



RF – Rogaland Research. <http://www.rf.no>

Terje Lie

**Evaluation of a programme for Competence
training for the Educational Psychological
Service and school leaders.**

Summary

Report RF – 2003/246

Project number: 7201820
Project title: Evaluation of "Samtak"
Project Quality Assurance: Preben Lindøe

Client: Norwegian Board of Education
Research program:

ISBN: 82-490-0279-2
Distribution restriction: Open

Preface

Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs in 2000 implemented a 3-year program for competence training for the Educational Psychological Service (EPS) and school leaders in both the primary and secondary schools in Norway. The Norwegian Board of Education took over the implementation for the program in 2001 on behalf of the Ministry. The content of the program was worked out by Centre for Behavioural Research, Stavanger University College. RF-Rogaland Research was responsible for the evaluation of the program. This summary is based on the final report from the evaluation.

Résumé

This report summarizes the results of a governmental program for competence training for the Educational Psychological Service (EPS), school headmasters and leaders of local school agencies. The program, based on a white paper from the Norwegian government, suggests more use of system directed work methods in order to support pupils with learning and behavioural disorders within the primary and secondary school.

The program consisted of three main activities: 1) Nationwide professional meetings on issues related to reading and writing disabilities, behavioural disorders and other learning disabilities, 2) development of local projects in schools and the EPS and 3) networking among educational staff and the Educational Psychological Service.

The evaluation of the program includes two surveys; the first survey was carried out in an early phase of the program and the second one at the end of the program. Field work including visits and interviews at selected schools and Educational Psychological Service offices were accomplished throughout the country during the evaluation period.

The results show that the nationwide professional meetings contributed most to the results of the program. Local projects were a significant factor too in the realisation of the program. The success of the program was quite skewed however. A substantial number of EPS offices reported that the impact of the program was quite low and so did local educational board managers. The school headmasters were in general more positive to the impact of program. Findings showed that offices and schools that were particular active during the program profited most from the learning activities. It was pointed out by the Psychological Educational Services that schools led by active and interested headmasters seemed to succeed more than others in the program.

Stavanger, 16. December 2003

Terje Lie, project leader

Contents

1	INTRODUCTION	4
1.1	The training program.....	4
1.2	Organisation of the program	4
1.3	The evaluation	5
2	RESULTS	6
2.1	Indicators of success.....	7
2.2	Impact of the program activities.....	6
3	DISCUSSION.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
4	CONCLUSION	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
5	REFERENCES	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
	APPENDIX	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

1 Introduction

1.1 The training program

Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs in 2000 implemented a three-year program for competence training aimed at the Educational Psychological Service (EPS) and school leaders in both the primary and secondary schools in Norway. The white paper from the Norwegian government: '*Training for children, youth and adults with special needs*' (St. mld. Nr 23, 1997-98), concluded that the special education within primary and secondary schools together with the EPS, should be strengthened by means of a competence training programme.

The aim of the program was to help school headmasters to arrange for the training of pupils with learning disabilities more effectively than before. According to the Act of Education, this sort of training should always be adjusted to the capacity of the individual pupil. The training program should strengthen system directed working methods within the different areas of learning disabilities and social-emotional disorders.

Goals were set for three target groups. The **professional staff of the Educational Psychological Service** should develop their competence within the different areas of learning disabilities and in system directed work methods. They should develop their experience giving advice and guidance to school headmasters and teachers. They should also help schools make plans in order to prevent reading and writing disabilities and relieve problematic behaviour among children and youth.

The school headmasters are responsible for the implementation of the program within their institutions. They should develop basic knowledge on the prioritized areas of the program and develop their experience with processes of change based on system directed work methods.

Local government agencies should help implementing the training program in their districts and coordinate this with other developmental activities. They should also keep up the status of knowledge within the subject fields in the program.

The implementation of the program started in 2001 and was based on three primary means: professional meetings locally initiated developmental projects and networking between local school leaders, the educational psychological service, relevant health institutions etc.

1.2 Organisation of the program

The program is administratively organised from the Norwegian Board of Education. The regional Offices of Education under the Ministry, of which there is one in each

county, carried out the program locally in collaboration with school authorities in the municipalities.

Centre for Behavioural Research, University College of Stavanger, was responsible for the professional content of the program. In addition several centres of special education supported the program.

A national group of coordination, appointed by the Ministry, monitors the program and gave advice to the Norwegian Board of Education during the program period.

Special interventions in the program

The main purpose of the program was to develop the competence among school leaders and staff of the ESP on learning disabilities. Three main areas of disabilities were identified: learning disabilities coming from social and emotional disorders, reading and writing disabilities and other learning disabilities (compound disabilities). The competence training should focus on the relevant professional disciplines within special education, and the training should have a system and inclusion perspective.

The core training activities were organised in three ways:

1. Professional meetings with lectures and work shops organised in each county and on a national level. The meetings were organised in sessions related to three different areas of disabilities.
2. Network activities between schools and EPS.
3. Locally initiated developmental projects relevant to the program.

The professional meetings went on over the whole three-year period, while the development of local projects was at special focus the third year. The first year, both the staff of the Psychological Educational Service and school leaders participated in the professional meetings. The second year of the program was mostly dedicated to the Educational Psychological Service staff while the school leaders participated again the third year.

1.3 The evaluation

The evaluation was based upon national surveys and case studies. The surveys were distributed twice. The first survey was held in the beginning of the program period while the second one took place toward the end of the program.

A questionnaire was sent to a random sample of Educational Psychological Services, to headmasters at elementary and secondary schools and to managers in the local school administration. In the first survey, questions were asked about how well the program was anchored in the institutions, to what degree local projects were planned or initiated and the degree of participation in the professional meetings. The final survey was to a large degree concerned with the impact of the program as judged by the target groups.

2 Results

2.1 Impact of the program activities

The competence training program contained the main training activities: professional meetings, local project development and networking. We will now briefly sketch the impact of the three different activities, as seen from the target groups.

Professional meetings

An important part of the competence training was organised as professional meetings aimed at the target groups. The meetings included lectures by invited specialists, work shops and case presentations. In addition, the meetings functioned as an arena where colleagues could exchange ideas and experiences. The meetings were arranged on conference centres and hotels, most often during two days. The arrangements took place in several districts throughout the country.

The impact analysis shows that the professional meetings contributed most to the results of the program. By this we mean that the higher degree of participation and the more usefulness the target groups reported from the meetings, the higher they rated the final result indicators of the program.

Local developmental projects

The target groups were expected to initiate local projects in order to try out new methods and practices related to pupils with learning and behavioural disabilities. The projects were quite evenly distributed among the different categories. As much as 90 % of the target groups involved themselves in developmental projects. A large part of the training projects, it appeared, had set off in an early phase of the program and in some cases even before the program had started. Local projects, thus, were well known methods in school development. The program however, had stimulated to further development of projects. The larger part of the local projects was about system directed work methods, as proposed in the program, but projects specifically directed towards reading and writing disabilities and emotional disabilities was also initiated.

Local development projects contributed second most to the results of the program.

Networking

Traditionally, the actors within the local educational institutions participate in different networks in order to coordinate their activities, share ideas and improve their insight in educational issues. The members of the target groups were stimulated to use these networks and to form new ones in order to incorporate knowledge on different learning disabilities on their agenda. The evaluation shows that participating in networks was quite common. The networks had however little effect as an independent learning activity.

2.2 Indicators of success

The final evaluation was based upon the two national surveys and experiences from the case studies. In addition and official reports from the local Educational Offices were taken into consideration in the final evaluation.

Data from the surveys resulted in a set of factors indicating underlying common dimensions in the answers from the target groups. The factors¹ (which we consider as result indicators) turned out to be:

1. The Educational Psychological Services develop its organisation to offer better counselling to the schools.
2. The school leaders strengthen their competence on system directed work methods.
3. The cooperation between parents and schools improves.
4. The teachers strengthen their competence on learning and behavioural disabilities.

The factor pattern differed somewhat between the target groups.

On the basis on the result indicators, scores were computed for each target group, indicating their judgement of the usefulness of the program. The results are as follows:

Table 1. Summary of result indicators. Usefulness of the competence training program as judged by the target groups. Percentages.

Target group	Usefulness of the program. Distribution of scores in percentages.	
	High scores (High degree of benefit)	Low scores (Low degree of benefit)
Educational Psychological Services	50-60 %	40-50 %
Headmasters	65-70 %	35-30 %
Local School Managers	40-60 %	40-60 %

The Educational Psychological Services judged the usefulness of the program as very good or good in between 50 % to 60 % of the cases on the four result indicators listed above. The headmasters give a somewhat better judgement. The local school managers considered the usefulness as good in between 40 % and 60 % of the cases.

¹ Computing of factors are based on the statistical method called Factor Analysis, see SPSS Base 11.0, SPPSS Inc.

The percentage of the target groups that reports high degree of benefit from the program is somewhat low, even if a large part also reports good experiences from the program. The results indicate however that the program did not function as effectively as expected. This is caused by several factors.

The program was top-down implemented with a rather rigid structure and few options for adjustments. The target groups differed initially in knowledge and competence in system oriented work methods. The program did not sufficiently contribute to the narrowing of this gap. On the contrary, inequality between the members was widened. The results indicate that the most competent participants in the first place profited most from the program, while the less competent members did not improve their position in a significant degree.

Both the schools and the Educational and Psychological Services had as a result of administrative modernisation in the recent years, achieved a more autonomous position within the local government administration. This generated a wider range of administrative practices and priorities which also affected the level of competence in the target groups and their ability to engage themselves in central government programmes. Such programmes are thus confronted with several and different local “realities”. In the future, central initiated programmes must take this into account and adapt themselves better to local settings. Success of similar national programmes will also depend on their ability to take into account differences in competence and the ability to take advantage of such programmes.