



## Action Competencies in Social Pedagogical Work with Socially Endangered Children and Youths – Interventions and Effects (The ASP Project) - an introduction to the residential institution study

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### Introduction

This folder presents the purpose, background, methods and perspectives of the research project Action Competences in Social Pedagogical Work with Socially Endangered Children and Youth – Interventions and Effects (the ASP project). The overall objective of this project is to identify professional intervention forms that contribute to the achievement of the objectives set for pedagogical work with socially endangered children and youth seen in an action competence perspective. The aim with project is to identify how socially endangered children's life opportunities can be enhanced most effectively. The survey comprise a brief analysis of the social educators' impact on the children and youths by examining the children's' and youths as well as the social educators' development of action competencies.

The ASP project is housed at the Danish University of Education (DPU), and is funded by the national Strategic Program for Welfare Research (SPW). The project runs from October 2005 to May 2009. The project is carried out in collaboration with the Copenhagen College of Social Work (Den Sociale Højskole – København), the National Institute for Social Education (Jysk Pædagog Seminarium), the National Institute of Early Childhood and Social Education (Frøbelemariet), and consultants from Århus and Hvidovre municipalities. A small ASP research unit is established at the DPU, and a supervisory committee including members from SL and LOS among other institutions will also be set up.

### Background

The reason why this particular project was established is that overcoming a negative social heritage is one the present government's priorities. Problems of negative social heritage stems from inequalities in socio-economic factors and the issues and particular problems that characterise children and youths committed to residential institutions. The ASP project is part of the national Strategic Program for Welfare Research (SPW), which was set up to explore various types of effect measurement of social work, with the intention to counteract the consequences of negative social heritage. As the aim with the ASP project is to improve children's life opportunities through development of action competencies, focus is more on the positive opportunities than the negative factors.

### The aim with the ASP project

A socio-pedagogical effort aimed at the endangered children and youths is assumed to improve their life opportunities. Measures to improve and develop children's competencies and learning potential combined with a determined effort against the pitfalls (e.g. exclusion) comprise a step in the right direction. The ASP project was set up to identify the pedagogical interventions that achieve the best results ("best practice") in relation to combating the effects of the negative social heritage. The concept of "action competence" is central, both as an intervention objective (the children) and as a means (the teachers).

Action competences are defined on the basis of five dimensions that together are assumed to make the individual capable of navigating as an active participant in the surrounding world in an adequate way. The five dimensions are 1) Knowledge 2) Skills 3) The ability to take control 4) Identity 5) Action abilities - the ASP project is focused on social competences and learning competences. The product from this project should be that social educators should be empowered to change their practice towards action competence endowment, which is assumed to improve children and youths in residential institutions' options and life opportunities.

## Design and method

The ASP study is carried out mainly in residential institutions, and the basic approach is that of pedagogical learning plans (a curriculum), the primary aspect of which is a 'qualification package' - comprising the core of the intervention. This package contains input and knowledge about social heritage, learning and competence development and knowledge about effectiveness in relation to socially endangered children's special needs. The qualification package also includes suggestions as to how the curriculum can be used in an action competence perspective.

The project draws on previous international research, and differs from previous Danish research in that the design is based on effects and intervention. It is our aim with this project to develop tools to evaluate 'best practices', and to use these tools to collect data on the effects, i.e. find out what works. The design is based on a qualitative experiment.

The project comprises five phases:

- Phase 1: Identification and clarification of the existing knowledge about the target group (children and youths committed to residential institutions), based on previous research, social and educational political documents and on the participating municipalities' strategies for developing and improving the teacher's work in relation to socially endangered children (October 2005 to April 2006)
- Phase 2: Development of an intervention strategy, i.e. the qualification package comprising 1) process descriptions 2) tools based on input and knowledge 3) implementation strategy. Input is gathered from background papers from research groups, theoretical work and from concepts for organisational development – all from an action competence perspective. The qualification package is fine-tuned in collaboration with the participating institutions (from April/May 2006)
- Phase 3: Strategic selection of the institutions: four residential institutions and two drop-in shelters are selected as primary intervention institutions, and later on a few other institutions will be included for reference. All told, the number of involved children/youths will be about one hundred, and the age spread will be 7 to 14 (from May 2006)
- Phase 4: Implementation of the qualification package. Key people from among the teachers in the chosen institutions play a key role in this phase. Courses will be held for the staff by researchers and representatives from the Centres for Higher Education (CVUs). The researchers and CVU-representatives will also participate in the implementation along with local consultants and other key people (starting in September 2006)
- Phase 5: First baseline assessments. Following this will be continuous qualitative and quantitative surveys of the implementation of the qualification package. These surveys will be compiled into mid-term and final reports (from September 2006 to May 2008). Final analysis, report, communication and conferences (from May 2008 to May 2009)

There will be continuous reporting of the research and implementation processes and results that will be published on the home page and through a series of books.

In continuation of the project, funds are being applied for to conduct a comparative Nordic survey, to be followed later by a European survey.

For detailed project description please consult the following link: [www.dpu.dk/hpa](http://www.dpu.dk/hpa)

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