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CAP Methodology in a School Settlement

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Abstract

Children Are People (CAP) is a pedagogical method to make children's reality more comprehensible, possible to handle and meaningful. At the Rosengård School in Malmö a method has been created to serve the Swedish school environment and to fit the needs of children, 9-11 years old, who come from families often characterized as of war and escape. The three year project showed good results and has been made permanent. Pupils have created their ability to interpret and understand their surroundings, to handle conflicts, to be able to make good life choices, and to get future optimism. The evaluation contents systematic observations and statements, that all describe individual development and a better working climate at the school.

Introduction

At Rosengård School in Malmö there are about 500 pupils from grade one to five. The school serves that part of Rosengård which tops statistics in the number of immigrants, unemployment, overcrowding and crime. The families are generally large, often divided and directly affected by war and flight. There are about 5000 inhabitants in the school catchment area with 97 % of immigrant background and only 15 % have regular employment.

The pupils at Rosengård School have about 25 different home languages and many of them only speak Swedish in school. Almost 65 % of the pupils leave the school with incomplete school certificates and are consequently ineligible to apply for courses in the upper secondary school after the compulsory ninth year in school..

Most of the families come from countries that are deeply affected by war, which manifests itself in traumatic experiences and sporadic attendance in school. Difficulties relating to housing are often followed by difficulties in concentrating at school which often as not lead to learning difficulties. This in combination with housing segregation which restricts the opportunities for further contact with Swedish talking children can be seen as one of the reasons that so many children leaves the compulsory school with an incomplete certificate. This in turn can easily lead to permanent marginalization and problems later on in getting established on the labour market, in becoming self-sufficient and in living independently. The majority of the pupils at the Rosengårdskolan are in need of special support and stimulation.

After having used the CAP model in this community in its more commonly used form within the Social Services, there was a proposal to use this method with the most socially disadvantaged children in their struggle with the many social and educational challenges in school. The intention was to give priority to early interventions within school and

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thereby maintaining low levels of socioeconomic expenditure. The goals were to counteract social marginalization and alienation; actively reduce violence and bullying; prevent vandalism; promote a safer school environment; and at the same time increase the number of pupils with completed school certificates after finishing school.

CAP methodology

The CAP methodology is an educative method to make full use of children's experiences, making it possible to raise self-awareness and empathy. It emphasises the child's personal rights and boundaries. The method is originally from USA and was developed for children from families with addiction or mental illness problems. It is based on a manual-based programme with controlled activities and exercises within a specific time framework and led by group leaders trained in the model.

The educative components are primarily directed at the reserved children, the ones that aren't visible or audible and who easily disappear in large and noisy classes. Both school and social services are accustomed to giving attention to those who show an antisocial behaviour but here the idea is that if the number of visible children increases then the influence of the small group of disruptive children lessens. More children dare to say no and stand up for positive values. The method is a way of strengthening the healthy aspects of the individual – to make daily life more comprehensible, manageable and meaningful.

The CAP method is not a therapy; the aims are to teach the children different rules of behaviour in life. The work is an ongoing process: the children meet in groups and train their new knowledge and experiences, and the different ways to communicate and relate to others. This leads to an increased sense of self-assurance which is a condition that the children are able to get the best out of the education system. Despite it being a primarily educative method this does not deny the possibility that there could be a therapeutic impact in taking part. The method is specific in that it has an expressed intention to educate and to give support in the same way to all members of the group. A sense of security is created by looking at what is common to the group, how one can find the best way to relate to others and how one can explore different solutions. The leadership has a clear role and the group leaders are trained in this method.

Swedish research in CAP methodology has been led by Ersta Vändpunkten in Stockholm (Lindstein, 1995, 1997, 2001). The program at Ersta as well as the program at Rosengårdsskolan emanates from a number of key ideas. The first idea is that it's important to raise hope. The children learn to know that although there may be limits when it comes to influencing others' behaviour they get the opportunity to experience that they themselves have value and have the right to get attention, help and support. The second idea is that if you openly share your experiences with others you will gain understanding both of yourself and of others. The third idea is to give the group a pulse, with regularity and structure, and central to this are the shared rules. The fourth key idea is the emphasis on personal rights and boundaries which assist the children in increasing their abilities for self-appraisal. (Lindstein, 1995).

In spring 2004 Rosengårdskolan started the CAP project with the assistance of two trained social workers under the guidance of a supervisor. A total of sixteen children from the third grade (9years old) were chosen and divided in two groups who then met once a week. The structure of these is pretty much the same every week with greeting and ending ceremonies, games, role-plays, pictures, movies, worksheets, relaxation exercises and snack breaks.

Originally the CAP methodology was based on the predetermined number of established subjects, which are Feelings, Defence, Family, Emotional Disease, Risks and Choices and Self-Esteem. Depending on the age and needs of the children in the group appropriate subjects like Creating Boundaries, Bullying and Friendship can be used.(Boberg 2001, Linder 2000) At Rosengårdskolan they have created some new themes called Weekdays in School, Social Skills and War. Each theme demands at least two group meetings. They have also made visits beyond the local community, and been able to train social skills in different everyday life situations and made exciting excursions. All activities take place during school time and the pupils leave their ordinary classes to take part in the CAP lessons.

While these pupils were followed up in grade four and five the work with new pupils started in grade three. The school had a concern that the small group of selected children would feel pointed out in a negative way, but it seems that these fears were unfounded. Instead participants saw CAP as a positive selection and during the three year study there was only one parent who was negative to her child's participation.

Objectives and specific research questions

The aim of my study was partly to follow and describe the project's impact on the children and their development during the three years, and partly to follow its influence on the school environment. The project's nature was a three years process following different grades. I wanted to know if the children did indeed learn to respect each other, did they learn to say no and develop a point of view, had they acquired positive role models or had indeed they become positive role models for others? I also wanted to know if the pupils had experienced that their learning environment had become safer and more supportive.

Referring to the method development of the project I identified the following questions: How has the methodology been adapted to the school environment and to children living in vulnerable conditions and in what way has the project had an effect on the rest of the school organisation?

Methods

The data-collection methodology was based on observations, interviews with class teachers, school managers, supervisors and social workers as well as group interviews with the pupils after the first CAP-year and with individual interviews of the same children after three years. There were also studies of documents and daily diary notes from the group leaders. The daily diary notes were a continual and important method for the documentation of CAP-groups during the three year study. In order to get an idea of

how the intervention have been disseminated to the rest of school organisation I made six randomised interviews with teachers that weren't direct involved in the CAP- project. I made these interviews during the last six-months of the project.

My theoretical base was Aaron Antonovsky's Salutogenetic theory which shows how children and adults with an increasing Sense of Coherence (SOC) can prevent stress and thereby ill-health. (Antonovsky, 1991)

Participant observations were concentrated to the both CAP-groups that started in autumn 2004 with the intention of enabling further interviews with the children. In order to familiarise myself with the children's school environments I took part in the fourth grades lessons, playtimes and lunch breaks. I made field notes after all my visits, but avoided taking notes in direct contact. I had many opportunities to talk to teachers and pupils. After the first year of my study I had interviewed and tape-recorded the fourth grade teachers.

It was my intention to compare the CAP-children with a control group. The CAP-children would then be followed up during their remaining time at school up to the age of 16. However the people working with the CAP-groups together with the teachers at school thought that it might have a negative effect on those children who did not get to participate in the attractive CAP-groups. When the politicians in the local community decided to make the project permanent the school leaders' motivation to continue with an evaluation with control groups evaporated. As a result the evaluation is solely based on qualitative data. (Kvale, 1997)

Theoretical framework

A theoretical perspective clearly appears in this programme and in the way the social workers and their supervisor express themselves. This is the salutogenic perspective. Central to this perspective is the focus on what is healthy and positive in contrast to factors that are negative and unhealthy, (as seen in a pathogenetic perspective). The main questions that guided the evaluation were if and how the CAP-project helps the children to increase their Sense of Coherence, and in what way health-promoting factors appear in this educational programme?

Environments of high social deprivation like this area are characterised by stressful elements like alienation, unemployment and poverty. Aaron Antonovsky (1991) a medical sociologist and professor coined the name salutogenes, which places a focus on the source of health. Antonovsky's research shows how both children and adults by increasing Sense of Coherence can prevent stress and ill-health. Many children in the CAP-groups grow up within families living under considerable pressure and stress.

Antonovsky defines three themes that are the central components in Sense of Coherence; comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness.

Comprehensibility refers to the extent to which you experience inside and outside stimuli as rational and predictable, as information that is

structured, coherent and clear rather than chaotic, disorganised and unexplainable.

Manageability refers to what extent you feel that you are capable to facing the demands placed on you.

Meaningfulness is the motivating component in Sense of Coherence. It refers to engagement and participation, and to what extent you feel that your life has an emotional meaning and that is worth investment despite difficult challenges (Antonovsky, 1991).

It is important to focus and reinforce the ability to resist and face the challenges of daily living and Antonovsky believes that it is qualities, phenomenon and relations (regarding both individual and environmental factors) and that these are intimately connected to comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. This implies, at least on a theoretical level that these three elements are inseparable, according to Antonovsky. Antonovsky's basic idea is that people with high Sense of Coherence are especially good at managing stress situations in a way that results in positive developments rather than with more stress and ill-health. The more protective factors you have leads to better opportunities to develop good mental health even if living under vulnerable conditions.

Results

Features of leadership

It is clear both in daily diary notes and in my visits to the school that the social workers have adhered to the method and its central components.

The roll of leadership has given possibilities to act as a supportive and reliable adult. The leaders have been responsive and clear and have been able to establish a framework so that all children have been seen and heard and able to feel secure. The leaders have been at school for four days every week and doing so have been available for not only the children but for the adults. The leaders have shown flexibility when meeting new challenges, new pieces of work which have demanded both immediate solutions as well as more long term. In the interviews with teachers that were not directly involved, the group leaders were seen as important colleagues, as a support and as a supervisor, both directly and indirectly which contributed a level of knowledge and experience within the social and emotional areas of behaviour.

Has then this intervention offered an opportunity to learn and given the children a Sense of Coherence? I have attempted to answer this question using Antonovsky's definition *comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness*. (Antonovsky, 1991)

How is comprehensibility represented?

Comprehensibility indicates that we see reality as relatively predictable, that one feels informed about that which happens and that one has an understanding of this. A salutogenic way to develop comprehensibility in school and in CAP-groups is to help the

pupil to feel she is understood, to work with predictability, to give clear information, to have a stable behaviour as a group leader, to avoid unfamiliar situations or sudden changes; pupils should always have an idea of what the next step taken will be and that there are clear and agreed rules and boundaries and problems that arise are quickly dealt with (www.salutogenes.com, Wästlund, 1999).

The empirical base clearly shows that the CAP-programme is based on a clear structure which children can learn to recognise. There are rules to follow and this contributes to a sense of security as does the manner in which information is clearly communicated. The group leaders give a lot of encouragement to the individual child. These measures give a predictability which in turn creates a sense of security, an increase in understanding and a competence in different aspects of life.

With an analysis of the interviews with the six teachers at Rosengårdsskolan we can differentiate a number of different salutogenic elements in their description of the programme. They describe Comprehensibility with the example that the intervention increases the pupils' skills' development, they receive help in resolving conflicts, and in their social development and social skills training and they get to explore other environments to the one they live in. The teachers believe that the group leaders give the children an opportunity to meet adults other than staff at school, and that they are adults who can meet and interact in a positive way and who provide a clear structure.

How is manageability represented?

Manageability is the ability to meet challenges and to be able to recognise the appropriate resources needed to deal with them whether by individual means or by others. A salutogenic way to develop manageability at school and in CAP-groups is to identify and present abilities and resources, to give lots of praise, to teach specific skills and to support the pupil in overcoming difficulties, to work with the pupil's ability in working together with others, and to teach the pupil to react to her mistakes in a constructive way (www.salutogenes.com, Wästlund, 1999).

These are the conditions under which CAP-interventions have been made. According to my observations and interviews there is a significant use of training exercises in cooperation and in communication. The leaders often give praise to the children for what they do say and what they describe. The leaders have shown considerable patience in waiting for a child to deal with the situation. Everyone is listened to and supported.

The children have also received tangible and practical knowledge as to how one can resolve problems in groups particularly at the very start of the programme. During the second and the third year of the programme the children trained dealing with a variety of social situations through role-play, argument exercises and with study visits in new social environments.

The teachers describe *manageability* in the programme in terms of pupils being able to learn how one should behave in a given situation which develops the pupils' emotional aspect as well as their social skills which then in turn are taken by the pupil to other classes where they are used. Teachers perceive that pupils practice the language of the

programme and that they become more active, learning how to resolve difficulties and speak instead of fighting and learning to give praise, give hugs, and listening to others and talk about how they feel.

How is meaningfulness represented?

Meaningfulness is the element which refers to the importance of feeling involved, that life has a valuable emotional content in which it is worth investing both commitment and energy. It is this which is SOC's motivational element and a necessary condition for genuine and lasting *comprehensibility* and *manageability*. A salutogenic way to develop meaningfulness in school and in CAP-groups is to create realistic goals for the pupils, and to awaken their curiosity, to introduce fun into the classroom, to get the pupil to feel that the group leader cares about him or her and to create a feeling of hope and optimism (www.salutogenes.com, Wästlund, 1999).

A measure of meaningfulness for a child often means that children are eager to come to the group. On a number of occasions children have come to the group despite it being a teachers' planning day when all pupils are on holiday! Children often stand outside the group room and wait well in advance of it starting. Teachers tell of the great interest of children to be part of the programme. One recurring answer I got from the children when I asked them what they had learned in the CAP-group was that they 'had learned to play' A remarkable answer given that all children can play, surely?

My interpretation is that they actually discovered the game and what one can do when one plays. That there are lots of different fun ways one can play together and that it can be organised and together with adults. Just as many children answered that they had had fun. In the context that many children at this school live in large families affected by economic hardships, unemployment, marginalisation, and traumatic experiences and much more then perhaps it's not so strange that they reply that they had learned to play and had had fun.

In support of this element *meaningfulness* (to find a commitment) we can state that persons interviewed saw the programme as a safe haven, a sanctuary for the pupils and a way of raising self-confidence of children who are unwell and as a way of establishing contact with the unseen pupils. It is described as a daily activity which gives the pupils positive attention, increasing the interest for school subjects as well as creating a desire to be in the group.

Effects on the school environment?

It is clear from the respondents' accounts that all the more children take more space, say no and assert themselves more in their own classrooms. This leads to consequences for these classes, for example with a quieter and better working climate. A greater number of children take responsibility in saying to those peers who disturb them which in turn is a pressure off the teacher who can then devote more time to teaching.

A number of the children have considerably increased their capacity for empathy and take increased consideration to others which leads to an increase in friendships. This leads

to repercussions for the whole class with a friendlier environment which of course becomes a better environment to learn in. Many pupils 'take things into their own hands' and resolve fights and other conflicts. They have clearly a high degree of manageability and trust in their own and in their friends' abilities.

The intention of intervention as a way of supporting and building up a child's self awareness and self esteem and thereby promoting the child's sense of identity has according to my empirical data been successfully fulfilled. Likewise the children have learned to significant degree new approaches in setting both physical and psychological boundaries. In many cases there has been a substantial raising of individual abilities as a result of participating in the groups. According to the children themselves they have learned a great number of things immediately relevant for their daily lives at school, at home and in their leisure time.

Is it possible to see some development of the individual child during the programme years and if so, what?

In the interviews the children's' teachers said that the pupils were eager to go to the group meetings and that they were composed when they returned. Their relationships with peers had changed and some had completely stopped causing trouble, one can say that they had developed their sense of coherence, that they had activated their coping strategies, and could see their immediate environment as comprehensible and felt capable of managing adversity.

They have even learned some basic rules of social behaviour, as one teacher put it 'good manners' Teachers point out that children who have participated in the groups can now ask other children not to disturb others. This means that they consider and act. Some children show leadership qualities, most demonstrate an increase in self-esteem and a greater sense of responsibility according to the teachers.

The children themselves talk about 'respect' as an important value, both for oneself as well as for others. Also important are the strategies for how one deals with conflicts on the school playground, in the local neighbourhood and at home. 'I have learned to play' say many of the children.

The school managers stress the socio-educational expertise that the social workers have brought to the school and which has been used in supervision as well as by teachers dealing with serious conflicts during the school day. All of the individual evaluations of those who spent three years in the programme tell of enthusiastic children who reflect over their own development and have positive thoughts about their own future.

Permanent programme

In summary, one can say that the pupils developed their capacity to interpret and understand their surroundings, and deal with conflicts in a more constructive way. The programme has had reasonable objectives and by making it fun for the participants has created optimism and hope in the future.

Another impact of the programme is that it has been a calm in the storm and has attracted many quiet pupils as well as many of the disruptive ones. There still remain a number of years before the pupils in first participation group receive their school certificate. The programme became permanent after two years and is now a part of the regular school organisation. It is as yet too early to determine if the programme has contributed to a greater number of pupils gaining complete school certificates.

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