional consultants or coaches of school leadership is rather an exception in the Czech environment.

School consultations are also associated with the position of a mentor. Mentors are considered to be change agents in schools as organizations, but they commonly work with teachers and young students at a more individual level. Benefits following from their work, even though it often takes place at the individual level, should be experienced by the whole school and especially by young students (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). In the Czech environment the position of consultants and mentors was almost fully identified by the project *Helping Schools Succeed (Pomáháme školám k úspěchu*, see Chapter 10), which financially supported the work of both of these specialists. The attribute „educational“ then evoked a targeted focus on improving the quality of teaching. “An experienced teacher, lecturer, mentor and coach in one person–this is an educational consultant in a nutshell ... he/she supports the staff in terms of school development planning ... helping teachers to reflect on and improve their teaching and plan their professional growth” (Pedagogický konzultant, n.d.). Providing consultations, which are a process of interaction between two professional partners and professional service for teachers (Erchul & Martens, 2010) is a joint activity for both consultants and mentors. The specifics of the work of mentors will be commented on later.

From the above-mentioned facts it follows that consultations can be directed either to problem solving, or to the development of schools and teaching, while primarily there has not been mentioned any problem. It also seems that in the first case it rather



concerns help, in the second case rather support. Based on the different concepts of the role of consultants in schools (see the above-mentioned sources), the following summary table follows:

**Table 2.** Overview of the concept of the role of school consultants

<b>Role of school consultants</b>		
Consultant – Advisor in case of problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– focus on the problems of young students and problem situations,</li> <li>– rather psychological and special pedagogical orientation,</li> <li>– is an expert on the issue he/she helps with – educator, psychologists, etc.,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– often a part of the school,</li> <li>– working more at individual level,</li> <li>– in terms of relations he/she is close to the teacher,</li> </ul>
Consultant – Specialist in development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– focus on support within the introduction of school policy and other changes affecting the whole school,</li> <li>– is a teacher-specialist in the implementation of actual changes,</li> <li>– his/her work is supported by the school policy (projects, etc.),</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– works at the school for a time, these might be people from the school or external consultants,</li> <li>– in terms of relations considerably close to the school leadership, or to specific groups,</li> <li>– works both on the individual level and with the groups,</li> </ul>
Consultant – Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– focus on specific areas of school development,</li> <li>– performance of evaluation,</li> <li>– supports the potential of the leadership (may be close to the role of a coach),</li> <li>– specializes in the process of change, need not be an expert in education,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– is usually an external worker,</li> <li>– his/her work is defined by certain time (fulfillment of objectives),</li> <li>– in terms of relations he/she is close to the school management,</li> <li>– working upon contract with the school leadership,</li> </ul>
Consultant – Educational consultant with focus on teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– focus on developing the quality of teaching,</li> <li>– does not primarily work with the problem,</li> <li>– closest to the traditional concept of a mentor,</li> <li>– is a good teacher.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– can be both internal and external worker,</li> <li>– in terms of relationship closest to the teacher, students,</li> <li>– works primarily at the individual level (but this is not a rule).</li> </ul>

Czech researches mentioned further in this publication are focused on the work of educational consultants and mentors, their work is based mainly on mentoring, i.e. supporting teachers to develop their way of teaching. The next section, therefore, deals with mentoring as a way to support learning processes in schools.

Although the traditional view of the work of mentors ranks it above all to the last type of consultant, respectively educational consultant, it always depends on how the mentor defines his/her role and mission himself/herself and what expectations and needs of the school are encountered.

### **Support of learning processes in schools through mentoring**

Mentoring is considered one of the oldest models of cooperation to support human development; in the professional sphere, this expression refers to professional, peer and wise leadership for learning and professional growth (Bey, 1995; Jonson, 2008; Saphier et al., 2001). Zachary (2005, p. 3) defines mentoring as “reciprocal relationship of cooperation and learning of two or more people who share a mutual responsibility to achieve the aims of the mentee.” Learning becomes a basic process, aim and product of mentoring. Similarly Kochan and Pascarelli (2003) considered successful mentoring a process within which two or more people are voluntarily educated (shaped) in mutually respectful and close relationship focused on achieving certain objectives. However, needs of the mentor and the context in which it is implemented also play an important role in this relationship.

It is primarily a specific form of peer learning, which is (or should be) a common part of professional life of teachers. Little (1990) ranks mentoring among the strong forms of peer support, i.e. those that have a clear impact in practice. Mentoring is specific in the aspect that it is provided for a relatively long period of time (to meet the agreed targets) to develop and consolidate a permanent ability of the teacher to cope with his/her tasks in school and in class within the given standards. Mentoring also involves the mentor providing support and assistance to teachers to enhance their professional growth and success at work (Jonson, 2008). Mentoring guidance is based on a voluntary relationship of trust, but it is primarily a learning relationship between two equal persons. The basic attribute of the concept is the relationship between an experienced worker/teacher and usually a teacher less experienced in some of the areas, where the mentor acts as a friend, guide, counsellor and support of the teacher, and – naturally and primarily – as a teacher (Drago-Severson, 2004; Kram, 1983; Saphier et al., 2001; Wollman-Bonilla, 1997 and others).

Target groups of mentoring, however, are not uniformly delineated. Very often, mentoring is perceived synonymously with the process of induction of new teachers or sharing experience with the younger ones. In many professional publications, there is no distinction between the concepts of *mentoring* and *induction* (Portner, 2005). Mentoring as an induction of beginning teachers is then seen as a relationship and joint work of a mentor and a teacher during the first year or the first years in the profession. It is a supportive relationship, while the mentor acts primarily as a model of professional

behavior, facilitator, coach and counsellor who shares his/ her own experience and knowledge with the new teacher (New Teacher, 2010). Similarly, the term mentoring is used also in relation to the target group of students or even young students. In this text, we will perceive mentoring as a form of peer support, which can include all teachers in school, regardless of their age and professional experience.

### Form, aims and activities of mentoring

Mentoring thus refers not only to the induction of beginning or new teachers, in practice, you can encounter mentoring guidance of teachers within introducing certain changes in teaching or within the adoption of a new function. For example, one can easily imagine a situation where younger, but in some respects (e.g. work with ICT) more experienced colleague, in the long run helps and supports an older colleague in the introduction of information technology into teaching. The beneficiary person and his/her needs determine the objectives of mentoring support, as well as methods for achieving the required length and specifics of the relationship. Mentoring leadership – depending on the objectives – may take various forms (cf. Jonson, 2008):

- the traditional design, while one mentor works with one colleague at one school,
- one teacher may contact more mentors regarding their demands (*multiple mentoring*),
- one mentor may be responsible for more teachers or work with a group of teachers.

The mentor and his/her colleague may not necessarily be from the same workplace, the meeting does not always need to take place in the environment of one school. In recent years, communication technologies accelerate and in some ways even facilitate management of mentoring. It is a combination, broadening or complete replacement of *face-to-face* mentoring by electronic means: e-mail consultations, chat, video conferencing, Internet discussions on the purpose-established websites and the like. Such cooperation is thus often referred to by the concepts of *e-mentoring*, *virtual mentoring* or *telementoring* (cf. Ganser, 2005; Jonson, 2008).

Generally, in the broadest sense, we can consider the objective of mentoring management to be the development of specific professional and personal skills that will enable teachers to perform their job well and become true professionals. In a narrower focus it can then be support of a teacher in innovation of teaching or improvement in some selected area, respectively improving their own professional competence. Although mentoring is bound mainly to working environment, personal goals are reflected in professional goals as well (Zachary, 2005). Objectives of mentoring may therefore take different forms and may be more or less specifically targeted. The important thing is that they are expressed and the criteria for monitoring their implementation are set up. Although it primarily concerns support of learning, a mentor can provide emotional support (encouragement, motivation, praise) and physical (help with something) support to some teachers as well (Lipton & Wellman, 2005). Some objectives are characteristic

for the management of beginning teachers, others are characteristic for the mentoring relationship between two experienced teachers. In the case of beginning teachers, for example, a typical objective may be adaptation and socialization in new environment. A good mentor helps the supported teacher formulate goals to be reached, they jointly establish criteria for monitoring of fulfillment of the objectives and agree on the manner and terms of cooperation.

The goals are then bound with the activities the mentor performs: he/she provides information and resources, helps with preparation for teaching, is a model of behavior (demonstrating it in the way of teaching), provides teachers with feedback on the teaching, supports them through dialogue and reflection on practice, provides emotional support, etc. (Lazarová, 2011). Mentor is an expert in “process control” and plans such activities and procedures that are clearly intended for meeting the objectives. His/her fundamental skill is conducting interviews (consultations) in order to develop potential, independence and responsibility of the supported teacher and at the same time not to interfere with the learning and equal relationship.

### Potential of mentoring in support of learning in schools

Mentoring enhances learning processes at both individual and organizational level. Teachers usually construct their “private understanding” based on personal experience and they can share it with colleagues with the help of mentoring. Mentoring thus breaks the isolation of teachers and promotes the reflection of practice and self-reflection. The benefits at the individual level include mainly accelerated learning, opening to more perspectives, improvement of selected skills, but also acquiring self-confidence and a sense of *self-efficacy* (Drago-Severson, 2004; Rhodes & Fletcher, 2013; Zachary, 2005). Benefits of mentoring are thus related to cognitive (new knowledge), psychological (self-confidence, self-efficacy) and social issues (a sense of belonging and acceptance).

Not only the clients of mentors, but mentors themselves mention that their work provides a similar range of benefits and is a pleasant way of broadening their teaching role. Mentoring is an opportunity for reciprocal learning that results from mutual relationship. In cooperation with their clients, mentors gain new inspiration to improve their work and have a greater sense of connection to the school community (New Teacher, 2010). Some researchers view mentoring as effective means to counteract the psychological and physical burnout of teachers (Drago-Severson, 2004). The data from the research clearly show personal gains from mentoring in the case of older teachers-mentors in the sense of “reverse socialization” and “revitalization”. In the course of care for their younger colleagues, experienced teachers are inspired by the way of work and the way of thinking, and thus enrich their existing practice (Leshem, 2008). By participating in mentoring, older teachers strengthen their sense of purpose and competence, increase self-confidence and develop relationship with younger colleagues. Some mentoring programs also show good results while working with retired teachers, who have already ended their active work directly in class, but in this way they remain in touch with “their” school (Portner, 2005).

The importance of mentoring, however, goes beyond the personal, respectively individual level and significantly affects group process and nature of the environment. It is not just a typical “one-to-one” relationship, but it provides the opportunity to experience cooperation of everyone in an organization. Based on a series of research data, it can be summarized that at the organizational level mentoring (e.g. Fullan & Knight, 2011; Kochan & Pascarelli, 2003b; Thornton, 2014):

- initiates a dialogue and reflection on practice, in which it restructures the existing knowledge, increases tacit knowledge within an organization,
- helps preserve valuable potential through intergenerational transmission of unique experience and knowledge and functioning cultural traditions created at a particular school,
- deepens mutual understanding of people creating cooperating communities,
- strengthens the sense of belonging (our class, our students, our school, our problems, etc.) and connection of people to an organization,
- creates the conditions for organizational change (transformation) and change of the culture into a learning culture.

It is important to take into consideration that mentoring is a journey, not a destination. It supports learning processes within an organization and it is the path to organizational learning, to a learning school.

Mentoring also has potential to influence culture of an organization, respectively school culture. Kochan and Pascarelli (2003b) note dynamics between school culture, context and mentoring in different environments and they ask whether mentoring is primarily aimed at maintaining the status quo or whether it is a transformation process (p. 264). People inducing mentoring as a new practice in a specific school must on the one hand respect its culture (rapid changes may not be accepted and so it is necessary to anchor mentoring to school culture) on the other hand, it is envisaged that the skills and professional behavior of a mentor are transferable and can gradually change the school culture in the direction towards learning. The mentoring culture is in fact a culture of learning.

Each community of people is characterized by its practice, traditions, norms, symbols and meanings. It is obvious that mentoring will perform better within the school culture, which highly appreciates the value of innovation, professionalism and adult learning. Mentoring requires a culture that supports its implementation and full integration into the organization; organizational culture, respectively school culture, is therefore seen as an essential condition for the success of mentoring. Thornton (2014) considers school culture the biggest obstacle to development of mentoring. Similarly, Zachary (2005), who proposes specific procedures for the implementation of mentoring in organizations, points out the need to “tune in” the culture of the organization and mentoring and then create an infrastructure in which mentoring can develop successfully. Mentors must understand the context in which they work – teachers and their work. It is also clear that an important role in the process of integration of mentoring into school culture,

alongside with mentors themselves, is played by the head teacher, “the leader of the culture”, who reflects the traditions, beliefs, ethics and rituals (Kochan & Pascarelli, 2003b).

### Mentoring programs and their limits

Mentoring can work in organizations on the formal and informal level. The informal forms usually provide more security as their main attribute is voluntariness. Their disadvantage may be missing an evaluation of effects, closeness in the dyadic relationship mentor – mentee and a low impact on the development of continuous learning processes across an organization. It is no exception that mentoring as a process supporting learning and change, gets into schools through projects and their financial support. In various countries, mentoring programs are part of educational-political strategies, therefore, it is bound to the emerging needs and political priorities (Kochan & Pascarelli, 2003a). From the level of educational policy, mentoring programs are initiated in the framework of which the formally set mentoring relationships do not always fully respect the condition of voluntariness. Programs linked to education policy have undoubtedly the advantage that they are financially supported and clearly structured, but the control of fulfillment of goals and the project-related evaluation evokes a problem with the induction (implementation) of mentoring to schools. Even the primarily formal “imposed” experience if evaluated by the person as pleasant, non-threatening and useful, can initiate an interest in mentoring and learning in a peer relationship. There already exists a number of documents on the ways different mentoring programs were conducted in organizations and what goals, successes and limits in achieving them the change agents encountered (Jonson, 2008; Kochan & Pascarelli, 2003b; Portner, 2005; Rhodes & Fletcher, 2013 and others). Based on these findings, it is possible to identify some conditions that need to be set up and maintained for the mentor program to be successful:

- project support must be long-term,
- formal qualifications and continuous training of mentors is necessary,
- there is a need to respect the existing school culture,
- the evaluation of processes and impacts must not be missing,
- it is necessary to continuously support and appreciate mentors and their clients.

The researchers have agreed that the introduction of comprehensive mentoring programs to schools is not always easy, especially if it is to be a peer support among experienced teachers. It can be assumed that mentoring in order to induce new teachers will have a smoother course. Mentoring can bring certain changes into school life that can be threatening for teachers. At some schools, it is not a common practice to ask colleagues for support, and all teaching is going on behind closed doors. The data from the evaluation of the project recently implemented in the Czech Republic pointed to very strong resistance of some teachers to whom mentoring was “imposed” by a project

as a form of peer support. It seems that the project did not respect adaptation to existing school culture, and also in a short period (1 year) it was not possible to train really good mentors and to convey the pleasant experience of peer support to the teachers (Lazarová, Vychopňová, & Dobrovolná, 2015). This experience confirms the risk of some poorly coherent and short-term projects, which are often a result of well-intentioned educational-political efforts and pressures.

Some authors of the publications dealing with mentoring programs have noted the requirements for mentors, whose professional skills are essential for success. They have just agreed that a mentor has to – in addition to the proficiency in the skills of mentoring – be dedicated to mentoring and must be able to adapt his/her communication style to individual specifics of the supported teacher. It is considered an advantage if the mentor and the mentee have similar philosophy of education and the ability to be “in tune” with each other (Jonson, 2008; Otto, 1994; Saphier et al., 2001; Wollman-Bonilla, 1997). Mentors are mainly required to have a good understanding of their mission and to be ready to cooperate, support the teachers actively not only to watch or supervise. The willingness of a mentor to develop informal contacts with the beneficiary, but also with other teachers is regarded useful, as well as opening and offering cooperation to other colleagues and increasing understanding of mentoring in the organization, respectively clarifying his/her role in the school.

Mentoring and other school consultations are part of the school life throughout the world, and their aim is to improve the quality of teaching and support learning processes in schools – both for children and adults. They focus both on the current problems (typical rather for consultations), as well as on the support of the development of schools and people in them. Mentoring and consultation have been struggling with terminology ambiguity because they are related to different target groups and take a range of forms depending on the context.

To conclude, it is worth pondering upon the question whether there is a clear evidence that mentoring and mentoring programs (and this applies to all general school consultation) actually function and have a distinct impact on the main process – teaching and education of young students. Mentors and other consultants usually work with teachers or school leaders (possibly with other entities) but the result should be reflected in learning and success of young students. The success of a young student may be imagined in various ways and it is usually difficult to measure. Does time and money spent on mentoring and consultations really have effect for schools, respectively for young students? Is it enough to ask about the feelings and experience of teachers who had the opportunity to receive the support of a mentor? The question of the effectiveness of consultations and other interventions in schools has in recent years been commented on by a number of authors (*evidence-based interventions, evidence-based practice, evidence-based consultations, etc.*) and obtaining evidence is becoming a big challenge for mentoring too (DuBois et al., 2011; Erchul & Martens, 2010; Konstam et al., 2015; Kratochwill et al., 2012 and others).





## 8. Reflection and reflective processes

Most people understand reflection from the word reflex. It is something that happens automatically, and is often used about the process that occurs when light hits an object and is emitted (reflected) in different directions. A reflection on the surface of water may seem to mirror an image identical to the reality that it reflects. However, our experience tells us that this is not the case. A small disturbance in the water-mirror will change the reflection and prevent a perception of similarity between reality and reflection. Besides, we have to rely on our experiences within the world we are familiar with (Biggs, 1999). If this image is used as a metaphor and transferred to mental systems, communication and perception of reality, it seems that we sometimes fail to distinguish one reality from another (Bateson, 1973). We may find it difficult to distinguish our own ideas and perceptions from other peoples' experienced realities. The terms and words we use may trap us into notions of what the world looks like, and how our own experiences blend with a perception of our surroundings. Bateson says that we form an image of something, and that this "something" is what stands out from the background. It is what distinguishes itself from the surroundings, although we see both the surroundings and the object at the same time. From what stands out, we get a sense of the object. Naturally, other elements may be distinctive, such as smell and taste, what we see, feel and hear. Moreover, he points out that the concepts we use are not objects we have inside our heads. He takes "the chair" as an example. He says that a picture of a "chair" is not a chair, but a depiction of a chair. If we grasp the chair and hold it, this means that the word "chair" is not merely an image. We do not have a chair inside our head, but we agree that there is a connection between the image and the chair (Bateson, 1972). Based on such an understanding, a mentor's thoughts around the conversation with his/her mentee might be decisive. The task may be how the mentor manages to distinguish what is important in the attempt to understand the mentee, or "the other" as Kierkegaard calls it (Kierkegaard, 1859).

Hence, the mission of guidance may be to help make an overview or draw a "map" of the reality as the mentee sees it (Bateson, 1972). This also helps to define what goes on during the guidance. The mentor's task is to communicate so that the language recreates the perceptions the mentor and mentee have of the depiction of reality they are working with. During this clarification, it might be necessary to narrow down the topic or issue by the use of questions. As events that affect us can also make it hard to see different perspectives simultaneously, it is the mentor's task to try to identify the mentee's perspective (Andersen, 2007). Søren Kierkegaard (1859) is often quoted in contexts dealing with perceiving reality in the same way as the mentee, to make it possible to be of "true help."

People have been concerned through the ages with the question of what truth really is. The question is put in the Bible, in famous words such as "What is truth?" Governments

and people in power must take an interest in the depiction of truth in order to remain in power. However, we see that our relationship with the truth is also about how we perceive ourselves and whether we are able to recognize other people's perceptions and perspectives. In search of a single truth, we can encounter many truths. There is no objectivity; everything is rendered subjective by our own background, experiences and interpretations (Maturana, 1987). Thus, according to Maturana, there is no universe, but a multiverse, as each individual has his/her own perception of what is happening. Given that there are different ways of perceiving and understanding the world around us, according to Maturana it would naturally be impossible for perceptions of what is happening around us to be identical (Hornstrup & Storch, 2001). This is central to systemic theory and will affect individuals' perception of reality and of themselves. Reflection helps to clarify perceptions and put them into new contexts in relation to others. Through conversation, the mentor tries to extract something from a background, i.e. an event, and make it visible, as something that makes a difference, as Bateson (1972) describes it.

A pedagogue, like a psychiatric therapist, encounters different views and has different beliefs that affect other people. For the mentor it is relevant how he or she relates to other people's perspectives. The mentor is less concerned with giving advice and more focused on charting, or contributing to the outlining of "new maps" of the conversation. As everyone has their own perspective in a multiverse understanding, it means that each individual perception is to be seen as descriptions of reality. Such descriptions can be termed a "map" (Korzybski, 1990). A map displays what stands out in the landscape, is significant and worthy of our attention. If the landscape is completely flat, the map will be irrelevant. Hence, "maps" are used to define dissimilarities. Metaphorically, "maps" are also used as a description of personal experiences of the world around us. Such descriptions are not limited to objects; they also include sensations like smell, taste, and, of course, emotions. How we assemble our impressions into understanding is decisive for how we react to the same experiences.

Conversation is a necessary tool for familiarizing ourselves with another person's world (Kierkegaard, 1959), describing the mentee's reality, so aiding us in our attempts to see what the mentee sees. Through this description, the mentor will also pursue other perspectives that might contribute to new perceptions of reality and help adjust the existing "map" or even draw new "maps" to get on with life (Korzybski, 1990).

Therapy is about making people able to resume their lives, to heal people after illness or injury. In psychiatry, the therapeutic focus is on mental contexts, in which control of one's own life is most important. Historically and traditionally, psychiatry has sought to identify the underlying causes of mental health disorders. Often, these can be related to congenital disorders or injuries, but they may also be caused by traumatic experiences in life where mental mechanisms have taken control. The discourse in different perceptions of the impact and potential of mental forces is based in the field of medicine (Magnussen, 2014). Opportunities and limitations seem to lie in how connections and brain functions are understood.

In many ways, other aspects of the therapy deal with different issues. Family therapy places great emphasis on relational challenges and interaction between the

various members, for obvious reasons. Hence, eco-mental systems will play a role in organizational development and communication in all human contexts. Regardless of our psychological-mental background, the vast majority of us have to relate to other people. The risk of communication-related collisions is always present – in the home, in the community and at work. In our modern digital world, worldwide social media also play a role. The challenges involved in understanding each other and how we behave towards each other are ever greater.

In cases of mental bruises and wounds, it may be therapy's task to help find a way forward, as the psychiatrist Professor Tom Andersen (1936–2007) has realized through his meetings with people with various mental disorders. Based on Bateson's theories on eco-mental systems and experiences in the field of treatment, Tom Andersen puts the patient first. Treatment theories are plentiful, but Andersen has found that not all of them are suitable for people with mental-health issues. This is partially due to attitudes. A hospital can appear daunting and reinforce problems. Andersen (2007) takes Bateson's theory of "a difference that makes a difference" as a point of departure. In his encounters with patients, he chooses to use the terms "conversation" and "dialogue" rather than "therapy". For him, the word "therapy" seems pathogenic and power-loaded.

In his encounter with a patient, he avoids such terms and instead focuses on listening and asking questions. The questions are related to what patients talk about, and this in various ways has a bearing on what it is important to talk about. Andersen believes it is important not to be biased by a pre-understanding of the patient, because this can direct attention to something that might not be of importance. To identify essential areas that could be of crucial importance, Andersen draws on his collaboration with the physiotherapist Bülow-Hansen. From her, he has learned that a physiotherapist may use three designations for "differences", thus turning Bateson's phrase about "a difference that makes a difference" into various degrees of difference. If the physiotherapist presses too hard on the patient's back, she meets a counter-pressure as the patient tightens the musculature, and the treatment does not serve the purpose. When the pressure is too light, it is of no avail. However, if the pressure is just right, it does make a difference. Furthermore, this is linked to the respiratory system and inhalation and exhalation, and the recognition that when the patient exhales completely, all muscles relax and the pressure has a positive effect.

In the therapy session he describes, Andersen tried to transfer this mindset to the conversation. He thought of the conversation as three conversations at once. Each participant had an internal conversation where words and concepts had to be chosen, thought through and then spoken. In addition, there was an external, audible conversation between the interlocutors. He states that the conversation should like respiration, with exhalation and inhalation. Simultaneously, Andersen listened for words it would be wise to talk more about and others that could wait, with reference to Goolishian's axiom: "You do not know what you're thinking before you have said it" (Sundet, 2007). Goolishian is greatly concerned with the significance of language, because it expresses emotions and experiences that might otherwise be difficult to explain (Sundet, 2007). Andersen is greatly concerned with the meaning of words and their function. Words are tools that

will help determine where “just the right pressure” has an effect. Thus, the conversation becomes reflective and the choice of words is important.

In our context, a “word” may also have a different meaning, because the word might have multiple significances. Besides, it can be a metaphor for mental processes in learning, organizational development and reasons behind planned and completed actions. Metaphor can be a complicated concept, because it can have different meanings when it is used and comprehended. Language can be an obstacle and a barrier, caused by linguistic ambiguities. The same word may have several distinct lexical definitions in one language, which do not correspond to the definitions in another language. In Norwegian, we have many examples of polysemous words, i. e. where the same word has many meanings and the significance is determined by the context in which it occurs. It is easy to imagine that such conditions give rise to misconceptions if conversations are not precise and participants’ interpretations are based on different contextual frameworks. In this context, we examine how we can use reflection on mental processes and argue for better learning outcomes. This includes the possibility of increasing the awareness of learning processes and the mental challenges posed by collaboration, team-building and problem-solving.

We have also seen reflection in relation to empowerment, which is about enabling the teacher in the classroom and finding one’s own strength in daily challenges, and also about contributing to the common development of the school’s organization. The school is based on various theoretical, pedagogical and psychological approaches. Furthermore, the school is ruled by authorities that define the content of the curriculum. Herein lie many challenges, because the curricula and the school’s organization evolve and change constantly, just as the rest of society evolves and changes. New needs are created and new awareness contributes to such changes. Consequently, this requires that the teacher and the school contribute to the changes and fulfil their social mandate through daily practice. In this chapter, we show how reflective processes can be useful tools in the performance of the school’s many tasks. Along with other measures, these processes may help address everyday challenges.

Teaching is not just about transferring knowledge; to a large extent it is about developing competence related to comprehension, abilities and attitudes. Knowledge, in terms of facts, can be learned, but to understand how these facts can be utilized requires that we find connections. Whether you are a child or an adult, this is about exposing the knowledge to reflective processes that help clarify, explain and generate more curiosity. Reflection can be a useful tool in a teaching context, but it also draws attention to learning as a process and interaction between the participants in the learning process. Moreover, reflection enables the teacher to identify justifications and options that were not prominent and obvious beforehand.

Reflection, both in terms of accomplishment and evaluation during the planning stage and the assessment of the teacher’s and the school’s activities, can provide an opportunity to develop good practice and get rid of and/or restrain undesirable practices. Reflection in this context is more than looking back on or forward to an activity; it is about challenging the activity and exposing it to new and different ideas or solutions.

Pupils' reflection on their own learning can be related to comprehension and contexts of the educational material and linked to the pupils' learning objectives. The teacher's reflection can turn in several directions: on one hand, to the teaching and language he or she exposes the pupils to, on the other to the choice of learning and teaching strategies. Through reflection, the teacher's activities may also help develop the school's expertise in relation to curriculum objectives, the school's pedagogical groundwork and various didactic challenges.

The school's complex assignment and different challenges regarding diversity and integration contribute to pressure placed on and expectations of the teacher's professional role. A systematic and purposeful approach to the opportunities available is vital. Reflective practice can raise awareness of such opportunities. In our complex society, it is also likely that the challenges become greater and more apparent. Reflection can be an instrument that enables us to go further in our thinking, and which helps us to find our own resources and recognize which other resources are available.

### **Reflection process as facilitated by a reflecting team**

The school's activity is often about solving problems, and also about identifying useful ways to plan and implement actions. Before a thought is turned into action it undergoes development – or a process. The process describes a period of time where something transpires or develops. For such processes to be fertile, it may be necessary to employ various catalysts. We know that time pressure and demands can constitute such a process, as can reward. In a guidance context, we use the reflecting team as a catalyst in this process to find new or other ways forward.

Our thoughts on reflective processes are based in therapy, more precisely on the theories of the family therapist and psychiatrist Tom Andersen. In the world of therapy, reflective processes are often about being in motion, challenging and changing life situations. It is vital to identify the medication that works. This is why Andersen looks into Bateson's concept of differences (Andersen, 2007). To Tom Andersen it is fundamental to show that there are alternative differences. Some of them are unfruitful, others are destructive. He defines the difference that works in line with Bateson, as "a difference that makes a difference". This is the difference that works properly, unlike other differences.

In the school system there are discussions as to whether it is possible for us to make changes for children. This applies particularly to children with special needs. Perhaps it should be obvious that children in need of customization and special pedagogical programmes should be supported by initiatives that may contribute to positive changes in both their learning situation and their life. If the need for remedial measures in school does not decrease, there might be reason to ask whether the school has found the right measures.

Andersen bases his description of the reflecting team on the therapeutic conversation (Andersen, 2007). It all started when a conversation between a patient and the therapist

took place in a room with a one-way mirror to the room next door. In this room, the therapist's team sat analysing the conversation behind the mirror. From time to time, the therapist left the therapy room to consult his colleagues, who had both listened to the conversation and observed the non-verbal communication. After a brief period of planning, the therapist returned to the patient, who in the meantime had been alone with his thoughts and the experiences they entailed. The patient had not heard anything from the neighbouring room and did not know to whom the therapist had talked or what about. Andersen got the idea that it might be interesting for the patient to hear what his colleagues thought, and so he invited the patient to listen. The mirror and the microphone were turned so that the therapist could sit with his patient and together they could hear what thoughts the colleagues expressed based on their observations. When this was done, the mirrors and microphones were turned back and the conversation continued. Having received various descriptions and impressions, the patient was now able to express his thoughts about the perceptions of the colleagues behind the mirror directly to the therapist. This meant that the patient could hear how his conversation was perceived by others. Shortly after, Andersen recognized that his colleagues might as well sit in the same room, and let an invisible curtain descend between the reflecting team and interlocutors when they were asked for input. A therapeutic reflecting team was thus created.

The notion of the reflecting team was further developed, and today it is often used in family therapy.

### **How to convert the therapy tool for educational activities**

The school does not engage in therapy. Nor does it choose its pupils; it has a social mandate to accept everyone who meets the requirements for school entry. In Norway, there are few requirements to meet. Children must turn six the year they start compulsory school, and it is their right and obligation to attend the school where they belong geographically. The school is the only institution that is required to deal with all children and thereby the children's families. This puts the school in a different situation from other social institutions. Through their children, the parents establish a connection with the school system, and close contact and good communication with the school is expected for many years. A good, functional collaboration between school and home and between pupils and educational staff is important.

The Education Act (§ 1.3) ensures that children in Norway receive education adapted to their own level, as well as providing for the right to specially adapted education for pupils who are unable to benefit from regular education. There is obviously great diversity among pupils. Likewise, there is great diversity among teachers and parents, which might lead to situations that call for clarifying, planning and special measures.

In the field of therapy, clients, or patients, comprise a group of people with serious problems. They are little representative of the population at large. Therapy applies for people who have a need for change in their lives and life situations, and they meet this

profession in different ways. Tom Andersen's meetings with his patients are described in a manner that pedagogy can draw benefit from. Although pedagogy does not treat people, it encounters all kinds of people, both children and adults. Thus, it is important to note that what Andersen's activities have generated might be of interest to kindergartens and schools as they meet with people. The field of guidance is about encounters between people, and the conversation or dialogue is intended to facilitate learning and development. This conversation, which is based on trust and symmetrical meeting between people, can make it easier to collaborate on both educational and special educational questions. During a meeting between parent, teacher and child, all parties wish for issues and difficulties to be addressed without force or lack of respect for the other. This is the most valuable contribution to pedagogy made by Andersen's form of therapy. Guidance is the most natural way to get acquainted with the reflecting team, but the attitude of openness towards others should be characteristic of a professional who works with people in any context.

In this way Andersen explains how work with reflective processes and reflecting teams can help bring about change that makes a difference in a hectic day (Andersen, 2007).

### **Empowerment – “powerment” for change**

The word “empowerment” is a difficult word to translate into Norwegian. This word is frequently used in the area of health, but even there it acquires different meanings depending on who is using it and what the person wants to achieve (Tveiten & Boge, 2014).

In our context, we choose to fill the concept of empowerment with qualities that enable people to take responsibility for their own actions, authorize themselves in relation to their own choices and their own lives, and enable and raise awareness of their own resources and opportunities as they address challenges that feel insoluble. Some add other values to the term, such as interaction, participation, self-mobilization and strengthening. It may seem that all translations tend to set limits for the word empowerment (Tveiten & Boge, 2014). Thus, it might be appropriate to retain it in mentoring contexts. In guidance conversations we often meet people who are stuck in patterns of behaviour that do not create the necessary change. They are no longer able to see a way out of a difficult situation and become discouraged and exasperated. Moreover, conversation reveals that the mentee is pleased with his or her actions but does not understand or see how these can make a change. Both the mentor and the reflecting team have a responsibility to help create awareness of new perspectives, seize challenges and look for reasons for what is being planned and what has been done. Through support and challenges, the mentee is made aware of ways of seeing the situation from new perspectives. The questions and reflection may help him/her in the search for other ways of thinking and acting. Both the mentor and the team are focused on raising the mentee's awareness of how limits can be stretched. In many ways, it is about creating or restoring confidence in his/her own power over the situation.

Guidance can contribute to the creation of confidence and find solutions in contexts where they may be hard to see, when the challenges are overwhelming. In addition to having an adequate formal education, guidance can help one realize sides of oneself that can be difficult to see (Boge & Fretheim, 2014). Empowerment can also be perceived as a counterforce in a situation of powerlessness. If the mentee feels helpless and stranded with his/her problems, guidance can open up opportunities for new perspectives and other paths that change the situation, so enabling him/her to acknowledge his/her own opportunities (Askheim, 2007).



# Conclusion II

Learning is substantial to educational institutions and leaders of education have their most important rule in enhancing the learning outcomes of their students. The relations between leadership and learning is an important issue in enhancing the effectiveness of educational organizations (Brundrett & Rhodes, 2010).

## Educational leadership

The knowledge, skills and commitment of teachers as well as the quality of school leadership, are important factors in achieving high quality educational outcomes. Good teaching and the ability to inspire students to achieve their very best have a positive impact on young people's futures. For this reason, it is essential to ensure that those recruited to teaching and school leadership posts are well-suited to the tasks they have to fulfil, and provide the highest standard of initial education and continuing professional development for teaching staff at all levels. This in turn will contribute to enhancing both the status and attractiveness of the educational leader profession (The Council..., 2009).

The school's leadership needs to recognize and concretize given goals and negotiate different interests, needs and requirements and finally take them into account in their daily work. Rapprochement between leaders and the led can be seen as a transition to a more democratic leadership, according to the modern demands in working life of influence and participation in decision making. When school leaders design and construct the content of a development process in a dialogue with the teachers, the school's possibility for organizational learning will increase (Sträng, 2011). Educational leadership is linked to the achievement of learning in organizations and thus plays an important role for development and change in the organization's culture. Wadel (1997) argues that educational leadership largely revolves around safeguarding the learning and learning and renewal of school. Leadership for learning must be linked to both learning theory and organization theory. Whether educational leaders succeed in their leadership depend on many factors, but the ability to get the members of the organization to work towards common goals is vital.

## Organizational learning

To define organizational learning we need to examine sociological aspects as well as information technology, leadership and processes (Common, 2004). Organizational learning often takes place when organizations develop structures and procedures to upgrade information processing and improve problem-solving (Olsen & Peters, 1996).

Organizational learning in schools is essential for continuous development and renewal from within. Schools can examine and reflect of what they have already learned, as well as innovating, solving problems, and carry out new strategies and knowledge in how to meet new challenges. Organizational learning encourages a proactive stance instead of a reactive position (Collinson, Cook, & Conley, 2006). An obstacle is that schools are not always ready to adapt to the proactive position made possible by organizational learning.

Dahler-Larsen (2006) argues that school development is achievable to a certain extent, for instance by shared experience, a language suited to express the problems and reflection on practice in the light of theory and empirical evidence. Reflection on practice has legitimacy beyond the local context and gives scientific justifications for the developmental activities.

Systematized reflection makes it possible to link theory, research and values closely to practice, and help the school actors to become more confident in their professional performance both as individuals and as team members.

### Reflection and Mentoring

Researchers emphasize that processes and substance of reflection are crucial to successful school development: To focus on metacognitive reflection will support continuing professional learning outcomes for teachers (Jamissen & Phelps, 2006).

*Knowledge* is the key to entry and retention in the profession. *Reflection* helps to clarify perceptions and put them into new contexts in relation to others.

The process of learning to become a professional into the shared knowledge among professionals is intensified by the personal adaptation and renewal of knowledge in professional practice (Edwards & Mercer, 1987). Teachers engaged in knowledge building through reflection have increased opportunity to construct and reconstruct meaningful conceptualizations that will go a step further than the hitherto available information given. By reshaping their reflections in productive interaction with students, they can, make “a difference that makes a difference” in learning (Bateson, 1972).

Mentoring is a way to gain access to and provide maintenance of knowledge during professional practice (Tillema, Westhuizen, & Merwe, 2015). Mentoring and other kinds of school consultations are aimed at improving the quality of teaching and support learning processes both for students and teachers. A relevant question might be if mentoring and consultation really have the intended effect for better learning?

### III. Learning teachers as seen through research



## 9. Learning and Assessment – a Norwegian research and developmental project

The research and development project LOV – *Læring og Vurdering* (LaA – *Learning and Assessment*), which stands for Learning and Assessment, is a work that was carried out in the period 2007–2012 under the auspices of Østfold University College, where a number of schools tried out some measures to increase their focus and awareness of learning.

### Background

The backgrounds for the LOV/LaA were allegations that the activities in the Norwegian school were highly activity-oriented, with weak links between activities and learning. (Kjærnsli et al., 2004; Klette, 2003). This formed the basis of the research and development project LOV, initiated in 2007, whose aim was to see whether it was possible to change pedagogical practices to make them more learner-centred than activity-focused (Jensen, 2012; Jensen, Sträng, & Sørmo, 2014). This was done by introducing the educational staff in the schools to the pedagogical basis of LOV/LaA. Subsequently, the schools were asked to reflect on their own practices, based on three different measures. These were adapted to the current situation in the schools, to prevent them from being experienced as “yet another task”. The measures explored facilitated the learning process according to specific principles: *loop learning*, including the use of reflection among pupils during the learning process, *peer observation* related to the structure and quality of the learning process (Appendix 1) and *pupil observation* as a means of raising awareness and accountability of the pupil’s role in the learning process.

Furthermore, the schools were asked to follow up the trials with reflection, discussion and sharing of experiences; individually, at team level and at school level.

After testing these measures, we asked teachers and leaders for feedback on their experiences with the method. The feedback was provided through letters from the informants. The research design and analysis of the material are described in the book *Kvalitetsutvikling fra klasserommet. Oppsummering av LOV – prosjektet* (Jensen et al., 2014).

### Theoretical basis

Learning theory and the theory of organizational learning are central to LOV/LaA. The measures in LOV/LaA are directed towards quality improvement of school activities and practices in the learning arena (the classroom), based on the learning process, and with the pupils, teachers and school leaders as protagonists. The conception of learning in

LOV/LaA is mainly based on the works and conclusions of Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1997). We consistently focus on this conception in terms of both students' and the teachers' learning. A sociocultural perspective on cooperative learning is essential, as is the fact that all participants can act as learning resources for each other by contributing their own experience and expertise. Learning and development can be linked to earlier references in each individual through active participation. In Vygotsky (1978), we find a dialectic relationship between the individual and the community (the culture) where the individual is helping to shape and influence the community and will thus, over time, contribute to its development. Hence, the school's learning environment will both influence and be influenced by the individual, and learning will be characterized by dialectical processes between the players in the group. Whether the individual contributes to the community and how this occurs will affect how the community accepts from and gives in return to the individual. These processes will have a bearing on whether the classroom develops into a learning community. A key point is the importance of interaction between individuals as the basis for individual learning.

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level and later on the individual level: first between people (inter-psychological), and then inside the child (intra-psychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57)

Vygotsky here claims that the starting point for cultural and social learning is in social interaction. In light of this, it can be argued that the concepts that contribute to and are a prerequisite for learning appear and develop primarily as an understanding of the individual in meeting and interaction with others.

Another perspective LOV/LaA measures seek to safeguard is the sociocultural concept of *scaffolding*. In school, this is about whether the teacher facilitates interaction during the learning process and whether the pupils in turn develop interaction skills. The question is raised whether such understanding and skills among the pupils are subject to continuous emphasis in the teachers' assessment practice. The question is what we want the pupils to learn (Hattie, 2013; NOU, 2002, p. 10).

Dysthe (2001) refers to communicative processes as essential in terms of learning and development. It is through conversation and interaction that children acquire knowledge and skills that enable them to understand the values of the culture they are and should be a part of. "The many plays and games learned as a child, consist of both physical elements and rules, and mastery of both often occurs through a combination of linguistic and practical interaction" (Dysthe, 2001, p. 49). Interaction and dialogue are therefore basic requirements for learning and development of the individual. This is because learning may be understood as processes in which each individual participates with different knowledge and skills through interaction, so that the individual learns by benefiting from the knowledge of others. In this manner, learning can be described as distributed between individuals (Lave, 1997). In the school, this may be obtained by

letting the group of pupils serve as a learning community, where the pupils consciously take responsibility for their own and others' learning. In such a community, learning can be described as mediated between pupils and between pupils and teacher. One condition, however, is that the teacher facilitates the pupils' contribution (Brown & Campione, 1990; Palinscar, Brown, & Campione, 1993). Another precondition is that the pupils participate and contribute actively in the learning process and in the interaction with other pupils in the learning process. Complicity, participation and contribution in such collective processes must, however, be learned and developed over time, and they often demand patience on the part of teachers.

Lave and Wenger (1991) point out that participation in communities of practice starts with limitations in each individual when it comes to participation, and that it takes time to acquire knowledge and skills that the individual may bring to the community. Moreover, they state that it takes time to acquire interaction skills that make it possible to become an accepted contributor to the community.

Another objective of the LOV/LaA measures is to develop the school as an organization. According to Kolb (1984), testing (active experimentation) is an element that also appears to be interesting in organization development. In working with schools, reflection and shared experiences have been common working methods. The importance of identifying or verifying practices that can be justified on the basis of curriculum, empirical and theoretical, has been emphasized. Through such a process, teachers will also identify aspects of the practice that are not well founded, and where there may be reasons for trying out new practices. In such cases, the schools have been encouraged to emphasize testing as an alternative to demanding change. The idea is that when teachers, by themselves and with colleagues, have positive experiences with testing, they will be able to see where and how practices can be renewed and modified, which should ensure more sustainable change.

Argyris' (1990) description of double-loop learning may help to highlight the need to assess practices and activities against a comprehensive understanding of the curricula, where school activities are considered in relation to overarching objectives set for the school. Argyris' thinking is relevant in an age where school quality is increasingly evaluated on the basis of pupils' performance in school subjects, while the general part of the curriculum and principles of education are emphasized less. Senge's (1990) description of the conditions for organizational development, too, supports the thinking that underlies the development of LOV/LaA. Organizational development based on what is and what occurs, in both practice and activity (personal mastery) will contribute to reflection on what should be in the future. The participants reveal their perceptions and assumptions about the best ways to reach the organization's goals through description of their own practices (mental models). In so doing, they build a new understanding of what practices and activities should be and where there is a need for change (shared vision). This happens through collective processes of reflection and learning (team learning). At the same time, it is necessary to integrate these elements within a larger context through systematic thinking (systems thinking). Senge's (1990) description of the five disciplines is also seen in relation to Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers' (2005) description of

continuous reflection as a cornerstone of a comprehensive development strategy (Senge et al., 2005, p. 9). The measures applied by the schools represent facilitation of learning activities according to certain principles (loop learning), peer observation related to the structure and quality of teaching, and pupil observation as a tool for raising awareness and accountability of the pupils' role in the learning process (Jensen, 2012).

What follows is a description of one of the measures, peer observation, as a basis for quality improvement in classroom practice and organizational learning.

## Peer observation

Peer observation of quality and structures is a measure designed to systematize shared experience and reflection. Moreover, it should help illuminate 'tacit knowledge' and help teachers to be resources for one another. In our project it was carried out by a teacher who observed learning activities in a colleague's class. Afterwards the colleagues had a conversation about the observation. The form that was used is found in Appendix 1. Based on the observation and conversation, the colleagues were able to determine whether anything could or should have been different during the learning process. Moreover, the observations were discussed in groups of colleagues, often in teams, to raise awareness of quality and structure among more people. In this manner, it was possible for more people to contribute their experience and expertise to find solutions to challenges faced by individuals.

At primary level, established teams can constitute a cooperative unit. There may be teams responsible for each grade in larger schools, or teams responsible for 1st-3rd or 4th-7th grade in smaller schools. Since discussion takes place in the teams after an observation is completed, there is no need for one teacher to be subject to several observations; once or twice a year should be sufficient. The main thing is to obtain regular discussion about educational practice, which is enough to keep awareness alive in the team, so that the individual teacher will eventually take this into consideration when planning, implementing and evaluating teaching.

At secondary school (ISCED 2), teachers are often organized so that a group of teachers is responsible for following one cohort of pupils through all three years. How closely teachers work together seems to vary; it is typically a greater degree of collaboration between teachers who teach the same subjects. The same applies to upper secondary schools (ISCED 3). Thus, it is more relevant to observe colleagues from the same faculty. It is still necessary to find solutions for how to carry out the observations and subsequent discussion in each school.

During the implementation emphasis is placed on the observer following the learning process through a whole session in order to get a thorough impression. When observations are reviewed in the teams afterwards, experience-sharing includes more people and the learning outcomes become greater. Moreover, this approach increases the likelihood of developing a uniform practice for the group of pupils these teachers are collaborating on, in terms of general factors such as participation, reflection and



interaction, and to benefit from pupils as resources. In addition, it is recommended that schools should periodically share experience from these observations in plenary.

Teachers must opt for or against peer observation across the established work units, which some feel produces a limited outcome (Dahler-Larsen, 2005, p. 81). In such cases, it is necessary to see how experience-sharing and reflection may be maintained within the individual work units and collectively in the school.

Observations should, as mentioned above, be carried out systematically and regularly to ensure consistent discussion and reflection at team level. Lillejord and Kirkerud (2009) argue that “continuous investigation of practice is necessary to improve practice” (p. 151). The times and dates of observation and team discussion should be logged in working documents or plan documents in order to ensure accountability in terms of quality assessment. Implementation of peer observation in this way will increase schools’ academic and professional integrity. Both the observer and the person being observed gain from peer observations. “[It is] a very good method of raising awareness of what we are actually doing. Both observing and being observed is useful. This also creates consciousness around your own practice, even when you are not being observed, which is most of the time” (teacher statement). Observations often starts with the observer focused on what is happening in the classroom where he or she is observing. Eventually, though, it seems that the focus shifts towards the observer’s own practice, as this teacher describes: “Observation of colleagues has been exciting and interesting, and has opened up good reflection on one’s own practice” (teacher statement).

However, experience shows that the form is being used in different ways. Some teachers have attached it above their work station and quite often ‘take a peek’ at it, especially during lesson planning. Teams can use it in the planning and assessment of teaching. Teachers can use it to convey pedagogical practice to parents or as a basis for conversation with students. School leaders use it to monitor teachers’ practice in the learning arena.

The observer should give feedback according to what he or she has seen, and not give descriptions of his colleague as a good or bad teacher. The discussions afterwards will reveal whether there were good reasons for what went on in the session or whether changes should be considered.

The main function of this measure is to raise awareness and contribute to the development of quality and structure in the learning process. Quality is here understood as a good start on the learning session, clear learning goals, learning that is relevant to the pupils, and proof that the educational aspect of the subject is being safeguarded. Reflection, effective teaching and the formative aspects of the assessment are also qualities that promote learning. Likewise, the observation of colleagues helps to spread the school’s competence across the established work units, as well as to develop basic common practice for general factors of importance for learning. This measure can thus contribute to a common orientation of the organization.

The peer observation form contains a number of elements that can be defined as *learning-promoting qualities*, with validity in all learning contexts. When these qualities become fixed elements in the learning process, and where this is natural, they turn into

learning-promoting structures. Some teachers find it difficult to include all the elements in every learning session. Nor is that the intention, but if one wishes to examine the qualities present in the learning process, the form may be helpful. Which of the elements should be addressed will vary from situation to situation, and this needs to be considered in each case.

One should also be aware of relationships between some of the various elements on the form. For instance, punctuality becomes more significant when the lesson focuses quickly on the learning activities, and when students work efficiently during the learning session. To have a lot of time available for learning is of limited importance if the efficiency of the learning process is low. Another example is related to peer- and self-assessment among pupils, which requires that the pupils have learned to work based on criteria, and that relevant criteria have been developed.

## Teacher surveys

Teacher surveys were carried out in eleven schools following their implementation of three of the LOV/LaA measures. The surveys were conducted in two stages and in various types of schools, and will be accounted for later. This chapter will describe the method.

Through letters (the letter method), teachers and leaders described their experiences as gleaned from the implementation of the LOV/LaA measures, and how these have influenced the practice of the participants, classroom practice and school activities. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) describe the method under “Personal Experience Methods”, the purpose of which is to acquire knowledge about people’s worldview and their thoughts, experiences and opinions:

In letters we try to give an account of ourselves, make meaning of our experiences, and attempt to establish and maintain relationships among ourselves, our experience, and the experience of another... In personal experience research, letters, as a research method, may be used among participants, among research collaborators, or among researchers and participants. In each case one of their merits is the equality established, the give and take of conversation. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 421)

Letters may be used where one wants information from a larger group of informants (Berg, 1999; Sträng, 2011). Admittedly, the disadvantage of a letter is that when it is sent to a researcher, it cannot be followed up with elaboration and follow-up questions, as in an interview. The advantage is that you can get information from several informants, and that the collection of data is completed when the writer sends the letter, so that the analysis can start immediately. When using the letter method, nor is selection a problem. Everybody who works at the school can provide information from their own point of view so that various perspectives are represented.

The letters are written in a context that is not necessarily accounted for, which can be problematic for the analysis. Consequently, some statements have not been used, because they do not provide any information relevant for the researcher. The analyses

were initially conducted as a collective work process, and when the statements were categorized, we went through the material several times, thoroughly. This was done to ensure that the interpretation was not coloured by personal experience and thus in danger of creating a different contextual framework from the writer of the letter. As Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p. 413) describe: “The situation is controlled by us because we have brought the passage forward, and its experiential status depends on what we choose to convey contextually.” One challenge presented by this process is therefore how to analyse the letters based on what the writer actually conveys (qualitative content analysis). Borg and Gall point out that one way of avoiding research mistakes is for several researchers to analyse the material individually before they reach a consensus:

The greatest difficulties in developing scoring methods are with measures that are unstructured, such as interview data, observational rating forms, and responses to projective tests. If one of these techniques is used, the measure should be scored independently by two or more raters. This will reduce the likelihood that bias on the part of a single observer will unduly influence the results, and it also permits the determination of interrater reliability. (Borg & Gall, 1979, p. 648)

The reliability of the data will depend on whether the writers provide honest and sincere answers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), not in relation to objective criteria, but in relation to the writer’s perception and experience. It is impossible to say whether the individual’s subjective perception is expressed or statements are influenced by the opinions of others. Perceptions are formed in a social context where everyone, to a certain extent, is affected by what is being said and done. The length of the letters cannot, objectively speaking, be given importance in terms of reliability. Yet, it is conceivable that long letters might be an expression of strong commitment, while short letters could be an expression of the opposite. Nonetheless, we have sought to place emphasis on precisely what is conveyed in each statement.

The statements were mainly positive, although some were negative, which can help strengthen reliability. Participation was voluntary, and the respondents decided for themselves what and how much they should write, but it was required that writing should be done during working hours (see also Jensen, 2012).

The method of analysis is partly in line with what Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe as “the constant comparative method of analysis.” Analysis is about dividing a whole into individual elements, in this case to look at each statement in the letter. The content of the letters from the respondents was examined phrase by phrase, and all statements were assessed based on their content. Corbin and Strauss describe “constant comparisons” as a method that reveals similarities and differences through comparing different elements in the data: “Constant comparisons: The analytic process of comparing different pieces of data for similarities and differences” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 65).

Coding means gathering data that is formulated differently by the various informants, extracted from different contexts and experiences and placed in common categories and concepts that seem to describe the same phenomena (Postholm, 2010). In this

process, raw data form a basis for developing general categories that the researchers can settle on in the further analysis. “Analysis involves what is commonly termed coding, taking raw data and raising it to a conceptual level” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 66). It is not unusual that the coding is carried out in three stages, where you start with open coding that provides the basis for the formation of categories and thereafter collect the statements in more overarching themes through axial and selective coding, which is once again compared to the research questions. Axial coding consists of finding patterns or categories where groups of statements can be gathered on an abstract and general level. In this case, the axial categories create (increased) awareness of learning and development, involvement/participation in development, reflection and confirmation/change. Selective coding is the final stage of the analysis, and shows how/if the axial categories apply to the organizational/institutional level or at classroom level. Then the researcher should reach the final and overarching category that is expressed through the research question or questions. Table 3 gives examples of statements describing the results of LOV/LaA in terms of the two main categories, “learning in the organization” and “learning in the classroom”.

Statements from the informants show that LOV/LaA has had a positive impact at both school and classroom level. The summary of the LOV/LaA project as a whole shows that teachers and school leaders in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education confirm this. The LOV/LaA project has shown that schools that understand early the importance of organizational learning, and the central principles for learning at all levels of the organization, gain more out of school development (Jensen et al., 2014; Jensen, 2016). However, this requires that work with school-based development of competence is adapted to the context of each school. The work must therefore be based on a high degree of flexibility, so that schools feel that they obtain support at their actual level.

Experience gained from the LOV/LaA project has long been used in school development in general, as well as in national initiatives such as *Vurdering for læring* (*Assessment for learning*) and *Ungdomstrinnet i utvikling* (*Secondary in development*) (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d.). Østfold University College has acted as an academic environment related to the themes of these initiatives.

Table 3. Statements on how LOV/LaA has had an impact on organization and practices

Learning in the organization/institution	Classroom learning, practice
<p><b>Statements related to collective awareness/organizational awareness</b></p> <p><i>What impact has LOV had on the school?</i></p> <p><i>Although we were critical of LOV, particularly at the beginning, I now feel that the project has been unifying and stimulating for us. It has given us a common platform that we are all familiar with and know how to use.</i></p> <p><i>Testing and implementation of LOV/loop learning has had a positive effect and acted as an awareness-raising process for the staff.</i></p>	<p><b>Statements related to pedagogical awareness</b></p> <p><i>It has also led to higher confidence when we use the same terminology, so that we have common points of reference when we have a conversation about pupils and teaching. (I then refer to loop learning and discussions around this). Somehow I feel that there is a greater professionalism, i.e. that our work is based on a comprehensive idea and a common understanding, thereby making it safer and easier to intervene to improve teaching.</i></p> <p><i>The most important thing is awareness of the development of quality and structure in the learning. I would like to stress two factors in particular. One is that the value of what is learned becomes visible. The second is equally important: that the pupils learn to put what they learn into a context.</i></p>
<p><b>Participation in organizational learning and organizational development</b></p> <p><i>Peer Observations have made us teachers talk more about our own teaching. Moreover, colleagues have got to know each other better in many ways, and I believe that the threshold is lower for us to invite each other into lessons. I think we have become more open in terms of our strengths and weaknesses, and we have been inspired to constantly develop as teachers.</i></p>	<p><b>Participation in learning in the classroom</b></p> <p><i>I have learned that participation of all pupils becomes greater and more palpable when we organize lessons and teaching in this manner. Perhaps this might be a new way to safeguard weak pupils.</i></p> <p><i>Pupil observation: Pupils became very attentive to their fellow pupils' latecoming and disruption of the class. They observed things that were not as visible to me as a teacher, such as the use of mobile phones and the Internet. Pupils became more alert and responsible. Pupil participation was more systematized. They became aware of how they needed to contribute and commit.</i></p>
<p><b>Reflection on the institution</b></p> <p><i>What impact has LOV had on the school? That we all have the same point of departure, a common thread in our work. It can be easier in parent – teacher meetings, for instance, now we have the same principles in the school and the municipality. Particularly with siblings in different grades at the same school. It also appears more professional from the outside.</i></p> <p><i>What impact has LOV had on the school?</i></p> <p><i>A common platform for us teachers.</i></p> <p><i>A common awareness of the use of LOV</i></p> <p><i>Increased focus on assessment.</i></p>	<p><b>Reflection on the practice</b></p> <p><i>I am convinced that LOV will make me a better teacher. By talking about different practices, discussing various challenges, being aware of how I do things myself, observing others and being observed myself.</i></p> <p><i>I must admit that I thought "What's new here?" when I was first presented with loop learning. Having worked a few years as a teacher, I have probably acquired some habits in my teaching, so the work with LOV has helped me to think through my own teaching practices.</i></p>
<p><b>Confirmation/change in activity</b></p> <p><i>We have received confirmation that what we are doing is good, and that it is healthy to receive a visit, and to drop by a colleague's classroom. The learning is more structured, and the school has got a common platform in the organization of the individual hours.</i></p>	<p><b>Confirmation/change of pedagogical practice</b></p> <p><i>My experience is that work gets started a lot quicker, and the pupils work more independently when we spend some time at the beginning of each session (perhaps a double lesson) talking about goals and criteria, so the pupils are sure about what to do, and why they are doing it.</i></p> <p><i>Moreover, I have become much better at asking reflective questions; "What do you think about it? Do you agree? How did you reach the conclusion? How can you use ...?" and similar types of questions.</i></p>



## 10. Peer support of teachers from the perspective of organizational learning – Czech evaluation research

In the Czech Republic there also exist schools that benefit from continuous and systematic peer or other professional external support, but they are still quite exceptional. There is also an evident lack of relevant research that would seek understanding of benefits/effects the continual support brings to schools and teachers. The action and evaluation research is focused on various forms of support for teachers that might describe both the character of supporting interventions and indicate some risks and formulate challenges for school leaders, teachers, teacher-workers in specialized positions (mentors, consultants, etc.) and also least, but not last the school policy.

The development of internal collegial and external professional support in schools in order to improve the quality of teaching is one of the priority themes of the Czech educational policy and it is supported by a number of development projects financed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic and the European Union, as well as various charitable organizations and private foundations (see Chapter 5). One of the Czech foundations that continuously supports selected primary schools, is the foundation The Keller Family Foundation. It has initiated and financed the long-term project *Helping Schools Succeed*. We were asked to perform<sup>1</sup> two surveys, the results of which should contribute to the evaluation of the nominated project and planning the following steps in supporting schools. The project the schools have entered into (respectively were selected based on certain criteria), should significantly contribute to their development, respectively support of learning in schools. A key role in development efforts was played by educational consultants and mentors, whose activity was supported by the project. This Chapter, therefore, with the agreement of the Foundation and the participating schools, presents selected results of the evaluation research to show how educational consultants, mentors and finally, the whole project contributed to the development of learning processes in the participating schools.

### One project – two evaluation researches

The above-mentioned financial and resource support for schools from the Foundation in the Czech Republic is part of a rather unique project (still ongoing), which has been positively perceived and evaluated by the professional community. The uniqueness of the project lies mainly in its long-term and continuous support of selected schools, in

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<sup>1</sup> This concerned the employees of the Department of Educational Sciences, Masaryk University, the author of the text Bohumíra Lazarová and Milan Pol (project consultant, under which this publication was created).

the sophistication of the objectives of the support, in the unusually generous subsidies to schools (compared to Czech standards) and periodic review of all the actions from the expert advice of the Foundation, respectively the project<sup>2</sup>.

The first of the above-mentioned evaluation researches (carried out at the end of 2014) was focused on the work of educational consultants from four schools involved in the project. The educational consultants were funded from the resources of the Foundation, in the past, they were also teachers and lecturers in teacher training and they completed a training in mentoring or coaching. The role of an educational consultant had been offered to them by the Foundation on the basis of the selection criteria. Their task was to support the schools involved, respectively the people in them (school leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, etc.) to develop teaching quality and professionalism so that they could create an environment that stimulates learning of young students, an environment in which young students use their potential to achieve good educational results and above all experience success. The above-mentioned specialists thus functioned in the role of consultants for school leadership and (especially) in the roles of consultants and mentors for teachers.

For this evaluation research<sup>3</sup> the method of (one-day) focus group was selected, attended by four educational consultants working for various time periods (from two to five years) in four schools. The method of focus groups was chosen deliberately in order to create a space for reflection of practice, which the atmosphere of trust contributed to, peer discussions and sharing. In addition to this, the documents related to the work of consultants (mission, job descriptions) were analyzed and interviews with the management of the project were conducted. With regard to the fact that five schools were involved in the project in that period, there was a nearly exhaustive sample of respondents at disposal. Interviews in the focus groups were covered more broadly (involving the position of a consultant, the reality of practice, reflection on the future), in this text there are only the data that covered the reality of practice documenting the perceived influence of provided peer support on learning processes in schools.

The second evaluation research was implemented in the course of the year 2015 and its aim was to identify and describe in what way the above-mentioned project supported a change of culture at two primary schools<sup>4</sup> which had been receiving the benefits for five years; so they were at the end of the project period, and the people in them had a chance to look back and evaluate which processes at school and in what way supported the project. In both schools, educational consultant worked alongside with teachers-mentors (in number from three to five), who had completed training in mentoring and training activities, though they were burdened with the regular curriculum and they were also supported by the project. In this research, methods for the study of school documents were used (websites, annual inspection reports), interviews with teachers, teachers-mentors, leadership and other teaching staff in various positions (five, respectively six interviews in each school) and focus groups (five, respectively six participants in each

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2 The Foundation has funded and has been funding more projects.

3 Which was implemented at the end of 2014.

4 In these schools there worked two of the educational consultants interviewed in the first evaluation research.



school). There was a requirement for the surveyed teaching staff to have at least five years of experience in the given school in order to be able to reflect on the changes taking place during the project in the school. To capture the impact of the project on selected areas of school culture, a modified version of a short evaluation questionnaire was used (Kilmann & Saxton, 1985).

Providing detailed information on schools is not considered necessary for the purposes of this text. It can only be stated that it was a standard, large municipal primary school (with numbers of young students over 400 in one school, over 600 in the other school). Only the data that document the support of learning processes have been selected and special attention was paid to work (and influence) of educational consultants and mentors to the processes of learning in these schools.

From both evaluation researches were created reports for the client – the Foundation, respectively the project management. One can appreciate that there has been encountered an effort of the Foundation, respectively the project team, which is quite unusual and certain for similar development projects – to look for evidence about the effects of support and render the accounts of the activities.

### **Peer support in the dimensions of the broadening, deepening and anchoring**

For the interpretation of the data of qualitative nature (interviews, focus groups), one of the concepts “borrowed” from the theories of organizational learning was used. It is based on the assumption that the role of mentors and educational consultants is not only to individually support teachers in their growth, but also to start the process of organizational learning across a school. Verbiest (2011) distinguishes three dimensions of organizational learning, respectively learning in community: broadening, deepening and anchoring. Broadening the capacity of professional learning community means increasing the number of people involved in the learning process, i.e. people who learn and act according to the expectations of the professionals in the learning organization/community. For example, broadening means that more people reflect their work, review professional literature, participate in further education courses, carry out the vision of the school in their daily practice, they share their knowledge with others, they learn with others, cooperate and the like. It also means that in order to develop their work they use the services of professionals such as mentors, school consultants, school psychologists, etc.

Deepening the capacities of professional learning community goes hand in hand with improvement of quality of learning and action, and improving organizational conditions for development of personal and interpersonal capacity. Adult learning in schools is becoming more and more common issue and responsibility and it must have clear impact on results of young students. Deepening also means the development of supportive, participatory and stimulating leadership.

Anchoring, respectively anchoring capacities of a professional learning community means the *embedding* of individual and collective learning activities and conditions for

learning into school policies. Professional development of teachers is therefore linked to school policy and the major development trends within the schools. The visions are the basis for decisions about teaching and learning, intervision, class observation and peer consultation become everyday routines in the school. It also means that everyone in the school purposefully and structurally participates in the development of school policies and has access to relevant information (Verbiest, 2011). This view of organizational learning has been adopted as the interpretive framework for the obtained data. On the basis of the data it is demonstrated how educational consultants and mentors by their presence and work in the school contributed to the processes of further learning, marginally we mention some of the limitations or difficulties mentioned by the respondents. It has been taken into consideration that the organizational learning in our schools has also been contributed to by a number of other factors – mainly the method of leadership, further education of teachers, events supported by the schools, etc. Educational consultants and mentors, however, played an essential role in both schools and that is also why they were supported by the project.

The data from both schools have been processed simultaneously, while also adding the data obtained from educational consultants from all four schools (see above). Because of anonymization of data, people and schools, the sources, respectively schools where the citations come from are not mentioned.

## **Educational consultants and mentors in the process of broadening the capacity of organizational learning**

The project significantly supported mainly further education of teachers, not only outside the school (educational courses), but especially in terms of cooperative learning in the schools. School consultants and mentors became a model of cooperation and knowledge sharing. They strengthened the awareness that people can ask not only them, but practically anyone at the school for consultation or assistance. The teachers adopted the fact that consulting with colleagues is normal. Respondents from the schools pointed out the openness among teachers, which – according to their experience – is incomparable with other schools. It is apparent that this openness and willingness to share and discuss the project has contributed, especially in the beginning, by involving educational consultants, mentors and pair teachers.

... today, it is normal that a peer turns to a peer and that he turns to his colleague regarding a failure, “Hey, there is something that I am not good at and you are good at it. How do you do that, please?”... there really occurs peer support ... (*interviews with school leadership, mentors and teachers*)

In the schools the trust in the fact that mutual exchange of experience makes sense and that nobody will judge anybody or point out his mistakes has been enhanced. The teachers began to spontaneously imitate the behavior of mentors, the non-judgmental

way of communication with colleagues and thus their position could be naturally taken over by any teacher. Mentors and consultants thus became a model of open behavior and communication. People in both schools, admitted that some of the peers are still personally and even with professional focus closer than others, and that is why they later began to seek other peers (who learned how to provide peer support from the mentors) rather than trained mentors. Both consultants and mentors therefore contributed to the broadening of capacities of learning by creating more opportunities for mutual learning. The project more or less freed their hands from direct teaching activities and sharing could thus be spread among other teachers as well. Mentors focused their work mainly on the support of innovations in education, the role of consultants was broader – apart from the mentoring activities, they focused also on the formulation of common visions of the school and the creation and performance of individual plans for professional development of individual teachers.

It was also noticed that in the course of time there was a certain social pressure in schools. The culture of high demands and high commitment was sensed by everyone in the school and those who were not participating in education, did not experiment, did not share and did not engage in activities would be soon easily identifiable within the team. When people talk about “working under pressure” or “developing under pressure,” it does not always necessarily has to be pressure from the leadership, but social pressure, which the consultants and mentors initially undoubtedly played a significant role in while developing the range of activities. On one hand, this implies many advantages for the development of schools, on the other hand, obvious risks (some people leaving schools, work under stress, etc.).

People and school are under immense pressure, not everybody can stand that, some left. But that does not mean they did not want to grow and learn, but they wanted it in a different way. Not at this price. People did not always leave in bad mood ... (*focus groups in schools*)

In May, the educational consultant comes and says: You are not going to the summer school in August? And now you feel bad that you're really not going this August to the summer school because you should, because everybody is going ... That's the flow, as I said, certain flow is set and nobody wants to get out of it. (*focus groups in schools*)

It is obvious that consultants and mentors had to first win the trust of teachers, otherwise they could not offer their services and could not be with them to broaden peer support among others. They admit that throughout their period of work in schools they sometimes encounter resistance of some teachers, but these are rather exceptional cases that occur in every school. Even teachers often had to have courage when they decided to ask a consultant or mentor for help because they experienced such a situation for the first time. Good preparation and experience of the consultants and mentors involved in these schools was reflected as well. The consultants mentioned that their work requires not only a high level of commitment and careful preparation (as a model of good work), but also some invention to be able to get closer to teachers, to find a way to motivate them to work together and develop peer support.

I thought that the teachers would be happy, but some had no desire to use my assistance, they did not want that service. It lasts until today in the case of some of them ... the teachers have just been learning how to ask for support. I was offering them a range of options and some of them did not know what to imagine beyond that, they had no previous experience. (*focus group with educational consultants*)

It took some time before teachers gained trust and understood that it is a service for them. Consultants must initially be a bit imposing and must not take it personally when teachers refuse them ... It took two years before it began to be ok, then things started to change slowly ... I learned not to be pushy, to listen and let things flow, everything has its own time. (*focus group with educational consultants*)

There are therefore outlined certain conditions for the consultants and mentors to be able to assume a useful role in the process of broadening learning across organization. Good selection of consultants and mentors, who must be educated in providing peer support and creating and maintaining (often fragile) relationship is of primary importance. They must also be prepared personally and also resistant to misunderstanding, initial mistrust and rejection.

... we did not know her professionally. It was about finding a job for a educational consultant. The leadership announced: you have to go and consult (note: individual development plans) with the educational consultant. And defense mechanisms occurred ... (*focus groups in schools*)

The teachers have also perceived negatively, even though only implicitly, the obligation to consult their work. There thought e.g. that regulations and interventions of the head teachers of the schools, as well as their strong connection with the consultants or mentors tend to be counterproductive. It is therefore clear that the consultants and mentors in an effort to expand learning processes across schools get into often non-transparent relationship network, which is complicated by unclear expectations and insufficiently defined competences and roles. In order to be successful, they require regular external support, which was in this case received from the project managers in the form of supervision, discussion meetings and the like.

### **Educational consultants and mentors in the process of strengthening the capacity of organizational learning**

From the perspective of this text, the most significant evidence that the consultants and mentors have been involved in the process of deepening organizational learning are the changes in thinking of teachers, respectively of all the people in the school. The interviewed teachers in our schools often communicated that due to the project and under the influence of consultants and mentors they not only “work differently”, but also “think differently”. And this is the basis for really profound

changes in teachers' behavior. This means that people formulate goals differently, gain another perspective or different insight into various situations, create and share new understanding have a different view of the young students, their parents and peers. Teachers received different approach to teaching, they place – under the guidance of mentors and consultants – emphasis on meaningfulness of events, they look for evidence of successful work, etc. Different way of thinking brings changes in behavior and language use.

... When our people go somewhere else to seminars, they themselves come up with the fact that their questions there were totally different than the ones of everyone else, right ... nowadays, they ask about completely different things than a traditional teacher, they are rather interested in learning it in depth. They are interested in the process of learning ... *(interviews with school leadership, mentors and teachers)*

And the truth is that it affects all of us a lot and some changed personally and in terms of their character during that period of time ... *(interviews with school leadership, mentors and teachers)*

If there comes a new teacher to school and our school has been changing the staff significantly, half the staff speaks different language and there is a need to provide support to the new ones ... The new teachers entering the school did not know what we were talking about *(focus group with educational consultants)*

Support of clear planning and seeking evidence of the benefits of innovation has a significant impact on the role of young students in the class. Partnership in planning and fulfillment of tasks within the relationship mentor –teacher, consultant – teacher are transferred by the teachers to their relationship with young students. According to the respondents, young students are also becoming partners of the teachers, they plan, formulate goals, choose activities and evaluate the learning processes.

... all this must be, of course, reflected on the children. And I think that it is also visible enough that the following relationship between the children and my peers does not exist – I'm not saying that nowhere–but it is not based on: Here I am, the teacher. Here are you child and you're going to do what I say, right? *(interviews with the school leadership, mentors and teachers)*

... Children understand it ... they know why they learn, define the objectives and purpose ... *(focus groups in schools)*

... I have never experienced that children would be thinking so clearly before ... it sounds ridiculous, that one has never seen it before in the school ... but it's a completely different level of how these children work. *(interviews with school leadership, mentors and teachers)*

The teachers in the schools where the consultants and mentors work are viewed as professionals, because by setting goals and seeking evidence the tendency to improvise and react only intuitively are weakened. The school leadership, mentors and consultants therefore treat teachers as professionals, they express their respect to them (otherwise they would not be accepted) and believe in their potential. Everybody in the school thus get a chance for their own professional development, as at the school there is available someone who offers them the support and offers guidance to quality.

In both schools the project also offered the teachers the opportunity to broaden their role – they can become lecturers or mentors in their own and other schools or just open their classes and let other colleagues consult them. Teachers are aware that the project has given them (not only) with the help of consultants and mentors an opportunity to excel, become better teachers and a better school. They have become self-confident teachers who are aware of their qualities and the qualities of their school. Teachers at both schools often encountered interest and admiration (reputedly sometimes also even envy) from other schools and teachers.

All can be leaders ... (*interviews with school leadership, mentors and teachers*)

I think that it was important that those who wanted benefited an opportunity ... had the opportunity to learn, develop their teaching skills ... and they found some way to their own profiling. (*interviews with school leadership, mentors and teachers*)

... There is an extraordinary staff in our school, the teachers are real masters ... our task is to show teachers that if they go for a difficult task, they can complete it – they can do it. (*focus group with educational consultants*)

... It just changes me in the sense that I am growing tremendously. I think that if I was at another primary school, I still could not reach such qualities as I have done now for those five years. And certainly, I think I owe it to the project, as well as to the leadership and the entire teaching staff, who are all helpful. I know that if I ask anybody for advice ... really anyone will always help me. (*interviews with school leadership, mentors and teachers*)

Educational consultants generally bring new quality to schools. They have agreed that they themselves must work with high commitment, they have been carefully preparing for their classes and any other activity with the teachers trying to be imaginative, resourceful and creative, and clearly target-oriented. This is actually how they show the teachers what the quality of work looks like.

An educational consultant must take the job seriously and should work hard ... It is still about high commitment and also about consistency. It must not be let up, but it should still be directed towards the agreed goal. (*focus group with educational consultants*)

When describing the process of broadening organizational learning, we mentioned that teachers have become accustomed, respectively adopted the culture of mutual consultation, observation in class, etc., but at the same time the process of deepening can be observed. Not only that teachers normally provide each other with feedback, but also the quality changes. Support is linked to a number of specific topics and teaching methods. It is no longer for example just attending peer's class (for the formal completion of the task), but the attendance is linked to a clearly defined objective. This model of meaningful observation and targeted provision of formative feedback is transmitted to teachers' work by mentors and consultants.

They do not do things just formally anymore, it does not make sense, they do not remain on the surface and in the feedback they are even not afraid to go deep and look for evidence, respectively the impact of innovation of the teacher on quality of teaching. (*focus group with educational consultants*)

Teachers gradually began to view me as support and I see development of reading throughout the school a great success ... The teachers started attending each other's classes and providing a descriptive feedback. It is joyful to see that some things in the school have changed. (*focus group with educational consultants*)

Recently, pressure on obtaining evidence about the quality, respectively effectiveness of interventions in schools and other environments has generally been growing (Konstam et al., 2015). Consultants and mentors, trained in evaluation brought to school efforts to seek evidence about the effects of innovations in teaching. The effects of all the efforts and great commitment of teachers are not always directly visible and they are usually difficult to measure. Mentors and consultants offered teachers possibilities to formulate objectives and criteria for monitoring their implementation. But it is also clear that to work with evidence is not easy and it is still considered a constant challenge for the future.

... for example two years ago, when it was said what the evidence of learning meant, we all just felt skepticism and today I'd say that we all know what is the evidence of learning, the problem is how to work further with it, how to be able to evaluate it ... This is a topic of this year. (*interviews with school leadership, mentors and teachers*)

... we will submit portfolios in advance, which will contain all the information about let's say attended training sessions, sharing, activities and so forth, but mainly there will be evidence of learning of young students. It will be handed over to the leadership in advance and they will be able to read it before the interview. (*interviews with school leadership, mentors and teachers*)

Working with evidence has become a natural part of self-assessment of teachers. Consultants help teachers not only in terms of formulating objectives but also in evaluating their own work. The teachers in both schools have been encouraged to apply

self-assessment, respectively evaluation of their goals (personal career development plans), and there has been a clear intention of establishing the processes of accountability in work of the teachers. This contributes to the professionalization of the profession (Newmann, King, & Rigdon, 1997). If a teacher works under the supervision of a mentor or educational consultant, he is no longer accountable only to himself, but feels a certain pressure to complete tasks and submit work at agreed terms and in the supposed quality. It is obvious that mentor as well as educational consultant – even though they are partners of the teachers – have influence on the teacher that can be explained, for example, by sensation of social power (Erchul & Raven, 1997). In particular, the perceived positive referent of social power may have positive effect (*positive referent* – the effort to work just as well as a mentor or consultant) and similarly positive expert power (positive expert), but also the legitimate reciprocal power (*legitimation of reciprocity*) when teachers know that they strive for a common good cause and do not want to disappoint their supporter (Erchul & Martens, 2010). The mutual support and collaboration among teachers and the “experts” (i.e. co-dependence) contributes to the sustainability of the set processes.

### **Educational consultants and mentors in the process of anchoring capacities of organizational learning**

If organizational learning is to become a normal part of school life and routine, it must be anchored in school policies. The project the schools entered into created the conditions for people to learn in the school to formulate and share vision of the school, and also to periodically think about their own direction. Consultants were there to support the school and individual teachers in formulating clear objectives and in finding ways to their fulfillment and control mechanisms. It is obvious that these demands were connected with some administrative work and therefore a burden to the teachers, but after some time they all began to see the sense in linking learning activities with clear goals and visions. The custom to formulate and carry out their own and joint plans and anchor the processes of organizational learning into school life supported by the leadership and consultants and gave the main processes a clear direction and meaning.

... suddenly, simultaneously with the project there was a direction ... certain vision we wanted to follow ... and there we jointly identified the areas in which we wanted to develop ... (*interviews with school leadership, mentors and teachers*)

Teachers learn how to define the objectives precisely, they are involved in the formulation and setting of the objectives for the whole school ... thanks to creating a plan, the areas in which the school wants to move, to change, as well as the goals it sets, it concerns clarification and approximation of the objectives and the like. (*interviews with school leadership, mentors and teachers*)

The educational consultant supports us a lot so that we have learned to clearly formulate our goals ... (*interviews with school leadership, mentors and teachers*)



Anchoring of organizational learning is also supported by workshops and educational events closely linked to predetermined annual priorities of the school. Through the activities the project supported, there have been set certain mechanisms for learning in the school: planning, sharing visions, annually repeated activities and events for various target groups, paired teaching and the use of consultants and mentors. Specific processes and changes in relationships (and school culture) have been started, which have a great potential for sustainability.

The school continues to have a specific priority each year and education is then implemented in that area—it is good for coordination on information level, for motivation, and it is easier even for establishment of cooperation with educational consultants, even in the case of resistant people. (focus group with educational consultants)

The use of the support of consultants and mentors became a common part of everyday school life. People have become accustomed to mutual consultations and the relationship mentor/teacher consultant has been transformed into the relationship teacher/teacher (see also the section about broadening).

... Because these people are incredibly open to each other, at least I perceive it like that ... that there is a really friendly atmosphere... here it does not work the way I sometimes hear that people do not share, do not give or that they invent something and keep it among themselves or that they would gossip and did not help each other ... (*interviews with school leadership, mentors and teachers*)

Well, later, after that year, I think, there started to occur opinions such as: And why can't it be him? ... When he is developing in mathematics, another one in English, this one is in turn good at natural sciences ... why should we see only one of the mentors? (*interviews with school leadership, mentors and teachers*)

It is worth noting that the position of mentors (and partly school consultants) in both schools during the five years of the project was gradually weakened; however, it does not mean that performed badly. It is the other way round. The teachers gradually stopped worrying about attending peers' classes, they openly shared their know-how, and began teaching in pairs. This is a good basis for sustainability.

It seems that the process of anchoring the capacity of learning brings most of the uncertainties and risks because it is connected with sustainability. In connection with the end of the project, replacement of leadership or mentors and consultants or other leaders leaving the schools can weaken the processes of learning and a range of meaningful activities ceases or becomes formal. Some risks – but rather the ones associated with a number of changes that took place within the school – were pointed out also by the interviewed people from the schools. If the innovations follow each other in rapid succession, there is a risk of a change not being adopted, there is lack of time for the actual testing and evaluation of innovations in teaching, at a time when the peer, mentor or consultant left the innovating teacher.

### III. Learning teachers as seen through research

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Sometimes I was excited by something and six months later it had ended. We've been everywhere and nowhere. There was so much work ... (*focus groups in schools*)

It seems that the change cycle is not always completed fully, when the incorporation phase is not fully completed. A lot of attention is paid to the adoption of new ideas and their implementation into practice, but there is a lack of attention and time to make the changes really settled in school life (see e.g. Lagerweij, 1992). This is a typical challenge in many innovative environments.

Last but not least, one of the significant supporting factors mentioned was the relatively long time of duration of the project (five years). Educational consultants and mentors initially met with suspicion and various expectations from the teachers, and it is therefore obvious that the people at the school need sufficient time to make sure about the meaning and benefits of learning for them and the whole school and also about the usefulness of those who support learning processes – consultants and mentors.

The work of the educational consultant at one school for five years made sense to me, because it is a systematic and long-term support. (*focus group with educational consultants*)

Moreover, the schools do not have, respectively the schools in concern did not have previous experience with similar projects, with consultants or mentors. Similarly, consultants and mentors did not have experience with this role and sought their own position in the schools and the professional identity. Both sides were therefore just learning, clarifying expectations and seeking a way to each other. And this requires sufficient amount of time.

The results of the evaluation research carried out in the schools involved in the development project brought several key messages for the supporters of the effort to develop learning in schools. They pointed out the role of educational consultants and mentors in the process of expanding, deepening and anchoring capacities of organizational learning. The study stressed the importance of long-term and clearly structured projects that support schools not only financially, but also in terms of high quality assistant staff that can develop processes of individual and joint learning in schools.

Good selection of consultants and mentors, and their ongoing training and continuous supervision support are to be regarded an essential condition for success. The importance of a thorough clarification of their position at the school, their responsibilities, competencies and relationships to leadership, so that they are understandable for the teachers cannot be underestimated. The investigated schools, mentors and consultants experienced such a situation for the first time. Everyone knew that this was an experiment that could fail. The results of the evaluation research thus helped convey the experience to other schools currently entering a similar project. Verbiest's structure – broadening, deepening and anchoring – can support the people from the school leadership, consultants and mentors so they understand some of the nature of the relationship between their work related and the support of learning processes.

# 11. The impact of reflecting team – selected data from Norwegian projects

Reflecting team has its origins in therapy. When Tom Andersen (2007) launched this conversation form, it was partly motivated by the experience he had in his meetings with sick people. Andersen often felt that it was difficult to be of help to many of his patients. This made him more curious about the relationship between the life they told about and what experiences they related to their anxiety, depression and other mental disorders (Andersen 2007). In the beginning, he was not interested in measuring the impact of the conversation form he applied, but he experienced something new in the meetings around these talks. Andersen writes that he sees changes or *differences* – as he chooses to call them, with reference to what Bateson (1972) describes as “a difference that makes a difference.” The differences in Andersen’s work with reflecting teams has significance for the individual’s encounter with Andersen. He does not give a summary of one general effect. A difference that makes a difference means a change, in the therapy through a change in your life.

The networks using reflecting team claim that there is much evidence of change. Therapeutic treatments can be given various forms and be based on different theoretical approaches. Most people would probably consider the hospital a suitable place of treatment for sick people, even for those with a mental illness. Tom Andersen, however, felt that the hospital was a difficult place for his patients to meet for conversations. The hospital was frightening and not a suitable place for sick people, Andersen claimed. He therefore started the practice of going home to the patients, meeting them in their everyday lives. This experience helped to break down the barriers between the doctor, the hospital and the patient. During these consultations, the patient was at home, and the conversation was characterized by equality, without deteriorating the roles of doctor and patient. This was also part of the reason for his practice with reflecting teams. Respect for the patients’ lives and history increased. Andersen describes that this resulted in a significant change in the patients’ lives and proved as a sustainable way of meeting people. The reflection and the conversation became equal and balanced, and the patient could to a greater extent take responsibility for their own development. This was largely due to the way the therapist posed questions and challenged the patient to rethink. The patient was faced with, and challenged to reflect on his stories. This created the conditions for a different way of perceiving themselves and enabled new perspectives on their history and their own lives (Andersen, 2007).

Jakko Seikkula’s meeting with Tom Andersen inspired him to implement this conversation form in his work in the psychiatry in Finland, and to start networking based on conversation and reflection work. Seikkula worked with severe mental illnesses. In the preface to the book “Open Dialogs” (Seikkula, 2000), Andersen says that far

more ought to wonder why Seikkula's work with reflective processes led a very high percentage of his patients back to work and a better life. These were people struggling with bipolar disorders. Andersen questioned why Norwegian clinicians appear not to find these results interesting (Andersen, 2000). The effects of this work might prove difficult to measure, but the feedback is nevertheless remarkable.

## From therapeutic thinking to tools for guidance

The therapy's task is to help create change and restore balance in life (*homeostasis*). Traditionally therapy has been a conversation where the client, through meetings with a therapist, finds the appropriate measures to address the challenges that he or she faces. In our context, we are not talking about reflecting team as therapy. The conversation we have during guidance is not about making people healthy or treat illnesses. Yet, it happens that the guidance conversation touches the mentee emotionally for various reasons.

In the logs someone tells that they feel strongly affected when others find their difficult work situation interesting. In other cases, the mentees get affected when they find new solutions to major challenges. Others may experience that the guidance forces the mentee to see his or her own work with new eyes. The same tool that is used in therapy, will thus in an educational context be about the awareness of own practice (Sørmo, 2015, p. 142–157). The subjects of reflective processes with guidance and reflecting team must justify both their choices and their preparations for activities during the guidance. These activities could be lessons that should have been done better or with better learning conditions that there might be reason to dwell upon, preparations for the new educational sessions, and meetings with other teachers, co-workers, leaders or parents. The method, which includes curiosity, the use of open questions, challenging questions, creating wonder and reflection on own practice, can have major effects. Meanwhile, the mentee is aware of the presence of a reflecting team, which is listening, wondering, and supporting the mentee in the conversation. The mentee is free to choose what he or she would like to focus on, but the mentor is always aware of the subtleties in the conversation. This can be things that are being said, the way it is expressed, what topics are selected and what topics are left out (Sträng & Sørmo, 2015).

## Logs tells us about experiences

In our mentoring projects, all the participants contributed by writing logs after every session. The logs are records of how each participant was experiencing the work of reflective processes. In such contexts, it may be difficult to relate to words like "effect", as this is perceived as a measurable phenomenon that compares results against each other. Whether the "effect" is good or bad will in this context be very subjective. The same event can be perceived differently, and thus it may be difficult to measure the actual effect.

The logs express how each participant was experiencing the work in reflecting team as a mentee, mentor or member of the reflecting team. This expresses a qualitative experience of personal involvement. The closest we get to measure the effect, is to examine whether the participants have different experiences or if the experiences coincide for some or more of the participants. Here follows some examples from the log material. One mentee wrote this after hearing the conversation in the reflecting team:

So great! Things I had not thought, thought of, or even noticed, were very well observed by the expert panel. It did not feel as if anyone was looking to correct me in any way, they were solely there to help/support/guide. (*mentee*)

One participant of the reflecting team writes:

I can see that Ingvild supports Karianne along the way, and specifies and clarifies her successes. (*member of reflecting team*)

None of the participants in the projects has expressed negative experiences concerning the guidance. All participants, from different institutions, have consistently shared positive experiences from their work in reflecting teams. They express that they are far more successful in finding solutions they had not previously thought of, to the problems with which they were struggling. Meanwhile they express that reflecting team is an appropriate tool to develop yourself as a teacher and employee in kindergartens and schools.

A log writer says:

Good to receive input from “behind your back“: RT is sitting back there hearing and seeing something completely different from what I notice when I am speaking. Very nice to get comments/questions on body language, intonation – all those things that reveal how you really feel in relation to what you talk about. (*mentee*)

However, not everyone is that enthusiastic. At one school, where we have been working with reflecting team for a few years, the participants experienced that colleagues sometimes had different preconceptions and prejudices against this form of guidance. Participants expressed that colleagues antagonized the guidance work. The participants believed this was largely due to a lack of knowledge and rumors of sensitive guiding.

Since the guidance tool is based on a therapeutic theory, outsiders can be prone to believe that the guidance is dealing with the same thing. It is thus important to ensure that the whole staff has the opportunity to attend presentations on this tool and to ask all the questions that require clarification before this form of guidance is implemented.

For several years, we have worked to examine whether the use of reflecting teams, in work with reflective practice or processes, can help create change in the everyday lives for those who work with children. In this context, we have not defined the characteristics of this change; just that it leads to an everyday life that is felt better for adults and children alike.

Our supposition is that guidance can be a useful tool to achieve such development. The adults closest related to the child might also have the best opportunity to contribute to change (Sørmo, 2015).

For that reason, we have linked the guidance to thoughts of empowerment. Both the official support systems and other resource persons often experience an increasing demand for external help when situations in kindergartens and schools are challenging. Frequently, teachers and institutions are the ones crying for help. Our projects have shown that the guidance has helped direct more attention towards the teacher's personal skills as a significant other, for both the individual pupil and for the group. By thinking empowerment, the teacher's role is a relationship builder that might have some good solutions. In the collaboration with the mentor and the power of having a reflecting team, the possibilities of finding new paths have increased. This is being confirmed by the participants' logs.

This was an exciting conversation. Fun to watch the development of Karianne, moving from chaos into being able to get an overview of her frustrations, to see the things that she has done right and well and see that her whole body language is different. She is full of "guts". (*member of reflecting team*)

Our research team at Østfold University College has worked in various fields with reflecting teams. Already in our guidance training of teachers for kindergarten and school, we have focused on developing knowledge and skills on how reflecting team can be used in everyday challenges. Working students, who are working with children while immersing themselves in the guidance studies, have during the exercises, indicated that guidance with reflecting team as a method has been very useful. During the exercises, these students have used their own, real-world experiences for which they have sought guidance. Through meta-guidance from the research team, they have worked to identify how the reflecting team tool can be used. Students state that they after such exercises are able to use reflecting team in a manner that helps them a lot in their everyday work. Meanwhile, we have also sought to examine whether this form of guidance can be used both in organizational development and as well as a tool related to educational challenges in primary education (Sträng, Jensen, & Sørmo, 2013).

Obviously, the family therapy model has other application areas than in an educational context. It has been necessary to convert and adjust the model to be able to apply it to guidance contexts. Nevertheless, reflecting team in this context has been strongly linked to the communicational thinking applied in family therapy. It is all about people or organizations searching for a way out of particular challenges.

## The projects

### KARIB

This project was named KARIB, as an abbreviation of the project's nature – Kulturanalyse og Reflekterende prosesser I Barnehagen (*CARIB – Culture Analysis and Reflecting Processes In the Kindergarten*). We chose to use the word “kindergarten” because the English word kindergarten and preschool had the same significance as we understood it. The project started with a lecture at the University College in 2011. Both students and the research team had worked to become familiar with the reflecting team tool. We then asked the students whether anyone would like to participate in a project aimed at further development of the method, to see if it could be useful in everyday work. Almost the entire student group volunteered immediately. Naturally, we were overwhelmed by this, but we chose students in a kindergarten in proximity to our college. Harekas kindergarten in Halden municipality.

Before we initiate such guidance sessions, or other projects in kindergartens or schools, it is crucial for us that the organization's leadership participates in every decision related to the project. At the outset in Harekas, this worked flawlessly, since one of the participants was also head of the kindergarten. We suggested basing the project on a cultural analysis of the kindergarten. The project is described in detail in a report published as Høgskolens rapporthefter or *College report booklets* (Sträng, Jensen, & Sørmo, 2013). The report also describes the method of the cultural analysis and the participants' own experiences of the process.

This project was followed up by two new culture analyses in the subsequent years with one-year intervals. Both the leadership in the kindergarten and the research team wanted to see how the participants experienced the changes after some time. Our primary interest was whether the project led to changes in a kindergarten that showed strong interest in improving everyday life for both the staff and the children. The results showed that many changes occurred in the kindergarten. The knowledge acquired by the leaders through the project, spread to the rest of the staff. After a few years, the employees influence on everyday life in this kindergarten had changed. Initially some members of the staff reported that they perceived this project as something the leadership was toying with, and that the staff was given too many challenges, but later this changed. Eventually the employees expressed that they were very happy to be a part of this (Sträng, Jensen, & Sørmo, 2013).

### The Låby project

The Låby project got started when the principal at the school contacted our college, to ask if it was possible to get guidance for a teaching team with particular challenges. We offered to start a guidance project based on the conditions associated with reflecting team. Four people, a teaching team of two who were seeking guidance and two other

staff-members signed up to be part of a reflecting team. We made an agreement with the school principal that the project would last for at least one year, and that participants should present their experiences at an international research conference. The research team of three people from the college took on the roles as mentor, observer and meta-observer. In addition to the actual guidance session, as a regular part of each meeting, we started with a 20-minute lesson about reflecting teams. The guidance took place once every month. Along the way, these participants wrote logs that we later analyzed. The logs showed that the teachers' team got different roles in the guidance. One of them was the principal mentee, while the other was a teammate. Meanwhile the reflecting team was strong supporters with observant reflections that helped to raise the mentees' belief in their own skills and to solve difficult classroom challenges in a new way. It appeared that "a difference that makes a difference" could also be about the teachers finding new solutions in their everyday work, and experiencing increased confidence in their own skills and competence.

#### The Berg project

The project at Berg school was intended to examine whether a team of teachers could collaborate on developing guidance within their own teaching team. The school administration was also interested to see whether this could result in stronger team building and the opportunity to develop the team's competence in a better way. This team had no previous guidance training, thus it was necessary to focus on both training and model building of guidance conversations. This was a relatively large group of five participants. Along the way, they all wrote logs, which were later analyzed. These results are still under analysis, but we have already detected a very positive attitude towards the method. The participants attended all the sessions with interest, and took turns in the roles as mentee and member of the reflecting team. In the final stage of the project, the participants took over the whole process, with the research group as meta-mentors.

#### The training prior to guidance

In all the projects, emphasis was placed on training before starting the guidance sessions. The training focused on how to safeguard the different roles in the process. Moreover, it was important to stress the importance of language, how the participants should concentrate on using open questions and be curious about the words that were being spoken. They should be observant of behavior during the guidance and be aware not to repeat formulations and sequences. It is also important that for participants of reflecting teams to be conscious about expressing support, without being artificial or irrelevant.



## Challenges of guidance

Guidance often occurs in situations where a mentee meets a mentor who is not a colleague. Many mentors prefer to have a written topic question that keeps the guidance strictly within the frames of the request. In kindergartens and schools, the guidance is often carried out between colleagues who know each other fairly well. This may be a good reason to formulate a problem/issue in writing. In the work with reflecting team, the intention is to meet the person who seeks guidance, with as little preconception as possible. People who know each other will always have a certain pre-understanding of each other. When mentee and mentor are close, the mentee might wish to have some control over what appears in the guidance. In Tom Andersen's (2007) form of therapy, he wanted to know as little as possible about the topic of conversation before they started. He believed that preconception could ruin the real issue, both because of the risk of the therapist appearing as a "besserwisser", as well as the patient's attitude towards the doctor. Some of the same effect might occur during guidance, and the roles of mentee and mentor. Equality in the conversation is vital to be able to agree on a good solution and contribute to change. If the problem is locked in a pre-formulated written presentation, it may impede discussions on problems at a different level (i.e. relational), that might be the actual obstacle in finding opportunities for change. Thus, pre-formulated written topic questions are avoided in the guidance method with reflecting team, and the person seeking guidance must express this orally. From that point, the guidance starts, with wondering, open questions and reflection.



## Conclusion III

School self-evaluation and reflective practice are two possible paths to improve students' learning.

### School self-evaluation

Experience from many countries indicates that when teachers regularly reflect on their own practice and focus on the improvement of teaching and learning in classrooms, they can also improve the learning achieved by students. Teachers engaged in school self-evaluation will have more opportunities to share their experience with the colleagues in a professionally rewarding and supportive way. School self-evaluation can be defined as an internal, collaborative process of reflective enquiry on the work of a certain school, mainly instigated to raise the level of school improvement and development (Capperucci, 2015).

When teachers reflect on their work they become aware of what is working well and what might need to be improved. To implement school self-evaluation is starting a process of reflection, improvement and development that can take place in a more systematic way.

In a successful Czech educational project (Road to Quality Improvement – *Cesta ke kvalitě*) a set of self-evaluation tools were verified in practice as a first step toward development and better learning. The results and experiences from the certain schools were communicated and exchanged to colleagues from other schools, thus implementing organizational learning. Norway has long time been engaged in different ways of school self-evaluation, including systems of supervision to ensure common practice, and the use of mapping materials to identify needs of individual support. Summative and formative assessments may facilitate knowledge and understanding of desirable actions to provide better learning.

The assessment system generates a lot of information of what is going on in schools around the country. A main question is how the results from school self-evaluation can be fully implemented in practice and contributes to better learning. This may require analytic skills which are not always available in schools.

The Norwegian landscape of supporting schools seems to be closely linked to issues of quality assessment at all levels of the educational system. The purpose is to provide different forms of customized education and to offer an improved learning outcome for the individual student. The quality assessment system refers to initiate a continuous pedagogical dialogue among schools.

## Dialogic interaction

The dialogic interaction may lead to a collective understanding of pedagogical phenomena, in which different perspectives and aspects are being visualized to initiate organizational learning. Through complex and subtle processes, as well as simple and direct mechanisms, different agendas conflict and interact, and in a dialectical dialogue the purposes, aims, objectives, and goals of the organization will be formulated. An actual organizational value complex evolves which, regardless of the formulation or verbalization or rhetoric in which it is couched, becomes “the mundane, quotidian philosophy that is translated into the realities and events of the workaday world through managerial processes” (Hodgkinson, 1996, p. 11).

This reveals the complex and challenging tasks teachers face and the need to develop high-level expertise in teaching and learning with an understanding of how young people can succeed in their education. Such actions respond to break the isolation of the classroom and the “one teacher one classroom” doctrine. Establishing a culture of dialogue and collaboration initiates organization learning, with the aim of improving the quality of education and provide better learning.

In the last three chapters we have discussed the impact of local research and development projects in Czech Republic and Norway, concerning learning and assessment, organizational learning and reflecting teams. The descriptions of these activities shows the importance of continuing knowledge building to support learning in schools.

Questions of effectiveness of the support provided to schools and teachers is highly relevant and it is evident that studies focused on results of provided support are more and more in demand. Results from the mentioned studies show that both individual and team support provided to teachers (professionally, with respect for context), including also dialogue and reflection of practice, is highly appreciated by teachers and schools. However, these studies also indicate certain risks connected with the use of reflecting teams, mentors and consultants and raise questions of both (continuing) training of teachers and support from their educators and other “agents of change”. At the same time it is obvious that a short-term project support is seldom sufficient to build a “learning school” culture. Short-term project support is only a good start which can bring a whole range of inspirations to teachers, educators, school managements and education politicians. Evidence-based, justified support and education, continuity and anchorage in education systems often remain a challenge. Rethinking the relationship between education and practices that scaffold knowledge creation is vital for the future (European Commission, 2012).

## IV. Concluding remarks



## 12. Support for learning in schools

In this book we have shown a variety of practical and theoretical excerpts from school research in two European countries, marked by historical and cultural differences, but with several common denominators in the field of education and knowledge.

Our initial aim was to present a number of options for support, focusing on collective learning and activity. We were fully aware of the cultural and contextual differences between our two countries, but along the way we discovered the potential of reflecting on the sustainable development of schools from different starting points.

We also became convinced of the increasing need of internal and external support in implementing new methods and standards of our schools into an overall perspective of better learning. A number of questions concerning European schools were raised by the OECD (2004) for more than a decade ago, but they are still fully relevant. Are students well prepared to meet the challenges of the future? Are they able to analyse, reason and communicate their ideas effectively? Do they have the capacity to continue learning throughout life? Parents, students, the public and those who run education systems need to know the answers.

### **Building a sustainable support system**

The professional development of teachers is a key challenge for all schools who want to improve the quality of education. Local schools are expected by governments, local politicians and school managers to enhance capacity and competence building for better individual and collective learning. To promote professional learning is considered as a prerequisite to manage the continuous stream of changes and demands, such as demographic changes, socio-cultural renewal and large-scale reforms of all kinds (Slegers et al., 2010).

Successful school support has the emphasis on pupils' learning environment as the key to achievement in school. Changing of learning environments can positively contribute to children's and adolescents' learning progress. An overall challenge in school development, regardless of the choice of perspectives and practices, is how to benefit from these learning processes to enhance sustainable development in everyday work.

A challenge for all schools is how to build well-functioning and sustaining systems of support for better learning. Bureaucratic and cultural boundaries may prevent us from seeing and understanding how to build systems with shared responsibility and accountability for learning processes (Oshry, 1995). Failure in the support for knowledge sharing appears when employees refuse to share information and knowledge with others despite being invited to (Pol et al., 2011).

A critical point in implementing models of school support is the way that complex chain of organizational mechanisms through the specific planning targets and objectives is articulated (Sharp, 1995). Another condition is the expected commitment of all staff to participate in the working process. This requires not least an active and visible leadership. Lack of continuity in school leadership, can be an inhibiting and counterproductive obstacle to sustainable school improvement.

The underlying pattern of function and actual impact on school culture also needs to be visualized and described. Hodgkinson (1983, p. 209) speaks of “the Analysis of Affect” as a tool for understanding an organization’s stakeholders at the micro level. Efforts should be made to regularly inform and remind the teachers of their responsibilities, especially the specifics of implementation. This level of follow-through by all staff is most likely essential to a successful implementation process.

Building a sustainable support system for teachers’ on-the-job training also includes building up a learning organization. To incorporate learning into an organization means to actively challenge its cultural values of traditions, character and spirit. School development in general can be described as the interaction between the defined school culture and its consequences (Sträng, 2011). For real development, and not only the structuring of descriptions, require an increased focus on cultural values.

An important task for schools is to identify their own cultural characteristics and develop sustainable support systems towards an integrated whole. Internal resources will be maximized when the teachers work together to shape optimal learning environments through systems that stimulate new ideas and personal growth.

Changing a school’s solid cast and loosening up the fixed patterns of labour relations successfully demand much work on a long-term basis. This is often a difficult project and the presence of internal and external change agents does not make it more manageable in practice. Schools are basically complex systems, composed of a number of different sub-systems, and not obvious to define in all parts. Moving toward an integrated culture will be a challenging journey for each organization (Snyder, Acker-Hocevar, & Snyder, 2000).

An interesting question is whether the school organization, according to its complex organizational structure, differs from other organizations’ structures and conditions for their work (Berg, 2003; Sträng, 2013). A parallel question is whether organizations really can learn, according to academic attempts of distinguishing between organizational learning and the learning organization. Some researchers (Pol, Hloušková, Lazarová, Novotný, & Sedláček, 2011) are questioning the very existence of the learning organization and perceive it only as a metaphor and a kind of hypothetic model, rather than normal reality.

### **Supporting the existing school culture**

Bringing internal or external quality-oriented supporting to a school where the mix of educational values and background among the teachers are not obviously fond of the requirements for collaboration is well intentioned, but not easy to achieve.



Collaboration depends on good communication and shared values. National cultures can have different styles of communication, and different understandings of what good education looks like and what it should achieve. When these differences are understood, they can be dealt with, and the collaboration required to develop better learning in schools can be more easily achieved (Fisher, 2012). Research has shown that there are great similarities and a considerable homogeneity of school actors in different national contexts (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2001).

At the same time it is important to understand the differences related to educational traditions and context of schooling, including the presence of educational reforms. Such differences are important to consider in order to understand the meaning of educational restructuring in different national or regional contexts. This has also been a basic idea of our project, which has have limited and prevented us from trying to realize our initial idea of finding a common and transnational model for school support.

School culture is however a complex concept. According to Fullan (2007) school culture can be defined as the guiding beliefs and values evident in the way a school operates and it can be used to encompass all the attitudes, expected behaviors and values that impact how the school operates (Fisher, 2012).

The concept of school culture in this book refers mainly to Berg (1999, 2003) and his school development strategy of scope for action. The essential parameters of the “scope for action” school development strategy comprise identifying the salient features of the current culture of a given school organization, as well as the limits determined by the policy documents regulation the work of the school in a particular national or regional context. This enables the teachers to discover the scope for action within the prevailed culture and the practices representing it in order to the aspects of what is prescribed and possible according to the document specifying the current mandate of the school (Berg, Namdar, & Sträng, 2011).

To describe and explain different ways of supporting the existing school culture must be made from multiple perspectives in parallel towards a holistic understanding. School organizations are often described as complex institutions with their daily work constantly influenced by the dual role of the school as an organization and as a social institution.

Berg (2003) has a neo-rationalistic view on organizations, looking at schools as institutions, established within society by an interest group or “mandator” to promote its goals and interests. These interests are a mix of ambiguous, conflicting and even contradictory rules and values. The organization is under the pressure of informal control mechanisms, codified and manifested in the local school culture. The school as an organization is considered as a result of the interplay between formal steering from the state and informal influence from the staff and the local community, described as the local school culture.

In our time of rapid change the perspectives of teachers can sometimes be critical to build and rebuild the culture of work in their schools. Snyder, Acker-Hocevar and Snyder (2000) identify three main variants of school culture, with different views on support and development.

At first there is the *fragmented* culture which consists of sporadically and loosely connected individuals with ambiguity and isolation as natural work conditions. Teachers are not involved in decision making for school improvement and there is little consensus about how the school can support student needs and engage in educational growth (Martin, 1992).

Second we have the *integrated* culture with consensus and clarity among all teachers about the teachers about the school organization's goals, mission and development plans for the future. There is a sense of harmony as well as a sense of predictability (Martin, 1992).

Finally, there is the *differentiated* school culture, characterized by consistent subcultures, but often with a contradiction and discontinuity to the dominant culture. In this culture there are rooms for multiple support systems like tutoring, mediation self-help groups, positive reinforcement and promoting self-esteem. A differentiated school culture may look integrated, but when the aims and values of the subcultures differ too much from the main culture, it may lead to stagnation and contra-productivity.

An important question is who actually is involved in the learning at each level of the organization. From a traditional view of organizational learning in schools associated with the teachers, now there is a potential for other important actors to enter and positively affect the development (Pol, Hloušková, Lazarová, Novotný, & Sedláček, 2011).

Hofstede (2005) speaks of different values or cultural dimensions related to education that affect teachers' expectations of what happens in the classroom and how they should and can behave with their students. The cultural dimensions also inflict on how they behave in meetings and how they communicate with colleagues and their head-masters. The extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power will be distributed unequally (Fisher, 2012).

Ekiert-Oldroyd (2011) states that empowering schools for creativity and thus providing better learning is substantial to the global problems now facing us. Minor improvement activities are not enough. Schools have to be altered radically. Despite this, almost obvious insight on today's requirements, schools are generally not creating organizational and social circumstances for individualized and innovative teaching and learning, despite the availability of appropriate research-based pedagogies (Sahlberg & Oldroyd, 2010) and well elaborated supporting systems.

Based on this background it is conceivable that the practical experience from the Czech Republic and Norway of how to support the existing school culture in teaching and learning may not be fully compatible.

## Reflective practice

Reflective practice is a general term to describe a variety of activities in order to transform an organization into a learning system. A popular view on reflective activities is that they will only be successful if the participants will view them as enough important to assimilate. Where reflective practice is implemented in a school, it is important to

ensure that consideration is given to how activities are received by all school actors (Burton & McNamara, 2009; Ledvinka, 2006). The organization must learn to create effect of the transformation and diffusion of the whole system (Schön, 1983).

Dialogues between school actors must have a constructive orientation, with the participants focusing on how their contributions can provide to a future oriented collaboration with the aim at better learning. Collaborative working relationships may help the sharing of successful practices and the provision of support (Fullan, 1991; Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Little, 1990). Establishing a reflective practice is complex, because the participants have to reflect, both on different aspects of daily work, and on their own cultural identity (Thorsen & DeVore, 2013). Reflective practice as a communication process also means that organizational members will need increased dialogic skills (Levin & Riffel, 2000).

It is also important to find effective strategies for promoting reflection in different contexts and useful approaches of compatible understanding (Sträng, 1997), to attain excellence and flow in the activities. Csikszentmihályi (1997) emphasizes that *flow* is likely to occur when an individual is faced with a task that has some clear goals that require specific responses. It is important to keep in mind that the collaborative work should, ultimately, produce valuable and innovative results.

Teachers may engage in reflective practice for distinct purposes. One reason is the desire to adjust their ways of teaching in order to find better ways of understanding the needs of their students and provide better learning. Within their sphere of influence they can pursue areas of great impact and better communicate (Gore & Zeichner, 1991; LaBoskey, 1994; Thorsen & DeVore, 2013). Reflective practice requires strategies for systematic analysis and reflection throughout different levels of the organization. The participants must learn to effect the transformation and diffusion of the system in applying knowledge to practice, while being mentored by professionals.

The presumed impact of school support as a sustainable learning system raises the question of how to facilitate the implementing of reflective practice as method for communication (Bell & Mladenovic, 2013). Research indicates that time and opportunities to reflect and ensuring access to a mentor for continuing professional development are important steps for promoting reflective practice in an educational organization. The mentor will challenge the thinking of the teachers and encourage them to look at things from multiple perspectives instead of repeating old standpoints and habits (Colmer, 2008; Kinsella, 2009).

A good relationship has the ability to engage all participants in effective communication, emphatic listening, personal learning and self-reflection (Kram & Ragins, 2007). Relational mentoring e.g. with reflecting teams (Andersen, 1991) characterized of members influence and influenced by each other is a possible step forward to reflective practice. If the mentoring feels safe and interesting, mutual exchanges of new ideas may lead to motivations for change of teaching toward better learning.

Mentoring with reflecting teams (Andersen, 1991) can be effective as a part of a support system, based on reflective practice. The idea of reflecting teams is originally developed within the therapeutic field. The concept of reflecting teams has spread from the original

therapeutic context and is nowadays applied in a wider organizational context. Reflecting teams has been a common method in connection with team mentoring and team appraisals (Hornstrup & Loehr-Petersen, 2003). The implicit value of a reflecting team is to provide new information. Andersen (1987) notices that reflecting teams allow an increased exchange of pictures and explanations. By sharing their information and knowledge, each participant receives new perspectives on their daily work and can participate in a learning process, as a result of a functioning support system for better learning.

### **Learning for quality and competence**

To create a sustainable support system for better learning in schools requires a shared understanding of concepts such as quality and competence in teaching. These issues are often politically entrenched with multiple views on the optimal aims and knowledge for practice. In several European countries, e.g. in Czech Republic, a focus on teacher competence definitions is also linked to reforms.

In a given context, the systems of teacher education and professional development should also focus on teacher learning for quality and competence. To encourage teacher learning enables teachers to be effective in supporting the learning of students in different contexts (Hatano & Oura, 2003)

Using theory and research to reflect on their own practice will increase the overall knowledge about teaching by the teachers themselves. It is important that teachers actively maintain and develop their professional competences throughout their careers, in an ongoing professional development process, based on their individual engagement.

A report from the European Commission (2013) proposes three main ways to enable teachers to acquire and develop the required professional expertise. The first is to find effective ways of how to stimulate teachers' engagement in career-long learning and competence development. The second is assessing teachers' competences, with tools that make it possible to look at the purpose and design of the teacher competence model being used in each system. The third is providing coherent, career-long appropriate and relevant learning opportunities, through which every teacher can acquire and develop the expected competence.

To cope with the question of how to stimulate teachers' engagement in professional learning and competence development there is a need of a competence development plan. A successful plan should be based on both research and practice to encourage and promote teachers' self-reflection, respect individual teachers' different starting points and leave room for school autonomy in implementing continuous professional development plans.

A standing issue is how to inspire teachers in practice to be proactive, reflective professionals who are prepared to take responsibility for their own professional development. Because teachers vary in their learning styles and the understanding of the needs of acquiring and developing their competences, their motivation to engage themselves in professional development will also vary.

The European Commission (2013) notes that teacher engagement can be stimulated by a mix of opportunities, incentives and requirements. Successful opportunities should meet the following conditions:

- matching needs and demands at all levels to build a stronger bond between the teacher and the current school and the education system,
- accessibility, relevance and variety of opportunities,
- co-ordination between the content of initial teacher education (ITE), induction (early career support) and continuing professional development (CPD) and the providers at each phase,
- dialogue between stakeholders (e.g. teachers and unions, school managers and employers, school authorities and national ministries, teacher educators and universities, CPD providers) at all levels, to secure commitment and shared understanding,
- adequate provision of time and resources (e.g. substitute teachers to cover for training absences).

Teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) is of growing interest internationally. While an increasing range of literature focuses on particular aspects of CPD, there is a lack of literature addressing the variety of CPD models in a comparative manner (Kennedy, 2006). The paucity of literature in this area was one of the reasons for us to compile this book, although we had no intention of doing a full comparative analysis of the conditions in Norway and the Czech Republic. To make our presentation useful we chose to discuss sustainable school support and teacher development empirically and theoretically in a European perspective, basically anchored in democracy and humanism.

### **Supporting teacher educators**

The European Commission (2013) points out the importance for all teachers to have the competences they require in order to be effective in the classroom. To achieve this, new teacher should be provided with initial teacher education of high quality. Serving teachers must at the same time be encouraged to continued developing and extending their competences throughout their careers.

Teacher educators can have a significant impact on the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Despite of the knowledge and experience of this key profession they are often not very much used in national or local policy-making. Nor will teacher educators always get the support and challenge they need in terms of their education and professional development.

Is important that national school systems acknowledge the need to define clearly what teacher educators should know, and be able to do. They should also acknowledge that great care needs to be taken in recruiting and selecting teacher educators, and

in facilitating their career-long professional development. Stimulating and supporting the development of explicit frameworks and policies, as well as national and regional education authorities will assist the teacher educators to be effective.

### **Paradigm shift**

In a recent study conducted by the International Tuning Academy Groningen, and commissioned by the European Commission and Lumina Foundation for Education (Birtwistle & Wagenaar, 2016), there is an on-going paradigm shift from input or staff/expert driven learning to student-centred, output-based learning to the reality in Europe.

The aim of the study was the need for evidence concerning how far the learning outcomes approach in higher education has been taken up in institutions. To address this aim, a mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative indicators was used. It is also the first study that shows the level of penetration of student-centred approach. The ultimate aim was to test whether this approach addresses current issues better than the traditional forms of education in the European Union. Though the study focused on higher education, the findings seem to be relevant knowledge for all parts of the school system, mainly concerning questions of school support.

- The distinction between learning outcomes, and the outcomes of a learning process, needs to be better understood by all involved.
- Teachers are struggling to adjust to the new concepts and paradigm shift and are challenged by no longer being the “knowledge owners” but rather learning facilitators.
- Staff development focuses more on processes, than the concepts and benefits of a learning outcomes approach.
- Teaching staff are not adjusting well to close cooperation with their colleagues when writing learning outcomes and developing learning activities.
- Institutions and systems are caught between the research excellence objective (i.e. rankings) and the policy drivers to achieve teaching/learning excellence.
- While good practices implementing the student-centred approach emerge in many parts of many institutions, there are few initiatives to scale up these good practices.
- In all cases, good practices are based on external stimuli via participation in relevant initiatives (Birtwistle & Wagenaar, 2016).

The results from the study indicate that the paradigm shift will be achieved, but without additional and continued support, it could fail. Educational institutions must assume ownership of good practice if it is to be embedded and taken forward. This requires serious investment in staff development and school support activities. A stronger commitment at national level to achieve the paradigm shift is needed to ensure sustainable development of schools. Systematic approach is needed to analyse what is happening in practice.

## Concluding remarks

Documents and reports from the European Commission are often presented as the result of a process of “peer learning” between experts on education policy and practice in the membering countries. Peer learning can be defined as the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions (Topping, 2005). It also enables participants to compare and contrast different policy approaches, learn from each other’s practices, reflect critically on current conditions in different contexts countries and draw shared conclusions about what changes can be made for effective policies (European Commission, 2013).

Support for learning in schools is also a product of peer learning. We have shown a variety of options for support and focused on collective learning in the Czech Republic and Norway in an overall European perspective of sustainable school support and development.

Czech schools are in a process of change towards a higher degree of decentralization and autonomy for individual schools. The national strategy for education is intended to meet European standards, according to equity and increased quality of teaching and learning.

We have noticed that The Norwegian school support systems are closely linked to quality assessment systems with the purpose to offer improved learning outcomes. Czech Republic teachers have a similar attention on better learning with increasing needs of support to develop and strengthen the teaching activities. School actors as assistants, school psychologists and special educators, work as potential change agents to realize the vision of better learning.

In both countries collaborative processes of reflective enquiry and self-evaluation are strong elements in the work of raising the level of school improvement and development. Assessment systems of all kind generate much information, but remaining questions is how the information will be implemented in practice and contributes to better learning. This is not a particularly new problem. In a guide for evaluating school programs, Sanders (1992) comments that we are often swamped with information and are asking how we can summarize the information we collect so that the message from our data gets accurate and clear.

A common denominator for Czech and Norwegian schools is the need for and the possibility of organizational learning. Reflecting and mentoring are other key-words of the continuing work of supporting schools for implementing the paradigm shift of better learning. In a broader perspective the quality of education and supply of skills has increased worldwide and Europe must respond. It is important that European education and training systems will succeed in in providing the right skills for employability and bring the learning experience closer to the reality of the working environment. By 2020, 20% more jobs will require higher level skills. Education needs to drive up both standards and levels of achievement to match this demand, as well as to ensure young people are able to adapt to the inevitable changes in the labour market during their career. The emphasis will be on delivering the right

#### IV. Concluding remarks

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skills for employment, increasing the efficiency and inclusiveness of the educational systems (European Commission, 2012).

This reveals the complex and challenging tasks teachers face and the need to develop high-level expertise in teaching and learning and an understanding of what it takes for young people to succeed in their education. Such actions also respond to the need to break the isolation of the classroom and the “one teacher one classroom” doctrine. Establishing a culture of dialogue and collaboration can improve the quality of education.

New insights in how and where learning takes place indicates that effective teaching may require other forms of professional assistance and support as a supplement to the traditional teaching work.



# Appendix 1

## COLLEAGUE OBSERVATION FORM: **QUALITY** and **STRUCTURE**

GRADE ..... DATE ..... SUBJECT ..... TEACHER ..... OBS .....

<b>Observations</b>		<b>Comments</b>
On time for lessons	<b>Min:</b>	
Focus on learning	<b>Min:</b>	
Lesson begins with collective motivation, instruction or summary of former lesson	<b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>	
Clarity and reflection upon learning goals	<b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>	
Discussion on strategies for learning	<b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>	
Putting learning into context	<b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>	
Students reflect upon how learning influences upon their thinking and actions	<b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>	
Questions addressing: - Learning strategies - Findings and solutions - Understanding and use	<b>Yes</b> <b>No</b> <b>Yes</b> <b>No</b> <b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>	
Students have time to answer	<b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>	
Students are helping each other	<b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>	
Students assess their own work	<b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>	
Students assess each other's work	<b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>	
Students reflect upon their learning, individually and together with each other	<b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>	
Students have sufficient time for learning	<b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>	
Students work effectively through the lesson	<b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>	
Working conditions are satisfactory	<b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>	
Lesson end with conclusive reflection	<b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>	



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