

1 Introduction:

Aim and Scope of the Technical Report

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This book presents the project School-In, offering detailed information about the make-up of the innovation from the very beginning in January 2017 until it ended in June 2020. Funded by the Research Council of Norway (project code 260539), School-In was conducted in cooperation between five municipalities and the University of Agder in Southern Norway. It targeted schools in the regular Norwegian education system, where compulsory education lasts ten years. Thus, School-In involved public schools hosting pupils from 1st to 7th, 8th to 10th, and 1st to 10th grade.

The project School-In was an in-service professional development (PD) programme which aimed to develop an inclusive learning environment by focusing on the impact of expectations in terms of changing school culture. It was an intervention project with a systemic approach using several methods and instruments developed to fit the intentions of the study. School-In was designed for working with the entire teaching staff in the various schools, ensuring cross-disciplinary and cross-level impact.

This technical report is made for documentation and replication purposes. The idea is that other research projects can profit from School-In's intervention measures, research methods, and results. The perspectives, measures, and instruments of this project are described thoroughly and may be used directly or adapted by other professional development programmes.

This report also provides an opportunity for policymakers to evaluate their programmes for innovation research. They seldom see the results of their programmes other than in research publications in international and national journals. The Research Council of Norway has an innovation research strategy to promote an innovative public sector. In this book, policymakers will find descriptions of how the programme was understood and conducted, meeting the demands for designs with various methods to develop empirical and theoretical knowledge at international, national, and local levels. The Norwegian model of innovation presented here might influence the way in which policymakers can initiate new programmes for innovation; thus, the report describes how research projects can ensure relevance for practice by basing the innovation on the need for new knowledge from the public sector.

School owners can benefit from using the report to promote local school development. The model for innovation we have developed and describe here provides

an opportunity for what Hargreaves & Ainscow (2015) call leading change ‘from the middle’. Large-scale school development approaches that only work in a few schools, or innovative ideas that are seldom spread beyond a few isolated classrooms are well known and often criticised (Parchmann & Gräsel, 2004; Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2015). One finding from our project was the opportunity to enable local leaders to lead ‘from the middle’, respond to local needs and diversities, and foster local initiatives rather than implementing other people’s ideas. This report gives an insight into how the project was conducted to provide new opportunities and lead schools ‘from the middle’.

School leaders can learn from an empirically-based and theoretically-based Norwegian model of innovation, promoting development with the teaching staff as drivers for change. This book explains how the School-In project was organised and describes the research methods that were used. It also addresses antecedents that influenced the innovation processes. The working methods used in the project will be helpful for schools seeking to enhance their collective capacity for inclusion and strengthen their professional learning community and school culture.

The University of Agder takes part in a national strategy for decentralised competence development – DEKOMP. DEKOMP is recommended to be school-based and relevant for the participating teaching staff. The School-In approach is already being used in lectures, to facilitate competence development in schools in the region. Thus, the working methods and an Organisational Didactics model developed in School-In are already used to create structures for capacity building (Midtsundstad, Dalehefte, Hillen, Horrigmo, & Ingebrigtsvold Sæbø, 2022).

We would like to thank all our co-creating partners in the municipalities of Agder as well as our peer researchers in the reference group. A special thanks goes to the project group leader and administrative leader of the overall project, Steinar Harbo, and to the coordinator, Line Håberg Løvdal, who made this project possible. We are also grateful for all kinds of support from the administration at the University of Agder and support from the reference group. Finally, we would like to thank the Norwegian Research Council for funding the project and, of course, the many head teachers, teachers, paraprofessionals, and students involved.

The book starts with an overview of the study and the project’s theoretical and methodological background before we move on to presenting the intervention methods and the research instruments used. Finally, we conclude this book with reflections on the relevance and quality of the project. We hope that this peer-reviewed book will be an inspiration for other researchers, practitioners, and politicians in the field of education.

The book consists of three parts:

The first part (chapters 1–3) gives an overview of the project School-In, its background, design, and sample. It also contains a description of the innovation and detailed information on how we conducted the project.

The second part (chapters 4–6) presents the main working methods used in School-In – the Mental Mapping Response method, Dialogue Café, and Reflection Cycle.

The third part (chapters 7–10) introduces the multiple research instruments – local expert interviews, teachers’ focus group discussions, teachers’ pre-post questionnaires, video studies, and student interviews – which enabled both general and in-depth studies, i.e., triangulation and case studies.

Finally, the book concludes (chapter 11) with ‘lessons learnt’ and reflections on relevance and the quality of the study.

References

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