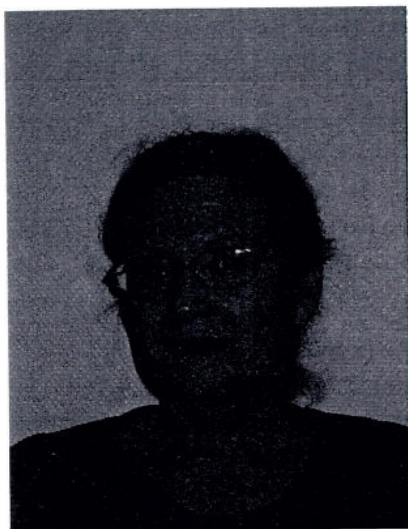


# Norwegian Policy for Empowering School Libraries

Elisabeth Tallaksen Rafste, Tove Pemmer Sætre and Ellen Sundt



## Abstract

The first part of this paper presents a general picture of school libraries in Norway, reviewing statistics, outlining legislation on schools and libraries and highlighting aspects of the national curriculum for primary and secondary schools. It illustrates the complex and integrated systems in which school libraries are to be found and looks at obstacles to successfully maintaining and developing school libraries in Norway, bridges to cross and measures to be taken. The second part uses the plan *Make Space for Reading! Norwegian Strategy for Stimulating a Love of Reading and Reading Skills, 2003–2007* (2003, 2005) to illustrate how the political, educational and library systems can join forces to empower school libraries and stimulate reading skills and interest in reading. It examines some of the projects and appraises the input from different parties, the project process and the preliminary results. Finally, it draws attention to future challenges for school libraries in Norway.

**Keywords:** School libraries; Norway

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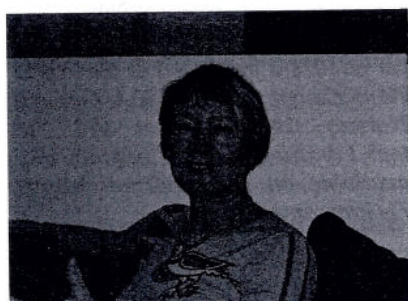
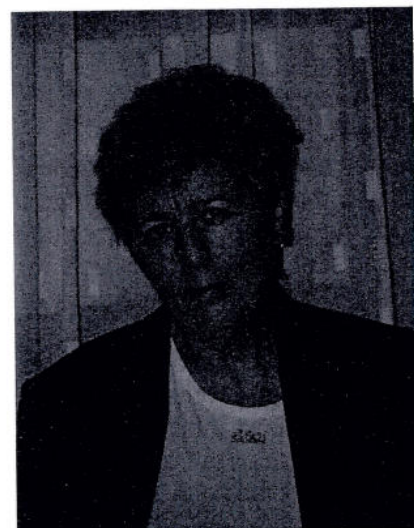
## Introduction

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Over the years, Norwegian school libraries have played an important role as lending libraries but a much more minor role as an integrated part of teaching at school. Policy has been drawn up to rectify the situation, and focuses on empowering the libraries. This paper will begin by outlining the status of school libraries in Norway in 2005, focusing on empowerment. In part two, we will present the national strategic plan *Make Space for Reading!* (2003, 2005) This is an interesting example of a government effort to highlight the importance of school libraries in the context of reading.

We must begin by defining the main concept, *empower* – and *empowering* – and relate the definition to school libraries. *The Oxford American Dictionary* defines *empowerment* as ‘to give power to, to make able; to authorize, license’ (*Oxford American Dictionary and Language Guide*, 1999). Using this definition as a starting point, we will examine how present Norwegian policy is directed at enabling school libraries to participate in education through legislation, guidelines, standards and strategies.

Let us take a closer look at the concept of empowerment. Rindom (2002), a Danish researcher on education, claims that traditional empowerment theory builds on humanistic values, and refers to the educational theories of Freire and Habermas. Rindom provides a framework for giving power to individuals or groups who perceive their position in society as being deprived of power and locked into a hierarchical dialogue with an administrative system. According to this theory, empowerment would signify a symmetric dialogue between the school library and school at the micro and macro levels. Furthermore, the dialogue would be rational and knowledge-based. We agree with this interpretation of empowerment. However, we believe that a more proactive understanding of the concept may be fruitful in a hypercomplex



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society, characterized by autonomy, flexibility and initiative rather than a passive view.

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

After presenting a brief outline of school libraries in Norway, below, we will discuss how to empower school libraries from this theoretical perspective.

### The Status of School Libraries in Norway: a brief outline

#### The Legal Base

##### The Law

Basic education in Norway includes primary and lower secondary school (ages 6–15) and upper secondary school (ages 16–19). It is governed by the Education Act and Regulations to the Act (*Opplæringslova*, 1998, *Forskrift til Opplæringslova*, 1999). The section applying to school libraries states that all pupils shall have access to a school library. It also lays the groundwork for cooperation with public libraries. In both cases, the library must be adapted specifically to the school (section §9–2 of the Education Act, section 21–1 of the Regulations to the Act) and be open to pupils during school hours. There are no guidelines or regulations for either primary or secondary schools in terms of staffing, budgets, space and equip-

ment for school libraries. Each school is free to decide how to implement to law.

##### The Current National Curriculum

The national curriculum is another important tool for empowering school libraries at the government level. In Norway the curriculum for primary and lower secondary schools has a specific section on school libraries (*Læreplanverket for den 10-årige grunnskolen*, 1996). It states that the school library is of vital importance to educational and cultural activity at school. The joy of reading and learning to search for information are among its key phrases. The importance of school libraries is hardly mentioned in the national curriculum for upper secondary schools (*Reform '94*, 1993).

##### The New National Curriculum

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

From the basic commitments:

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

The basic skills:

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

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

##### Staffing and Budgets

The staffing of school libraries varies greatly. The average school librarian in primary and lower secondary schools works 5.48 hours per week.

One third of them have the required academic background: a minimum of 6 months of full-time study in school librarianship as a supplement to their teacher's education (*Statistikk for folkebibliotek*, 2001). The average school librarian in upper secondary schools works 33.3 hours per week. Just over half of them are qualified school librarians, having completed a minimum of three years of library science (*Statistikk for bibliotek og museum*, 2003).

The counties have financial responsibility for school libraries in upper secondary schools. The municipalities have responsibility for primary and lower secondary schools. The average annual grant per pupil, earmarked books and other media, was NOK 184 in 2003, varying from NOK 539 in one county to NOK 88 in another (*Statistikk for bibliotek og museum*, 2003).

### **The Legitimacy Base**

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

### **Empowerment of School Libraries Based on the Current Status**

The ineffectual legal base and the variable legitimacy base mean that the present empowerment of school libraries is unpredictable. Policy directed at empowering school libraries has been decentralized to the regional and local levels. This means that the dialogue between the bureaucratic and professional organization and the school library depends on a responsible approach and attitude to the legal base. It is further dependent on the content and quality of the legitimacy base, which varies considerably from one school to the next.

There has been some frustration over the school library system having had difficulty achieving a symmetric position in dialogues, due to these insufficient power bases. We assert that increasing the power of the legitimacy base is the best starting point for empowering school libraries from a strategic perspective. School librarians, professionally trained in librarianship and in the educational field, will gain an increased status by the way the academic education will make them able to negotiate and discuss with school leaders and teachers in their 'language', and with students in their educational explorations.

In future, experience in managing and using school libraries in education may lead to an improvement to the formal framework and the legal base because argumentation on the part of school library services has been improved and professionalized. This strategic approach does not imply that national policy is of less importance. We need more elaborate legislation to arrive at a more predictable and visible school library situation.

Having discussed the overcoming of obstacles to empower school libraries in general, we will continue with a presentation of the national project 'Make Space for Reading!' (2003, 2005). This project is interesting as a policy document that may increase both the legal- and legitimacy-based power of the school library by integrating it with reading instruction and stimulation of reading.

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### **The National Plan 'Make Space for Reading!'**

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*Make Space for Reading! Norwegian Strategy for Stimulating a Love of Reading and Reading Skills, 2003-2007* (2003, 2005) focuses on improving the ability to read and the joy of reading. The plan covers all children from day care up to and including upper secondary education. It targets teachers, librarians, headmasters and parents. It seeks to contribute to reinforcing teachers' expertise in reading instruction and use of the school library. It further attempts to increase awareness of reading as a prerequisite for learning in all subjects, cultural competence and taking part in a democratic society. The plan is dynamic and open for revision from local and regional institutions, including the universities and university colleges. The 2005 revised edition was launched at World Book Day in April. 'Make Space for

Reading!' should be seen in conjunction with another ongoing national project 'The Cultural Schoolbag', a priority programme for cultural education within the school system. Starting this year, 'Make Space for Reading!' (2005) will run parallel to the new education reform 'Knowledge Promotion', and 'Make Space for Reading!' must follow the terms of this reform. Both plans stress the importance of reading.

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

### **Empowering School Libraries by Making them Visible through Reading Projects**

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

### **Empowering School Libraries through 'Make Space for Reading!' Projects**

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

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

### **The National Network for School Library Professional Development**

Supplementary training for teachers and school librarians and networking are crucial components of the plan. In the following, we will look at how these strategies can be seen as a policy intended to empower the school library and increase its legal and legitimacy base.

The national network for school library professional development was established in 2004 as part of the strategic plan 'Make Space for Reading!' Agder University College in Kristiansand and Bergen University College are in charge of coordinating the network. The main objectives of the network are to

- define the school library as a subject
- analyze the need for education and expertise within the field
- initiate and develop studies in the school library field
- make the school library visible as a learning arena

The network functions as a meeting place for different target groups involved in school library issues and for discussion and coordination of these issues. It also allows discussion and influence on legal-based power on the national and local level. Representatives of all the universities and university colleges have been invited to join the network and will constitute an important voice in putting school libraries on the agenda at this level of education. This can thus be seen as another way of empowering them. In addition, school libraries can be empowered through collaboration with other networks, especially networks for reading, writing and literature. Last but not least, developing supplementary teacher training is seen as an effective way of improving the legitimacy-based power of the school library.

We will now discuss the last two ideas and describe actions that have been taken or which will soon be taken.

### **Empowering School Libraries through Cooperation between Networks on the National Level**

Building bridges between networks may be an effective way of putting school libraries on the agenda at the level of higher education. The National Centre for Reading Education and Research established at the University of Stavanger will be one of our partners. The school library sector should be integrated with the research and the courses at the centre. The network for Norwegian covering writing, reading and literature is another important partner. We have already developed the joint study 'Reading instruction, literature and school libraries' (see below).

### **Increasing the Legitimacy Base through Teachers' Supplementary Training and New Studies**

The supplementary training already comprises studies and workshops in four different fields:

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

### **Empowerment through Strategic and Temporary National Plans**

In many ways, 'Make Space for Reading!' has been like a breath of fresh air for education at every level. All schools can apply for funding to start a project they are enthusiastic about and through which they believe their pupils will become better readers and more independent learners. By focusing on reading, the school

library is made visible as a resource centre for both printed and electronic texts, a centre for both academic and leisure reading. In addition, the school librarian may act as an integral contributor to literacy development. If the school library is poorly developed, reading promotion projects may make the invisible school library more visible. In addition, the school library may be challenged to respond to the need for more expertise and resources.

On the other hand, the strategic plan may widen the gap between school libraries even more than now. This may be the case because many schools cannot manage to draw up a project and write an application for funding. And if they do submit an application, they will still not be sure that it is good enough. This may be the situation at schools with a very weak power base. The plan calls for proactive and creative schools and proactive school libraries. Instead of empowering the libraries, the plan may lead to disempowerment.

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

An important question to ask about a 5-year plan is whether the duration is adequate to develop anything lasting. The Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education is aware of the problem of good results from projects of limited duration fading away at the end of the project period. This is why allocation of funds to local projects is the domain of the state education administration in the counties (the county governors). They are responsible for setting priorities, follow-up, reporting and joint regional actions. It is clear in the plan that the focus will be on a lasting strategy for all parties to stimulate the joy of reading and reading skills. The plan will be evaluated by the SINTEF research environment in Trondheim from 2004 to 2008.

The plan has been received enthusiastically, and it will be exciting to see how the actions in 'Make Space for Reading!' are implemented at schools, and how school libraries are integrated with these actions. It will also be interesting to

observe the extent to which the fires that have been lit under people have a long-term effect on joy of reading and development of school libraries. We are concerned that the fire that has been lit may gradually die down unless the state does not take other drastic measures to follow-up 'Make Space for Reading!' in order to increase empowerment.

### Conclusion

We have described how present school library policy seeks to empower school libraries. Empowerment has been interpreted as a symmetric dialogue between bureaucratic and professional organizations, on the one hand, and the school library, on the other; a dialogue where the school library also has a say in decision-making and is proactive. We have also introduced the concept of *power base*, which consists of the *legal* and the *legitimacy base*. The former is the formal framework of the school library. The latter is the personal and professional confidence in, and support for school libraries as an educational instrument. This conceptual framework has proved to be fruitful in discussing the empowerment of school libraries. We assert that there is a dynamic relationship between the two sides of the power base. Consequently, it is of vital importance that there be both strong legislation and highly qualified and skilled professionals in school libraries in order to achieve a proactive and symmetric dialogue on school library matters.

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