PROJECT PRESENTATION

‘Min Stemme’ – a Collective Effort for Developing Web-Based Content for Teaching and Learning about Democracy and Democratic Values in Norwegian Schools and Kindergartens

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Abstract

The website Min Stemme has been developed for the centennial of women’s right to vote and universal suffrage in Norway in 2013 and the bicentennial of the Constitution of Norway in 2014. It is a website for teaching and learning about democracy and inspiring democratic participation in K-13 (preschool through upper secondary school). Institutions and organizations that already produce and distribute resources related to the two jubilees or relevant topics provide most of the content to the website.

Keywords: digital learning resource, democracy, participation, K-13

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Introduction

Norway celebrates the centennial of women’s vote and universal suffrage in Norway in 2013 and the bicentennial of the Constitution of Norway in 2014. For these occasions, the Norwegian Centre for ICT in Education has developed a website for the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. The website is a resource for learning about democracy, equality and related topics and values and is aimed at the K-13 group.

This is the first single learning Norwegian website that provides learning resources on a unified platform for such a large and diverse target user group. This unified presentation is considered an important criterion for success as it emphasizes the universality of the topics and values associated with the two jubilees, such as democracy, equality, participation and human rights.

The diverse target user groups and number of covered topics provide a number of interesting challenges. Therefore, special care has been given to facilitate sorting and searching of content. With the help of preschool teachers, teachers and The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training both the taxonomy and navigation of the website have been tailored to meet the requirements of the target user groups.

The name of the website, Min Stemme, means both ”My Voice” and ”My Vote” in Norwegian. The website aims not only to distribute relevant content, but also to provide an arena where children and adolescents can express their opinions regarding important topics in Norwegian politics and society.

Content production – a collective effort

The content found at Min Stemme can be divided into three types: Learning material (consisting of texts, videos, photos and podcasts), exercises and user-generated content (digital stories, photos, essays, videos and cartoons).

Only a small part of the learning material has been commissioned especially for Min Stemme. Institutions and organizations that already produce material related to the two jubilees or relevant topics provide most of the content. At the launch, there were 30 partners. Among these were the Norwegian Parliament, the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, the Norwegian Center for Constitutional History, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, the National Library, the National Archives of Norway, Arts Council Norway, TV2 School, Save the Children, United Nations, the Rafto Foundation and the Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities.

To the best of our knowledge, the number of parties contributing free content is unprecedented for a Norwegian learning resource.

During the two years of the jubilees, we intend to expand the number of participating partners and continuously to add new learning resources. Fresh content is important to maintain the interest of target users. Furthermore, the focus for the celebrations of the jubilees will change during this time. Equality will be the main theme of a national week of celebration of the women’s right to vote in June. Democratic participation will be especially important around the time of election for Parliament in September. Next year, democracy in general and the Constitution in particular will be
the focus for both the bicentennial of the Constitution and the 25th anniversary of the Sami Parliament of Norway.

Providing easy access to the learning material

With the introduction of a new national curriculum in 2006 and new standards for formative assessment, many consider the demands on teachers to be at an all time high. Teachers carefully consider new requirements or suggestions before adding them to their individual teaching plan. For Min Stemme to be included in these plans, it needs to be highly relevant and easy to use for teachers.

In order to provide relevant content, we collaborate with The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. With their assistance, Min Stemme reflects the topics of the national curriculum and the preschool framework plan, and all contents are linked to specific competence objectives found in the curriculum. During the development of Min Stemme, we consulted frequently with teachers and preschool teachers to make sure the website feels intuitive to navigate and appeals to the target user groups.

As a result, the content is organized in only two levels. Each item is represented by a thumbnail on the front page and sorted into one of three categories: learning material, exercises and user-generated content. One click brings you to your chosen content and one click brings you back to the top level.

You can navigate Min Stemme by topics or by keywords. The content is divided into ten topics, each of which is relevant to the jubilees and the curriculum. Five of the topics are chosen specifically to reflect the framework plan for the preschool level. Clicking on a topic header filters the front page content to display only content relevant to the selected topic.

The other way to navigate is a highly visible sentence with clickable keywords that lets you sort content by:

- Target user groups (preschool, 1–4, 5–7, 8–10 and upper secondary level 1, 2 or 3)
- Subjects (Norwegian, social studies, history and religion are covered today, but more subjects will be covered in the future)
- Competence objectives
The navigation sentence is designed to make it easy for teachers to find content suited for specific age groups, subjects or teaching a particular topic. The advanced search makes it possible to sort results by what type of resource you want (i.e. searching only for videos related to equality for lower secondary school).

Once a resource is selected – teaching material, exercise or user-generated content – related resources are interlinked, making it easy to plan a lesson.

Many teachers prefer to make their own versions of exercises before assigning them to their pupils, for instance by adding local information to make it more relevant. Users can create their own version of the exercises on Min Stemme. We encourage teachers to do so by providing a visible “change exercise” button on every exercise. Teachers can save personalized versions of exercises to their profile and distribute a link to their own version to their pupils.

Both learning material and exercises can be shared with pupils or colleagues in a number of ways: Share the URL, download PDF to distribute via LMS or e-mail, or share on Facebook and Twitter.
Teaching democracy and participation in Norwegian schools

Norwegian schools have a democratic mission that is clearly stated in the Education Act, the first chapter clearly states that schools should encourage democracy and participation. Democracy is also emphasized in the national curriculum (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2006), which states that schools have a responsibility to prepare new generations for participation in democratic processes and stimulate them to engage in society.

_Min Stemme_ has a twofold aim: To teach facts about all aspects of democracy and to foster democratic values in order for the pupils to become active participants in society and democracy.

There are three parts to teaching democracy, according to Berge and Stray (2012):

- Teaching about democracy (knowledge)
- Teaching for democratic participation (values and attitudes)
- Teaching through democratic participation (actions)

_Min Stemme_ aims to cover all three parts. In order to change attitudes and inspire actions, we seek to involve not just the intellects, but also the emotions of the pupils. Accordingly, mechanisms for participation are crucial for achieving our goals for _Min Stemme_.

_Min Stemme_ offers its users several tools for interacting with the content and for contributing their own content to the website:

- Weekly poll. All visitors can answer a yes/no question and further elaborate on the subject in the commentary field below the question. We plan to host debates where pupils can interact with subject matter experts, politicians and media personalities.
- Comments and discussion. Users are encouraged to comment on and discuss all the content on the website, i.e. the learning material, exercises, user contributions, weekly polls and debates.
- Cartoonist. A tool for creating cartoons is integrated with _Min Stemme_ and a “cartoon universe” with official buildings and famous politicians has been developed especially for _Min Stemme_. This tool allows all users who have logged in to create their own cartoons on political life in Norway. Pupils can share their cartoons with others, saved in the their user profile or shared via _Min Stemme_ as a user contribution (see below).
- User contributions. Teachers and pupils are encouraged to share their own content e.g. videos, pictures, cartoons or texts. Early contributions range from images of kindergarten children expressing different emotions to a humorous interpretation of the events leading up to the creation of the Constitution of Norway in 1814 by pupils from an upper secondary school.
- Contests. _Min Stemme_ will arrange different contests during the two-year jubilee period, mostly in cooperation with one or more partners. Currently _Min Stemme_ features a drawing competition from The International Museum of Children’s Art.
Privacy issues when dealing with minors

*Min Stemme* has a target audience that ranges from small children to young adults. This raises quite a few privacy concerns. We want to encourage participation by allowing users to voice their opinions and contribute content on the website, while still protecting their identities and privacy. The solution has been to limit some of the options for the younger children. All users can access and view all content, but only authenticated users above the age of 15 can comment and participate in the discussions. Norwegian law (i.e. The Children Act\(^3\)) grants pupils over the age of 15 certain rights that don’t always require their parents’ consent for school purposes, but they are still minors who need some form of privacy protection. *Min Stemme* uses Feide\(^4\) to achieve this.

Feide is the Norwegian national solution for identity management and authentication within the education sector. Feide allows *Min Stemme* to verify a person’s age and whether he or she is associated with a Norwegian school as a teacher or student. First time users are asked to accept the terms of use, and the system will then generate an alias for the user. The user aliases are unique and permanent, but don’t reveal any personal information about the user. Allowing the user to choose their own alias would probably provide a stronger feeling of identity, but the downside would be the risk of exposing personal information and the risk of user names inappropriate for an educational website targeted at minors.

Share and share alike

*Min Stemme* aims at providing teachers and pupils with a website containing high-quality content, and we want the content to be widely used, redistributed and changed to fit the individual user’s needs. All content developed especially for *Min Stemme* will be released with a Creative Commons licence\(^5\) that allows users to change and redistribute the content for non-commercial purposes. We
also encourage our partners to make their content available under similar conditions. Whenever elements from *Min Stemme* is used to create new content, users are required to licence their content under the same conditions as *Min Stemme*.

*Min Stemme* encourages modification and sharing in numerous ways; by making high-resolution versions of images available for download via Flickr, by using Vimeo and YouTube for distribution of movies, by providing buttons to share on Facebook and Twitter, and via the aforementioned tools for editing content and making user contributions to the website.

References


1 http://www.minstemme.no/
4 https://www.fcide.no/
5 http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/