Evaluation after completion of half of the SkoleVFL 1.0 (School AFL - assessment for learning) project

Summary and conclusions

The evaluation after completion of half of the SkoleVFL 1.0 (School AFL - assessment for learning) project has focused on three particular aspects:

1- The digital learning resource, called MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), in relation to structure, functionality, content and form.

2- The school-based implementation, with such aspects as the leaders' ownership and involvement, the implementation process, adaptation and follow-up, and the school's history and culture.

3- The concept within which SkoleVFL 1.0 is incorporated, comprising the combination of important governance signals, and available network-based learning resources, a special resource for school, and school-based registration and implementation.

The network-based course - MOOC

The responses provided through a questionnaire and interviews show that the vast majority are very satisfied with the form, content and structure of the course. The respondents find the design easy to understand and easy to navigate. Several respondents pointed out that the course had an awareness-raising effect, and many consider MOOC to be a useful toolbox. Even though comments on the quality of the presentation vary, as do the comments on the synergy effect between the theoretical in-depth study and tying this to practice, it appears that MOOC has generally functioned as intended. It has made the theoretical content accessible in a flexible way over time, whether the teachers have used the resources alone in the evening or together in the daytime. According to school leaders and teachers, MOOC has given new knowledge and understanding, it has provided the material for establishing a common language for discussing the topic of "assessment for learning" among teaching staff in schools and it has formed a common platform for discussion, reflection and learning for the whole staff in the participating schools.

The part of MOOC which appears to generate the least positive engagement is the forum that has been established for sharing experiences and reflections with teachers and school leaders from other schools. The threshold for sharing one's own thoughts in such a relatively open forum is quite high for many, and developing a common language and common arena for holding discussions with one's own colleagues is appreciated much more than sharing thoughts, experiences and reflections with teachers from other schools where one has no previous relationship to the staff. 7

The school-based implementation

The school-based implementation will naturally depend on such factors as:

- the school's history relating to work on the topic "assessment for learning"

- the school's experience with and culture for school-based competence development and change

- the involvement of the school leaders in this topic area

- the school leaders' experience of and legitimacy for undertaking school-based learning and development processes

The teachers in the study have expectations for the leaders on different levels. These expectations refer in part to scheduling, which means clearing room in the schedule for working together. Another concern is that the leaders clarify what the expectations are and promote the process. The teachers also want their leaders to give grounds and establish goals for the work, and finally, they want this this work to be integrated with other topic areas they are working on. The school leaders have also had to balance many

factors and wishes. It appears to have been necessary to balance the wish for progress against the wish to have sufficient room for dealing with the challenges of day-to-day school work. Moreover, it appears that some schools have had to adjust the ambition level and high expectations in the field of tension between enthusiasts and more sceptical members of the teaching the staff. Version 1.0 of the course module, which was especially designed for school leaders to support their process, has been assessed in the interview as instructive. Some stated that they followed it blindly, others had spent less time on it, choosing instead to give priority to reviewing the full course content. We see that in spite of the variations in the responses, as seen above, the school leaders in the study generally have assumed responsibility, have given priority to working with the process over time and have chosen strategies that appear to be useful.

The concept that SkoleVFL 1.0 is a part of
The competence development concept that SkoleVFL 1.0 is a part of is still new and largely untested. Digital learning resources are mainly used in individual learning processes, and school-based learning processes are most often based on a combination between physical courses with required attendance and discussion among teacher colleagues. The SkoleVFL 1.0 concept, on the other hand, combines an internet-based course with a school-based decision to participate, and a school-based process for discussion of and reflection on the learning resources made available on the net. To support school leaders, a special module has been developed to provide the course leaders with information and recommendations.

One aspect which has been minimally raised in an explicit way in this initial study is that with respect to traditional courses, a school rarely has the funds to dispatch all its teachers to the same course. This aspect should be examined more closely in the final evaluation. Teachers who have had the opportunity to attend a course are often expected to both inform others about it and to "sell them" on the ideas/knowledge the course has given them. With this new SkoleVFL 1.0 concept, the entire course content with learning resources and assignments is available to everyone at any and every point in time. The concept thus appears to significantly strengthen the possibility of carrying out competence development processes for the entire school. 8

One requirement for such a concept to work is that the school leader sees the topic as relevant and important, has confidence in the content and is sufficiently able to endorse the work methods and means of presentation. In the implementation of SkoleVFL 1.0, this ownership aspect is probably covered because the school leader has been instrumental in the school's decision to take part in the project. The school leaders who have no faith in the concept have probably not encouraged their school to join, and are thus not included in the material. Bearing in mind the important role the school leaders have in this concept, it appears to be a key success factor that the school leader is given the opportunity both to learn about the concept and to take ownership of it. Moreover, the school leader/school leadership team should be given good feedback and assistance along the way, in the MOOC process itself, and through direct dialogue with SELL – the course provider. The discussion forum in MOOC gives the opportunity to discuss and exchange experiences, but it appears that the head of school mainly uses other school leaders in the leadership team at the school as interlocutors and supporting players.

What we can say is that school leaders and teachers have had time to test the concept over time, and they generally give positive assessments. The critical assessments referred to above must not be ignored, but the following excerpt captures one of the main tendencies in the evaluation material:

> *"I would absolutely recommend this competence-raising method for the whole staff at the same time. We gain a common stance and a shared understanding. We speak the same "language" when we work with assessment for learning and school development. We who are in the rural districts with less access to courses and education than those who live in more central locations benefit very much from this way of providing competence raising initiatives."* (From a free response comment field in the questionnaire).