

## **Inter-professional work a follow-up study of supporting children in need**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The aim of this paper is to present and discuss how professionals can cooperate concerning children in need. In a local project school, recreation center and health care staff worked together aiming to keep children with emotional problems in the regular classroom and at home, instead of placement in a special unit or foster home. Data was collected using documents and interviews. The result showed that the challenges in the first phase concerned re-design of the project aims, but there were also opportunities such as mapping of truancy, a Short-Term Resource School, in-service education, work with about 35 children and their families with a 24-hour perspective and a new group for discussing de-identified cases. The initial vision did not last over the years, but other forms of inter-professional cooperation were created. The conclusion is that engagement and shared vision among operational staff is not enough; significant leading persons at a central and political level need to share the vision, especially with respect to sharing financial resources from different sectors.*

**KEYWORDS** -Children in need, truancy, inter-professional work, organization

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Addressing inequality is an issue on a society and organizational level, but also on a professional level. Earlier research has found that cooperation between professions from different sectors could have positive impact on support to families and children in need. One way is supporting cooperation between staff at school, in social welfare and in health care. The aim of this paper is to present and discuss multi-agency work developing possibilities to keep children with emotional problems in the ordinary classroom and at home, instead of placement in a special unit or foster home. The focus is on multi-agency work and its challenges on professional and organizational levels.

Inequalities in educational and socio-economic opportunities are addressed in a variety of ways in different countries. In Sweden, children have a right to education starting at age seven, and attendance from grades 1-9 is compulsory. If a child is absent from school, the general rule is that the child's parent or guardian should be informed the same day. If the child is absent continuously the school has to intervene and create an action plan as there is a risk that the child will not reach the learning goals (SFS, 2010:800 [1]). One of the interventions could be to let the child participate in a small group in a separate classroom, a special unit. If there are severe problems in the family and the child is at risk, the municipality can act according to law and place the child in a foster home (SFS, 2001:435 [2]; SFS, 1990:52 [3]). Placement in a group other than the ordinary classroom or in a foster home is preceded by different actions and means to support the family and the child.

The difference between excused or unexcused absence from school can be a matter of opinion, but school staff react when they perceive a pattern or high frequency of missing days. Not all municipalities have collected information continuously, but data shows that absenteeism can start in early years and increase in lower secondary school, when the pupils are age 14-16. The truancy can occur as a longer period of not coming to school, occasional parts of days or whole days. Results from studies also show that a combination of school factors and family factors seems to be involved. In almost all cases the children have got support, but according to the children, not always relevant support (Skolverket, 2010a [4]). Reasons for providing support to children and families vary, but can be individual factors such as attention problems or reading and writing difficulties, school factors such as lack of sufficient support from school, or psychosocial factors outside the educational context, such as family situation (Strand & Granlund, 2014 [5]).

The research questions are:

- What are the professional challenges in multi-agency work?
- What are the organizational challenges in multi-agency work?

After presenting earlier literature and the results from multi-agency work it was possible to finally discuss the research questions in the end of the paper.

## **II. EARLIER LITERATURE**

Depending on the education system teamwork is an issue for teachers working together with staff from other areas. Staff from health, social welfare, law enforcement and education can work together, more or less, to support families and children in need. There may be agreement about working together, but the expectations and definitions of working together can vary. Both staff and organization are emphasized in a definition from Huxham&Vangen (2003 [6], 2005 [7]) suggesting that collaboration exists in a situation where people work across organizational boundaries to a positive end. Rose (2011 [8]) also underscores that there is a need for common goals during inter-professional collaboration, and a need to change perspective from individual preference to group preference. Rose argues that change is challenging concerning the roles in a group as the expertise is not always equally valued. Sharing ideas can also challenge professional identity and ideas contradictory to one's own identity can lead to a loss of control. Some control has to be given up, but there has to be an awareness of not becoming a homogenous mass as the professional expertise then can be unclear. However, Rose argues that a shared goal is a prerequisite for working together. To reach a common goal the participants must have the ability to make decisions. The question of authority is brought up by Odbratt (1999 [9]) who found that multi-agency work was weakened when participants did not have the possibility to autonomously represent their organization and its resources in a group. There is a need to clarify how participants are representing the organization in the group and how to represent the collaboration group within the original organization.

Even though research has found teamwork to be important it is clear that there are challenges for the professions involved. Diversity of professions in a team can create a broader range of knowledge, while on the other hand a professional identity can create a situation where information is not shared with "the others" (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004, as cited in Mitchell et al., 2011 [10]). The willingness to share information can increase when collaboration is carried out across professional boundaries. If there is a shared goal, the team can become a social identity (Mitchell et al., 2011). In a study by Mitchell et al. (2011) inter-professional teams in the health sector were asked about professional diversity, team identity, threat to professional identity, inter-professional openness and team effectiveness. The aim was to study factors that moderate professional diversity's impact on team performance. Based on the results Mitchell et al. suggest that if there is a weak sense of team identity, professional diversity has negative impact on performance. A perceived threat to professional identity also has negative impact on performance. Diversity in teams is neither negative nor positive; it is the strength of professional identity and team identity which gives the effect.

When Westrup&Persson (2007 [11]) studied an initiative for supporting collaboration concerning work with children and youth they found some prerequisites for cross-boundary work. From a personal perspective the professionals must be able to hold back their own need for prestige and control. From a professional perspective they have to get knowledge about each other's working area and accept differences between the professions. They also found cultural differences such as use of concepts and focus where teachers talk about knowledge while social workers talk about treatment methods. Structural differences were also found such as principles concerning budget with different decision structures and different time plans. Lastly they found the instrumental perspective concerning steering towards quality, where common goals are necessary. The incentive for working together is there, but a central issue is how resources are divided between units, where a partly common budget or co-financed budget supports collaboration.

When factors are presented regarding inter-professional collaboration, it is often issues like resources, anchorage and engagement at management level, objectives, knowledge and skills, trust and powers which are mentioned according to Germundson (2011 [12]). Germundson argues that inter-relational factors and how professionals perceive each other is also important. When Germundson studied how teachers and social workers perceived each other the initial issue was children at risk. He found that the social workers' perception of teachers on an individual level was mostly positive but they were also perceived to lack knowledge about social workers and their field of expertise. The teachers' perceptions of social workers were more on an organizational level and not as positive, and there was a lack of communication regarding children at risk. These perceptions, Germundson argues, also affect inter-professional cooperation.

Apart from challenges on an individual basis, there are also challenges on organizational levels concerning teamwork. Results from a study of professionals working together in a family center (Niklasson, 2001 [13]) showed that the professionals from education, social work and health care worked together more or less within certain areas. They shared premises, planned together, presented common information and participated in continuing education together. The prerequisites were common policy, common steering directives and revenue and cost sharing, but the prerequisites were not always easy to handle.

These results can be compared with Edwards et al. (2009 [14]), who identified different models concerning work with children and families. A multi-professional team can consist of different professionals working together, but also with other assignments. Another model is based on sharing premises, which supports inter-

professional collaboration but does not always lead to it. Lastly, a model can consist of local networks, which are often preceded by projects. All three models can exist simultaneously.

Collaboration could also be a question of going from organizational collaboration to staff collaboration. Fridolf (2014 [15]) uses grades of overlapping to describe crossing boundaries. Coexistence is when the organizations know of each other but do not take into account the other organization's actions; collaboration is when the organizations act together with common norms, but keep their own goals; coordination is when not only the organizations but also staff are working together; and finally, there is shared vision.

In a way similar to Fridolf; Frey, Lohmeier, Lee och Tollefson (2006 [16]) describe working together as continuum on a scale, starting with coexistence but in their analysis ending in merging. The different levels are presented as: no relation; coexistence; networking; communication; cooperation; coordinating; alliance; collaboration; and finally, merging.

When merging is introduced the model is reminiscent of Sullivan & Skelcher's (2002 [17]) grades of integration. Horizontal integration is when actors work voluntarily while vertical integration is carried out in a hierarchy. If there is a contract there is a low degree of the two forms of integration. In coordination there is high degree of vertical integration but low degree of horizontal integration. In cooperation with intense contacts there is a low degree of vertical integration but a high degree of horizontal integration. Lastly, collaboration is a combination of hierarchy and voluntary work.

Organizational issues and national law can be supportive for collaboration, but also become a hindrance. Lacey (2000 [18]) argues that there is a need for law supporting multidisciplinary and multi-organizational collaboration and inter-organizational councils meeting to solve problems, but without creating a new bureaucracy. McConkey (2002 [19]) also brings up organizational issues such as different structures for administration and financing concerning education, health care and social work. McConkey argue that there is a need for integrated pre-service education and common continuing education, and that there should be an organizational and financial approach among the activities.

In summary, definitions of professionals working together vary. In this paper the concept of collaboration defined as professions working across boundaries with common goals is used in the next sections. Whether the inter-professional work in the actual project can be defined as collaboration or not is elaborated on in the Discussion section.

### **III. BACKGROUND TO THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT**

The issue of combining resources and working across boundaries is not new in Sweden. There have been local experiments with financial cooperation aiming to give the best possible service to individuals or groups (SFS, 1994: 566 [20]; SFS 2003:1217 [21]). Most often the experiment concerned adults who needed rehabilitation or youth at risk where agencies from the national, county and municipal level needed to combine resources.

In this case the experiment focused on school-age children, 7-16. In 2007 it was possible to apply for financing at the National Authority for School Development for multi-agency work. Earlier a strategic document was written concerning prerequisites for working together: steering, structure and shared vision among the professions (Myndigheten för skolutveckling et al., 2007 [22]; Skolverket, 2009b [23]). It was also clarified that multi-agency work was expected. Such work can start as soon as staff at school report that they suspect that a child is at risk to social services (Skollag 2010:800 [1]). As soon as the report is at the Social welfare board, or equivalent, in the municipality initiative should be taken by social work staff to collaborate. The aim with preventive collaborative work in these projects was to reduce the need for reporting. In the end there were agreements and funding for 74 municipalities all over Sweden comprising 99 projects (Skolverket, 2009a [24]). One of the municipalities which got financing is located in central Sweden. The aim of the national initiative continued in the local project. On an individual level pupils with emotional and mental problems should be supported to stay in existing home/school instead of placement. On a group level the number of pupils absent from school should decrease. On an organizational level an overarching holistic view should be created, independent of area of expertise. In the particular municipality staff from the departments of Child and Education, Work and Family, Culture and Recreation and Child and Youth Psychiatry were supposed to work together to reach the aims.

The focus should be on the interests of the child and collaboration should be based on a view which was both common and comprehensive. To achieve a common and comprehensive view the actors needed to use a common language, which could also be used by the parents in the families concerned. To support collaboration certain activities were planned:

*-Competence development for teachers, recreation instructors and parents to achieve a comprehensive view for pedagogic work*

- Start a school in cooperation with a local zoological garden for children with interest in practical work in gardening, painting, carpentry or animal care at the local zoo
- Start a *Short-Term Resource School* for pupils who need intensive, short-term intervention (five weeks)
- Individual *coaching* for youth for meaningful recreational activities

First organizational requisites were created for the project. To lead the project two project leaders were assigned, one from Child and Education and one from Work and Family, both from management level. Stakeholders were engaged from different sectors, presented in Fig. 1.

| <b>Politicians</b>                    | <b>Municipal board</b>  |                                    |  | <b>County board</b>         |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Administrative agencies               | Child and Education   | Work and Family                    | Culture and Recreation                     | Child- and Youth Psychiatry |
| Central administration, manager level | <i>Project leader</i>   | <i>Project leader</i>              |  | <i>Staff, unspecified</i>   |
| Central administration                | <i>Administrator for placement</i>                                    |                                    |  |                             |
| Operative, manager level              | <i>Principal from Resource School<br/>Manager from Support Center</i> | <i>Manager from Family support</i> | <i>Manager from Youth Recreation</i>       |                             |
| Operative                             | <i>Coordinator</i>  | <i>Coordinator</i>                 | <i>Administrator from Youth Recreation</i> |                             |
| Children and families                 |   |                                    |  |                             |

Figure 1: Example of stakeholders in the project

From the start two project leaders and two coordinators were assigned. An overarching project group on the policy level was created with representatives from the stakeholders. Self-evaluations would be carried out led by the author of this paper, and an evaluation group for this process was created. The group also more or less functioned as an operative project group. In this group there was no representative from Child and Youth Psychiatry. The group met continuously to address issues concerning working together. In this way the organizational prerequisites were present for the project.

Project information was published on the municipal website and the project leaders reported on the project at a joint meeting for the Child and Education board and the Work and Family board. The project group was summoned by the project leaders and they were also partly managers for the coordinators. The project leaders also summoned the evaluation group and met with different staff working on the project.

#### IV. METHOD

The data collection started in January 2008 and ended in June 2009. The author of this paper had the possibility to follow the project work during most of the time as a process leader for the self-evaluation process and also as a dialogue partner for the project leaders. Data consists of documents about the project, documents written during the project, annotations from observations at meetings, separate meetings with the project leaders and interviews with participants in the self-evaluation group.

The appointed participants from different expertise areas were not always present at the meetings. Due to change in work some participated only a few times. One coordinator from the central municipal administration level joined about halfway through the project. A main source of data collection was the self-evaluations made by the participants. The self-evaluations were prepared by introductory questions by the author of this paper. In the end, seven self-evaluations were written by both project leaders from the municipal level, the manager from Support center for children and youth, the principal from Resource school unit, the manager from the Family support unit, the coordinator for placements, a manager of Child and Recreation administration and both of the coordinators. Five of the self-evaluations were written individually and two (project leaders and coordinators) were written together. A selection of the questions and answers are presented in the Result section. The presentation is organized in accordance with the questions asked.

To study what remained of the efforts in the project after a few years, e-mail questions were sent to those still accessible. One project leader had resigned and the representative from Recreation had left the municipality. The answers are presented in the Result section in accordance with the questions asked.

In the Discussion section the results are analyzed and discussed with the help of earlier research concerning inter-professional collaboration.

## V. RESULT

### **V:IProcess and outcomes of the project**

The project met some challenges. The project plan had to be redesigned due to lack of funding, staff replacement, lack of cooperation with a local zoo and lack of anchoring in agencies. The cooperation with health care did not turn out as expected, but a separate group with representatives from the municipality and county (KommunLandsting, KoLa) was organized with representatives from the sectors. The aim was to discuss de-identified pupils and families and the group met a few times during the project time.

There were also opportunities. To get a picture of truancy the coordinator for placement carried out a survey with principals in compulsory school as target group. The questionnaire consisted of questions about truancy and methods for dealing with this absenteeism. The response rate was 100%. The results from the mapping showed certain groups of pupils. Some pupils stayed home, while others preferred to be at school, but not in the classroom. Thereby the municipality has a baseline from which discussions could be carried out whether truancy is increasing or decreasing.

Two coordinators, one from education and one from social welfare, were assigned to the project and they worked with about 40 children and their families. Some of the pupils needed another family to stay with, and some needed a short stay in a special unit, but most could stay at home and in the original school. On individual and group level the coordinators had contact with principals and teachers in 14 schools, and in addition social workers and staff from the Support center. The individual cases comprised about 35 pupils for a shorter or longer duration. Some of the children needed to be re-placed but most could still stay at their original school.

The written description by the coordinators of procedures and discussions when pupils are eligible for the Resource School provided a base to give suggestions for development. The result showed a lack of documentation, unclear areas of responsibility, the need to have a single entry, i.e., fewer personnel to ask concerning problems and need for common resources across the administrative boundaries. In addition, they asked staff in school and in social work about critical incidents where collaboration needed to be developed. One example was that staff at school lack follow-up response when social workers work with children and families at the same time as the child participates at school, or alternatively is placed at the Resource School or in a foster home outside the municipality.

An organization for a Short-Term Resource School was created within the Resource School organization. Staff were recruited and space was rented. The activities started immediately after the end of the project in autumn 2009.

Continuing education was offered when staff from the Support Center conducted training for special pedagogues and principals at compulsory school concerning pedagogic mapping (to clarify a pupil's knowledge and skills). Another continuing education was carried out when staff working at Youth Recreation participated in training about coaching. After the continuing education in 2008 it was possible for the staff from Youth Recreation to work with some children.

Discussions were carried out concerning a shared view and collaboration between the parties. Support Center had to renew their information activities to other agencies about their work. The procedures for applying to Resource Center affect the Support Center as the idea is that Support Center should be contacted before any application is made. During the project the procedures were clarified. In addition an internal collaboration group started at the Support Center. The participation of Youth Recreation contributed to the discussion about the value of leisure time, and its importance and possibilities could be highlighted (a comprehensive view), where the 24-hour perspective got a place in the discussion. The organization of the Short-Term Resource School met some obstacles, such as financing, premises and contracts with staff. In connection with the discussions about the obstacles it was also possible to discuss how to collaborate, how resources could, and should, be distributed, and how welfare work could be developed in the municipality, especially from the viewpoint of shared resources.

The collaboration with Child and Youth Psychiatry (CYP) did not develop according to plan, but through alternative activities. A representative from CYP participated in the project group. Extended collaboration between Work and Child administration and CYP could be reached when it was found that a group, not previously known to the actual participants, was available and had meetings. In this way the network was extended and social workers also got access to some needed county council health data. The project leaders initiated a group with representatives from the municipality and county council, called KoLa. The aim with KoLa was to discuss de-identified cases where common resources were needed to support children and families. The official start of that group was spring 2009.

The description above of the process is based on documents, observations and interviews. The description now continues with three central issues concerning collaboration: new collaboration, collaboration for whom, and lessons learned. This presentation is based on the participants' self-evaluations.

### **V:II New collaboration during the project – perspectives from the self-evaluation**

All participants confirmed that there was collaboration, but they have different experiences if collaboration concerned individual children and families, if it was between professionals or if it was on an organizational level. The social work, education and recreation sectors had all collaborated with the coordinators in the project. For social work the collaboration with Child and Youth Psychiatry was extended. The Support Center noticed that the knowledge about and amount of contact with the Work and Family and Culture and Recreation departments had increased. One reason was the engagement from the project leaders and that the participants had given priority to the meetings and participated. From a social work perspective the possibilities to meet different representatives for municipal activities had increased. It had become clearer what works and what had to change. A shared vision and understanding concerning collaboration was reached between the social work, education, and recreation sectors. A shared political vision was also achieved. The project leaders argued that knowledge of each other's prerequisites and activities had increased. Solutions on both individual and group level during the project period could not have been achieved without the project. The project also led to additional, unplanned collaboration, because of new or increased contacts and increased trust between staff and organizations. The perception on the manager level was of both new and increased collaboration.

The coordinators did not perceive any new collaboration, but extended collaboration. The collaboration concerning children and families increased as long as the coordinators were engaged, but they noticed that as soon as they were not engaged the collaboration between social work, education and leisure time staff was reduced. They feared that, in general, the collaboration that had been increased will decrease to the earlier level when the project ends.

One comment was that the project led to an insight that there is a lack of collaboration. For those engaged in the truancy survey the common discussions during the project time were perceived as positive. The participants realized that there are a lot of activities but that coordination and preventive activities are lacking.

### **V:III For whom did the collaboration lead to change – perspectives from the self-evaluation**

The aim was to increase collaboration to support children and families. Did the collaboration lead to any individual, group, professional or organizational change? The continuing education of recreation staff led to three children getting coaching. The goal to coach five children was not reached, but the structure is built for coaching. The work by the coordinators led to changes on an individual level concerning pupils and teachers who collaborated. The coordinators were able to suggest alternative solutions independently of which sector was responsible and thereby a more coherent solution for the pupil was achieved.

Individual participants increased their collaboration with representatives from other sectors. On the professional level the participants got to know each other better and also described and clarified their assignments. There is change on staff level and an example is that staff at school come to the coordinators with school-related issues. The issues can concern which duties the school has regarding the pupil and how to solve school issues for pupils/children at foster homes. Staff at school still regard the coordinators as extra staff, which was not their role. Common for both staff at social work and education was that staff need someone to discuss actual cases with and where they are worried about how the "other staff" is thinking and acting.

On an organizational level Youth Recreation increased capacity to offer coaching as they got five staff with coaching skills. In general the discussions and collaboration led to staff meeting children and families in a more professional way. The participation in the project has led to internal discussions in the Support Center. The role of the organization was scrutinized and this led to changes on an organizational level. Another achievement was that two political boards, Work and Family board and Children and Education board, met and discussed collaboration.

### **V:IV Lessons learned from the project – perspectives from the self-evaluation**

Some of the lessons learned are applicable for all participants, while some concern the special work the organization did during the project. To the Culture and Recreation administration it became clear that the first model, training just one person in coaching and making that person into a specialist, did not work. Instead they realized that they have to train several persons on staff so that more than one could take coaching as part of their assignment.

The organizations involved are "giving" each other assignments and those receiving assignments, such as recreation instructors and social workers, have noticed that it is important to clarify how the assignments are received, who will carry out the assignments, and to what extent assignments could be accepted. During the project period it became obvious that many groups met and that one previously unknown group turned out to be a good collaborative partner for social workers. This led to the insight that there is a need to map existing groups for collaboration, and to follow up the changes in these constellations. There should not be more groups than necessary. Continuity of participants in a group during a longer period is also a prerequisite, otherwise there will be constant interruptions during the process. It also became clear that staff participating in groups do not always have the same authority. When meeting in groups, especially when collaboration should be decided and carried

out, there have to be persons with mandate to decide. All but one of the sectors in the collaboration group had managers as representatives. After more than half of the project period the manager in the sector with operative staff realized that there was a need for staff from manager level and joined the evaluation group.

One of the reasons the project started was truancy. During the project period a survey was conducted but how this knowledge should be used is not clear. A question is asked whether the survey was a goal in itself or if it was basic knowledge for finding methods to decrease truancy. Participants in the collaboration group had different perspectives concerning truancy; some wanted to focus on early preventive activities and others wanted to focus on methods working with those pupils already absent from school.

Change takes time and a lot of effort is needed to change ways of thinking and routines. A great commitment is needed to keep this process going. It became obvious that the planned change did not always happen. The professionals are in general interested in collaboration but the structure with sectors with budget responsibility does not support collaboration. One crucial issue was which budget to use, from social work or education? This was a sensitive issue and when it was brought up it became clear that there are problems and also prestige involved. When solutions and not problems should be the focus of the staff, then organizations also have to change to make this possible. The politicians on the relevant boards have to guide this change. There has to be a municipal perspective and in some cases a common budget for preventive work and work with early interventions.

## **VI. WHAT BECAME THE LASTING RESULT?**

The project ended in 2009 and the question is what remains of the initiative after a few years. The vision of “one team” to contact for staff and families did not last and the two coordinators went back to ordinary work. They later became managers. Additional in-service education in coaching was carried out for the staff at the Recreation sector and staff is continuously offered in-service education in pedagogic mapping.

The criticism concerning flaws in documentation during interventions has resulted in implementation of a new procedure, according to statutory regulations, for the Resource units. Today the staff at social work sector inform staff at school concerning reports to social work. Staff at social work also meet with staff at school so that reports can change to application for support instead.

Today the policy in the municipality is process-oriented, with seven different formal processes for different areas and target groups. There is no formal process concerning children, but a process-oriented work has started concerning children at risk.

There are different perceptions whether the KoLa group exists. One perception is that the KoLa group where de-identified cases were discussed exists and there are representatives from education, social work, psychiatry and habilitation. The group meets three or four times during a term. Another perception is that it no longer exists, due to lack of cases. Instead a Social Intervention Group (SIG, see below) has taken its function. Several other groups have been established. A strategic operative group (SOG) with managers from education and leisure time meets frequently. This is considered important as there is no formal process for children. An addiction center has been established where staff from social work and psychiatry cooperate. A Social Intervention Group (SIG) has been established with representatives from social work, law enforcement, education, recreation, employment agency and psychiatry. Two social workers got a special assignment to work with truancy in 2013-2014 and the team is extended with two additional social workers from 2015. According to law (SFS 2001:453 [2]; SFS 1982:763 [25]) users should have a right to have interventions coordinated and formalized in an individual plan (samordnad individuellt plan [coordinated individual plan], SIP). Schools have a right to request creation of a SIP. Additional projects are carried out, such as a project concerning education for children who are placed at institutions.

On a political level a Social Investments fund has been created aiming at development based on cooperation. This is a variety of combined resources where sectors can apply for funding. There has been no further decision about common resources.

For staff in education and social work the idea of inter-professional collaboration is important. A perception is that there are still challenges because different sectors are upholding boundaries concerning responsibility, especially between municipality and county. There has been a suggestion of joint exercise of authority (myndighetsutövning), but the suggestion was never accepted politically. What is perceived as needed today is pedagogic support to all children in family home, a SkolFam [SchoolFamily]. The initial project included this idea but it was never launched. One reason was change of significant leaders on central level. New leaders have new ideas. Another need is joint exercise of authority concerning placement of children and youth.

## **VII. DISCUSSION**

### **VII: I What are the professional challenges in multi-agency work?**

A central concept in the national initiative was collaboration. This collaboration would concern county council and sectors in a municipality aiming to improve support to children and families. Participants were

supposed to be staff from Child and Education, Work and Family and Culture and Recreation departments, law enforcement or Child and Youth Psychiatry.

As earlier research shows, cross-boundary work and inter-professional work can be defined in various ways. To start with, who participated in the local project? It was staff from the earlier mentioned administrations, with the exception of law enforcement. Through various activities children, parents and politicians also became engaged. The role of Child and Youth Psychiatry did not turn out as expected, but became an alternative collaboration. First of all the Family unit (social work) found an already existing group for collaboration, previously unknown to the social workers. Secondly the project leaders created a new group, more like a network, KoLa, joining the municipality and county council. These formed meeting places.

The challenge where information is not shared with “the others” (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004, as cited in Mitchell et al., 2011 [10]) did not occur during the project. One explanation can be that there was a shared goal; in this situation the team became a social identity (Mitchell et al., 2011). There was no expression of perceived threat to professional identity among the participants. Instead the results concur with the results from Westrup&Persson (2007 [11]) that the professionals were able to hold back their own need for prestige and control. They got increased knowledge about each other’s working area, even though it is not totally clear whether they accepted differences between the professions. The structural differences concerning budget also seem to occur in this local project. As Westrup&Persson argue the central issue is how resources are divided between units, where a partly common budget or a co-financed budget supports collaboration.

If the challenges concerning identity for professions were handled, what then were the areas regarding collaboration (Niklasson, 2001 [13])? The two coordinators shared an office, otherwise there was no collaboration concerning premises in the project. Common planning and information was carried out among project leaders, coordinators and also among those organizing the Short-Term Resource School. What was lacking was collaboration concerning education and common vision for stakeholders; there was continuing education for staff which did not include parents. Due to the project, steering collaboration was carried out between the project leaders, but not otherwise. Also due to the project, budget collaboration occurred as coordinators were financed by the project funding, but otherwise there was no common funding between the sectors. No policy collaboration was achieved.

Another way of discussing collaboration is to regard collaboration as starting with a common interest and ending in merging organizations (Frey, Lohmeier, Lee ochTollefson, 2006 [16]). In the local project the different organizations are beyond coexistence and networking. They are definitely cooperating by giving information to each other, the roles are defined, there is formal communication, but decisions are still made independently. As there is no sharing of resources, apart from the project budget, it is hard to argue that the inter-professional work has reached beyond cooperation, as defined by Frey et al. (2006). Thereby a result of this study is that the concept earlier used in this study, collaboration, has to change to cooperation.

### **VII:II What are the organizational challenges in multi-agency work?**

The short-term goals in the project have partly been reached. No cooperation with the local zoological garden was possible, but the Short-Term Resource School was organized. A survey was carried out to map the frequency of truancy, where individuals with same pattern could be grouped and methods to deal with truancy were documented. Documentation was carried out showing obstacles to collaboration. Further on the need for work in groups and for knowledge of group processes has been highlighted. On the other hand it became obvious that there were already several group meetings. Continuing education was organized for recreation staff and teachers, but not for any other stakeholders such as parents. Several interventions on individual and group level have been carried out. Effects on the individual or group level have not been measured or studied systematically in any other way.

The results showed that it was not clear when a group starts, who was representing which organization, the aim, whether the aim was reached, and when the group was ending. The impression can be that “meet and cooperate” is always positive, but if meetings and cooperation lack a clear goal to reach, in the end the impression can change to that there are too many “group meetings” and cooperation can be perceived as endless discussions.

As it was a national initiative to strengthen inter-professional and cross-boundary work, the national projects have been evaluated on both a local and a national level (Skolverket, 2009a [24]; Skolverket, 2010b [26]). The most prominent change during the projects on a national level was increased knowledge. This is in line with the local project where the participants got new insight into each other’s assignments. A development could also be noticed on the national level concerning rules, organization, documentation and approach. This is not totally in line with the local project as there were no changes in rules or organization, although there were changes in increased documentation and common approach. No development or very little development was achieved concerning resources and anchoring on the national level. Funding was a big issue and several of the reports from the projects around the country made it clear that the development was only possible through the funding from the national initiative. This is partly in line with the local results. The project was anchored on a



professional and administrative level, but the needed anchorage in common resources, which required political decisions, was not achieved during the project time.

Although anchored in professional interest and on an administrative level, inter-professional work across boundaries is difficult when there are organizational obstacles. The results from both the national and the local project support the argument from Lacey (2000) and McConkey (2002) that there is a need for law supporting multidisciplinary and multi-organizational collaboration and inter-organizational councils meeting to solve problems to handle different structures for administration and financing concerning education, health and social work.

There are few lasting results from the original vision of the earlier project. On the other hand there are new structures, new groups for meetings. Collaboration, or co-operation, is still perceived as a means to support children at risk and to achieve better results.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Inter-professional work is critically discussed internationally and has some traits in common as earlier research has shown. This study is context-dependent to a large extent due to the framework for inter-professional work such as national laws and the structure of the education and welfare system. Thus there are limits for generalization, but a possibility to use the results for critical discussions and deeper understanding. The conclusion from the study is that inter-professional work across boundaries is possible, but prerequisites must be in place. First of all significant persons in leading positions in administration have to be engaged. Secondly, the issue of collaboration has to become a political issue for a decision of sharing resources from different sectors. One sector alone cannot finance cooperation between sectors/professionals.

## IX. Acknowledgements

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