

Background, aims and added-value for SAI of RCN project “DEEPREAD” - Ståle Wig

In January, I was contacted by Anne Mangen, a professor at the Reading Center at the University of Stavanger, to contribute to an application for a "Research Project" grant from the Research Council of Norway. If SAI approves the application, and if RCN grants approval for the project, it will involve a collaboration between SAI and the University of Stavanger, and a two-year research position for me, affiliated with SAI and funded by RCN. I am seeking approval from SAI's board to participate in this application, which has a deadline of March 6th. Here, I provide some background on the project and its significance for SAI if the funding is granted.

Background

In 2018, Nefissa Naguib and I took an initiative to enhance students' concentration abilities by developing a method in "deep reading," a type of reading that is undisturbed, focused, and meditative. Deep reading is the opposite of the everyday scanning of text that most people do at the grocery store or on their phones, which is quick and fragmented. Deep reading is slow and patient. Because deep reading requires a type of cognitive patience that is difficult to cultivate alone, we organized collective sessions where students read together. Students and teachers committed to reading longer course texts silently in uninterrupted periods lasting between four and six hours without digital aids.

The initiative was prompted by the impression, among both ourselves and the students, that many were struggling to get through course texts, especially monographs.

Since 2018, other teachers at SAI have further developed the deep reading seminars. The initiative has also spread to other departments within and outside the University of Oslo (SUM, Bergen, Høgskulen på Vestlandet, Oxford, NTNU) and among student communities. In 2022, the Department of Social Anthropology received funding to research the effects of deep reading seminars. The project was funded by Eliert's learning network EILIN and involved collaboration with researchers from the Reading Center at the University of Stavanger, a literature researcher from the University of Utrecht, a research assistant at SAI, and myself. The application we are now preparing to submit to RCN – "Facilitating deep reading in schools and universities: investigating the effect of medium on persistence, flow and engagement (DEEPREAD)" – aims to scale up the EILIN project and explore how to facilitate deep reading and concentration at universities and schools.

Implications for SAI

If RCN grants approval, the research project will investigate and further develop deep reading as a method to regain reading flow and concentration. The project will involve interdisciplinary collaboration between cognitive researchers, literary scholars, psychologists, and ethnographers. I will be one of two anthropologists in the project (the

other being Sarah Bro Trasmundi at ILOS). We will conduct ethnographic studies, focus group interviews, and experiments at the University of Oslo – if granted, with students at SAI – and at high schools in Viken. Our goal is to understand better a) what reading entails for students in high schools and higher education, b) what effect the reading medium has on students' reading flow, and c) the differences between forms of collective and individual reading practices.

The project could carry significant value for SAI. The institute will be associated with the leading environment in Norway for reading researchers in a project that could set the agenda for both reading research and policy developments related to screen use and reading in higher education. An important aspect of the project will also be to develop pedagogy that is practically useful for teachers and students. If I were to have the opportunity to contribute to the project through a research position at SAI, I would consider it natural to involve teachers at the institute in an advisory board to help ensure that deep reading seminars become an integrated part of the offerings for new students at the institute.