

The Nordic Forum working groups

The Nordic
Lighthouse
Project



The working groups were first assembled at the 2nd Nordic Forum meeting in Oslo. For new members of Nordic Forum we recommend that you take a look at the workshop description below and look at the workshop summaries on the Nordic Lighthouse YouTube-channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLMALxGfAiPD-m1Y4DewlS6ltVaHO0WIQD>

It is up to the members of Nordic Forum which working group/workshops to participate in. The working groups do not work or meet between meetings. The main task of the members of the working groups is to contribute with expert knowledge during the workshops, where various issues related to the use, communication and sharing of best practice and research are debated and proposals for possible initiatives are evaluated and discussed.

You will sign up for a workshop/working group at the meeting when registering.

Working group A: Arenas for communication, school-university partnerships and New Social Media

The lack of two-way communication between practitioners and researchers has been mentioned as one of the key challenges by members of the Nordic Forum.

Without two-way communication and feedback from practice, some of the issues that practitioners find important (such as where they face challenges in their daily work) might risk not being addressed by research. Another risk of non-communication might be that researchers point to solutions and instruments that are impossible to implement in practice. Moreover, when implementing new research-based ideas and instruments in practice, it might be beneficial if researchers assisted school-owners, leaders and practitioners during the process.

School-university partnerships have been suggested by members of the Nordic Forum as a way to ensure that research is embedded in practice and to secure proper feedback processes.

A school-university partnership partly answers/meets several of the challenges mentioned by the members of the forum such as: practitioners lacking trust and ownership to research based knowledge, lack of practice-relevant research, lack of two-way communication between practitioners and researchers and research applicability. However, such partnerships are not widespread. Could/should something be done to encourage or support such partnerships and would such efforts be worthwhile making?

New Social Media (NSM)

The potential of using NSM to communicate and discuss research-based knowledge has also been highlighted and suggested for further exploration by the members of the Nordic Forum. NSM have the advantage of facilitating easy and fast two-way (or thousand-way) communication. Moreover, it is accessible, non-formal and easily sharable between different media.

In Sweden and Island, for example, Twitter is used by teachers to discuss new research on specific topics such a science teaching or math. While these are bottom-up initiatives, it might still be possible to stimulate such debates and initiatives across the Nordic region¹.

¹ See for example what the do in Iceland: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JV3CfOr0HQ4>

Facebook and Facebook Groups are another example of NSM that teachers and pedagogues in the Nordic countries are currently using to share and discuss new research and teaching methods. The Facebook groups differ greatly with regard to activity, topics and how formalized vs. ad hoc they are. Like Twitter, the majority of these are bottom-up initiatives. But is it possible to stimulate such initiatives and potentially encourage the creation of cross-Nordic Facebook groups on various educational topics with participants from both practice and academia?

How great is the potential of using NSM for communication between practitioners and researchers and for sharing research to a wider practitioner-audience? What groups of practitioners and researchers could be reached through NSM and would certain groups be overlooked? Is it realistic that both researcher and practitioners would be active in the same groups?

Here, the general underlying assumption is that such two-way communication will bring about more practice relevant research, more trust in research and better implementation. But is this assumption valid?

Working group B: Remediating educational research and using video

We know from international research² and the Nordic practitioner focus-group report presented by The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) at the first meeting in the Nordic Forum that practitioners only to a very limited extent look for and use new research-based knowledge. Many of these factors have also been highlighted by the members Nordic Forum:

- *The language barrier – practitioners find the academic language difficult to read and understand. Also academic articles are often written in English which makes it even more difficult*

² Levin (2013) 'To Know is not enough: research knowledge and its use', *Review of Education*, Vol. 1 no. 1

- *The time/resource barrier – practitioners don't have the time and resources to read up on and search for new research*
- *Location, access and information overload – practitioners don't know where to find the research information they are looking for and experience 'information overload' in their work life*
- *Trust in evidence/research based knowledge is missing and often practical experience is valued higher than research based knowledge. Also, some practitioners find that the political focus on evidence based practice disrupt their autonomy as teachers*
- *Applicability and translation: Knowledge about 'what works' does not by default translate into useful tools and instruments and 'how to do it'. Research findings must be "translated" and made applicable in practice*
- *Practitioners find that there is a lack of practice relevant research*
- *Priority/strategy/capacity building by school management is needed if the use of research based knowledge in practice is to happen. Management must help facilitate a "research culture" among its teachers/pedagogues*

In line with international research the Danish report *Videnspredningsanalysen*³ (presented at the 2nd Nordic Forum meeting) shows that new research knowledge is hardly ever implemented into practice if the findings are not 'translated' and communicated directly to practice. It remains unclear 'who' is expected to make this translation: Is it the individual researcher's obligation to communicate and translate his/her research findings to practitioners? And if so, is this expectation realistic? Do researchers in general possess the required skills to 'translate' and communicate

³ See the attached report *Vidensspredningsanalysen*, Nov. 2015. The finding of this report will be presented at the Nordic Forum meeting in Oslo.

their findings to practitioners? And even if they are able, are there sufficient incentives to do so? Most often, researchers don't get much credit for working and communicating with practice, but are rewarded for publishing their research in high-ranking, international, academic journals and for communicating their findings to other academics.

The NIFU-report *Nordisk forskning og forskningsbaseret policy og praksis på barnehage- og grundskoleområdet*, presented at the 1st meeting in the Nordic Forum, maps out the various remediating actors currently translating and communicating research within the field of education in the Nordic countries. These are, among others, educational what-work clearinghouses, knowledge brokers and research institutions such as the *Center for Educational Research and Academic Development in the Arts (CERADA)* in Finland, *Centre for Research in Early Childhood Education* in Island and the *12 National Centers for Learning* in Norway - just to name a few. See the NIFU report for a complete list⁴.

The Nordic remediating actors are very different in terms of organization and funding (both within and across countries) and some only focus on certain educational levels or specific issues (such as learning disabilities or ICT). Most of them have other obligations besides remediating educational research. Do they have the capacity to carry the remediation task or do other actors have to get more involved?

An important remediation actor with regard to the implementation of research into practice in Denmark and Norway are the national learning consultants employed by the ministries for education. These consultants are collaborating with municipalities and schools who need support in the process of implementing new regulations or

⁴ <http://eng.uvm.dk/Education/Themes/Nordic-Lighthouse-Project>

assisting schools facing specific problems. Part of their job is also to communicate and implement research-based knowledge into practice. However, the learning consultants have many other responsibilities besides translating research into practice, and there is a limit to the number of practitioners they can reach.

Video as a media for communicating research

Video has been suggested by the members of the Nordic Forum as a way of communicating research based knowledge to a large number of practitioners.

In USA and Ontario they are using video to communicate research-based knowledge to practitioners working with primary and secondary education.

<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos>

<https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/research/OERP.html>

In the Nordic Lighthouse Project we have made some small experiments using video to communicate research based knowledge to practitioners working within pre-primary, primary and lower secondary school. See

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLMALxGfAiPD_xby8uV4n3iuRzsGmwzbtb

When using video, we can show how teachers are implementing new research based ideas in the classroom. In this way, research knowledge is 'translated' into practice and by using video we are able to 'show how to do it'. Moreover, video has the advantage of communicating orally which is, as showed in

Videnspredningsanalysen, generally preferred by (Danish) teachers (instead of research communicated in writing). International research also shows that teachers prefer that research findings are communicated by other teachers (instead of a researcher), which is something video can also easily accommodate for.

In order to get many viewers, one might consider having such videos located on portals that practitioners already visit when looking for inspiration and information

about teaching and education as well as when discussing ideas with other practitioners or researchers.

Podcasts have also been mentioned by some of the members of Nordic Forum. Podcasts have many of the same advantages as video, but are, unlike videos, only able 'to tell it – not to show it'.

Some members of the Nordic Forum have mentioned the national Nordic public service TV and radio channels of which some have produced programs explaining new research from various academic fields to a broader non-academic audience. How many of these programs that are relevant for educational practitioners and what programs are produced in which countries could be explored further. Furthermore, there might be a potential for sharing such programs across the Nordic countries and making these programs accessible from popular websites that practitioners often visit when looking for information or inspiration for their teaching.

Sharing remediated products across the Nordic countries

Regardless of whether we are talking about videos, podcasts, or other kinds of remediated research-communication products, there might be a great potential in sharing such products across the Nordic countries. Let's say, for example, that Swedish researchers have come up with interesting new research about how to prevent bullying in schools and that this research knowledge is 'translated' into a short video for practitioners located on a Swedish website. If shared among the members of the Nordic Forum, the video could easily be made accessible to all Nordic practitioners. Many of the Nordic practitioners are able to understand each other's languages - and if not, subtitling a video is not expensive.

Working group C: A research based knowledge culture and teacher education/continual professional development

As mentioned by several members of the Nordic Forum, it is not only a question of spreading research-based knowledge and making it accessible, relevant and applicable. If new research based knowledge is to be implemented in the classroom, there must also be a culture among teachers and within the school system where it is the norm to work with research-based knowledge. Here, international research has shown that it is important that practitioners trust and value evidence based knowledge and that school management prioritizes the process and provides the necessary resources to make it happen. Research also shows that schools that are successful in implementing new research-based ideas and tools have managed to establish a new 'knowledge culture' among the practitioners. Here, school management and the local school owners initiated the process and prioritized to spend resources on it⁵.

Continued professional development and a more research-based teacher education are examples of ways to establish a more knowledge-based culture. Developing new institutional rules regarding cooperation at school level, establishing formal school-networks and school-university partnerships are other ways to support a stronger knowledge culture among teachers and generating more trust in research-based evidence.

Working group D: Sharing and coordinating research between the Nordic countries

Although the amount of national educational research on ISCED-level 0 to 2 issues in each Nordic country is growing it is still quite limited. One might argue that because

⁵ Nelson and O'Beirne (2014) *Using Evidence in the Classroom: What Works and Why?* National Foundation of Educational Research

our societies, history, cultures and values are so similar and connected, the problem of context-dependence is less significant when transferring research findings between the Nordic countries. If this is the case, the potential for research sharing across the Nordic countries should be great.

But where should such research be located, in order to make it assessable to both researchers, practitioners, school management and policymakers? And how should it be organized in order to give users a quick overview?

Some members of the Nordic Forum have suggested the need for a new Nordic educational database on primary and lower secondary research.

What can we learn from the Nordic database of Early Childhood Education and Care NB-ECEC⁶?

Here, another central question raised by some of the Nordic Forum members is whether it makes sense to establish a Nordic (rather than, say, a national, European or international) database? Is it desirable to limit the scope to the Nordic region with regard to such databases? Is there enough relevant Nordic research to do so?

If there is a need for a new Nordic research database, many new questions arise: should it be an open or closed source? Who should manage and update it? Who should finance it? Etc.

Another point highlighted by members of the Nordic Forum is the question of 'gray-research', such as research reports financed by local or national authorities on specific topics. Such research findings rarely get published in academic journals and

⁶ <http://www.nb-ecec.org/msearch?vocab-search-form.widgets.mastersubject:list=implementering>

don't exist in academic databases, although the scientific quality might be high. How do we get an overview of the 'gray publications', are they accessible and what could be gained by sharing such knowledge between the Nordic countries?

Members of the Nordic Forum have also mentioned incentive schemes (such as financial or academic credits) as a way to facilitate more practice relevant research. Is this something the Nordic Forum should look more into?