

Strengthening Youth in Residential Areas:

Development of social skills in 3 schools in the Municipality of Høje-Taastrup, Denmark

Executive Summary

In this development project teachers and (youth)club workers from 3 schools and their after-school hours youth clubs, in the Municipality of Høje-Taastrup, were trained in **Aggression Replacement Training / A.R.T.** which is a well-known method/model to sustain the development of social skills in older children (8 – 11 years old). The aim of the development project has been to provide teachers and club workers (with various pedagogical training) at 3 schools placed in socially disadvantaged areas (in Denmark such are often referred to as 'ghettos') with shared tools and methods which could supplement their professional skills in order to enhance the interdisciplinary work with challenged and vulnerable children.

The method arrives from the psychology of learning, where aggressive behavior is regarded as an adopted behavior. The children have participated in 30 hours of training in groups. The focus is on developing their social skills and their ability to manage self-control, including the ability to regulate their emotional outbreaks and anger. A further perspective has been working to train their knowledge of, and ability to manage, moral reasoning and empathy.

The design of the method development project was planned together with the researcher, who subsequently has followed the implementation and analyzed the progress of the project. Testing was done before and after the completion of the training. While most international research does follow up testing immediately after the conclusion of the training, this research is based on a follow up 1½ years after the training ended.

20% of the groups' children scored lowest on social skills at the outset. Analysis shows that these participants showed prosocial development over time. It also confirms the observations from the teachers and the club workers that the behavior of the children moved from a problem filled life in a more prosocial direction. The results show that especially this group of children persistently benefited from the knowledge and skills they achieved from the training. Based on this, the method is considered as usable and robust in securing children and youth, in vulnerable circumstances, a better position in a social community context.

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