

# **CHAPTER 12**

## **DRAMMEN UPPER-SECONDARY SCHOOL CASE, NORWAY**

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### **Introduction**

Drammen Upper-Secondary School is one of Norway's largest upper-secondary schools: it hosts over 1300 students. Most of the students here are enrolled in the general studies and college preparatory programmes. We offer a standard college preparatory curriculum in the natural sciences, technology and social sciences, and have our own specialised lines, so-called niches, with a focus on internationalisation (parts of the subjects are taught in English), entrepreneurship, and research. Furthermore, we have elite sports and Arts, Design, and Architecture as college preparatory offerings. In addition, we offer SESAR, which is a vocational programme in sales, service, and tourism, and a separate class for those with special needs. The S-class is a special education programme for students who, after application and an expert assessment from the PP service, are admitted to upper-secondary education. The instruction provides basic competence without grades and is based on an individual education plan (IEP). These students are divided into smaller groups in various subjects throughout their schooling.

The students at Drammen Upper-Secondary School come from diverse cultural backgrounds. Many of the students come from other countries and cultures, have values that differ from those considered typically Norwegian, and have a mother tongue other than Norwegian. Furthermore, we have a diverse student body in terms of socioeconomic background. All in all, the student population at our school comprises a wide spectrum of conditions and backgrounds. This results in both an exciting diversity and various challenges in everyday school life. Common challenges include, among other things, encouraging the students to

appreciate the differences that exist and understanding that it is completely acceptable to disagree on some matters while simultaneously accepting that we have different values, cultures, and backgrounds. This is something we actively work on here at the school, both during class time and, particularly, during the autumn when we hold a diversity week. During the diversity week, we focus on the positive aspects of the diversity present in the school. Among other initiatives, we work to promote the idea that we are all equally valuable regardless of language, background, or religion, and we invite to both discussions and lectures to involve and engage the students.

## **Professional Development Activities**

At Drammen Upper-Secondary School, we continuously engage in professional development work in accordance with the curriculum framework. The school is a professional community where teachers, leaders, and other staff reflect on common values, assess, and further develop their practice to varying extents and in different ways. We work together in subject groups where the main focus is on the pedagogical work within the subject area, as well as in departmental and line meetings to develop excellent offerings for the students. During subject meetings, teachers share various teaching plans they use, methods and assessments, and reflect on how these work and how they might be improved. Teachers are also given the opportunity to participate in job shadowing and courses through Erasmus+ when the school has the funds for this, an opportunity we consider important for personal development and inspiration. Those who have the chance to participate are expected to share their experiences with their colleagues. We have several cooperation agreements with schools in Europe, including in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and the Czech Republic, where we travel with students on exchanges and collaborate on various academic projects, both on-site and digitally.

Drammen Upper-Secondary School is a university school for USN. As mentioned earlier, we are primarily a general studies school, and during the past four years, we have been in a process of reorganisation with the goal of aligning more closely with the expectations of the subject renewal reform. In the process of reorganisation, the management team was accompanied by advisors from USN. Guro Hansen Helskog and Rikke Sundberg have followed the process closely throughout the entire period. Philosophical conversations combined with academic theory have inspired us and contributed to the development within the

management team, an experience that we carry forward into our work with both subjects and in our departments and lines.

In addition to the specialised programmes we already offer at the school (Forsker, Drammen International, and Inspiro), we have, through the reorganisation, established new lines such as “Samfunnsforskeren” (the Social Researcher), “Business”, and “Realfagslinja” (the Science Programme). The new organisation has focused on creating theme-based subject packages for students on the various programmes. In the Social Researcher programme, we build on a foundation of research enthusiasm and creativity, aiming to prepare students as thoroughly as possible for further studies through research and academic writing. For example, they have utilised advisors from USN and are in close cooperation with the Holberg Prize in Schools (HiS). We are the first and only school in the country to be designated as a Holberg School.

We are committed to developing ourselves as a school and believe it is important to research and to engage in self-research. In this context, one of our staff members, in close collaboration with USN and the school’s leadership, has applied for and secured public funding for a PhD project that addresses interdisciplinary approaches and student participation.

## **Overall Observations of Teachers’ Engagement in Research in their Classroom**

Research can feel overwhelming — there is so much interesting material to absorb, yet almost none of it tells you exactly how to act on it in your own school. Starting a new project takes longer than expected: not just to get going, but to figure out how to turn theoretical ideas into practical steps. By the time real progress begins, the initial energy has often faded.

Looking back on my own studies, theory was the main focus throughout. Textbooks drew on research, but the research process itself was rarely discussed. What I remember wishing for, and what I still wish for, was something more concrete: “If you use Strategy X, you can expect Outcome Y, and here is why.” The ideas often felt too abstract to translate into classroom action. There was a noticeable gap between the theory and how it might actually be used.

In my conversations with newly trained teachers, I have rarely heard anyone mention doing research in a meaningful way. Their routines seem largely unchanged from day one, and none have told me they plan to take on a research

project as part of their professional practice. Perhaps some assignments during training could qualify as research, but I suspect they experience them simply as practical exercises, not as systematic inquiry. This suggests we need to make the idea of research more explicit and to clarify that it does not have to mean large-scale university-style studies. It can be as simple as comparing results when you try a new assessment method against an older one. Small-scale, built-in projects that fit inside existing responsibilities rather than adding to them are the most likely to survive the first term.

We have not yet established a systematic approach for observing how teachers engage with research in their classrooms. Teachers participating in the TREL project share their experiences within subject groups, but their actual research processes are not formally observed. As a result, we have not identified any standout topics, nor have we been able to draw connections between their findings and the specific needs of our school. We have not yet received teachers' final research results, so it is too early to assess their relevance or impact on professional development. One broader pattern we have noticed is that students tend to struggle with self-assessment and evaluating their own learning. This is an area that intersects with many of the project themes.

I am curious to hear more as the project develops. I want to know whether participants feel they have achieved what they set out to do, and whether the experience has shifted how they think about their own teaching. That kind of honest reflection, not just reporting outcomes, is what I think would be most useful to share across the school.

I am still very curious about how things are going with the project and am eager for more updates. I want to know whether the participants think the initiative has met its goals and if they feel they have achieved what they set out to do. It is also important to highlight that when working on areas like assessment, testing a new strategy against an old one to compare results could be valuable. This approach needs a clear plan, and any new method should fit smoothly into a teacher's regular responsibilities. The goal should be to keep the process from becoming too time-consuming and instead make it a natural part of their professional work.

## Recognition and Appreciation

I am genuinely interested in seeing where TREL leads, though my understanding of the full scope of the project is still limited. What I notice most clearly at our school is the gap between sharing experiences that could drive change and actually acting on what we hear. Teachers often find it easier to talk about what they do in the classroom than to reflect critically on whether their methods are working. This is a real area for development, and I think TREL addresses it directly. We have not yet established a systematic way of observing how teachers engage with research in their classrooms, and without that, it is hard to build on what individual teachers are learning.

Small, manageable research projects that are built into what teachers are already doing are the ones most likely to stick. If the task is to “tweak and observe” rather than to “redesign and report,” more teachers will take it up. The challenge, and the opportunity, is to design frameworks that feel like natural extensions of teaching rather than academic exercises. For this to work, information shared through TREL should not only explain theoretical principles but translate them into something a teacher can try on a Tuesday afternoon. I look forward to learning more about the project’s outcomes, and to seeing research become a living part of everyday practice rather than something that stops when the project ends.

To engage with and acknowledge the teachers’ research, we rely on them sharing their experiences with the leadership and the wider faculty. If we find this knowledge valuable, we will be able to implement and integrate it into our ongoing efforts to develop further and improve our professional methods.