Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

Building strength through enhancing social competence in immigrant students in primary school. A pilot study

Terje Ogden [a]; Mari-Anne Sørlie [a]; Kristine Amlund Hagen [a]
[a] The Norwegian Center for Studies of Conduct Problems and Innovative Practice, Unirand, University of Oslo, Norway

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

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Terje Ogden[*], Mari-Anne Sørlie and Kristine Amlund Hagen
The Norwegian Center for Studies of Conduct Problems and Innovative Practice, Unirand, University of Oslo, Norway

In the present pilot study we examined how a school-wide intervention model, 'Positive behavior, interactions and learning environment in school' (Norwegian acronym: PALS) contributed to risk reduction in immigrant students through the promotion of social competence. The aims of the PALS project were to promote social competence through positive behavior support and to prevent and reduce problem behavior in students. Teachers and students in selected grade levels at four elementary schools and four comparison schools participated in a quasi-experimental evaluation spanning over 20 months. The present study was conducted with a subset of the students, namely the 6.7% ($n=49$) immigrant students who had Norwegian as their second language. Consistent with the social learning theory underlying the PALS model, teacher reports indicated that immigrant students in the intervention group were significantly more socially competent than were their counterparts in the comparison group at post-test when school differences at pre-assessment were accounted for. A significant decrease in internalizing problem behavior was registered in teacher ratings along with a marginally significant positive trend in teacher-rated academic progress. No intervention effect was registered in teacher-rated externalizing problem behavior or in student ratings of social competence. In order to measure potential generalizing effects of school-wide intervention programs, we discuss the need for larger samples and longer follow-up periods.

Keywords: *Positive behavior support; school-based intervention; immigrant students in primary schools; evidence-based practice; educational resilience*

Introduction

In the present pilot study, we examined how the school-wide intervention model 'Positive behavior, interactions and learning environment in school' (PALS) matched the needs and background of immigrant students and investigated the

*Corresponding author. The Norwegian Center for Studies of Conduct Problems and Innovative Practice, Unirand, University of Oslo, PO Box 1565, Vika N-0118 Oslo, Norway. Email: terje.ogden@atferd.unirand.no

effects of the interventions on their social competence, academic functioning, and problem behavior.

The overall aim of the PALS model is to prevent and reduce behavior problems and to promote social competence through school-wide positive behavior support (Arnesen *et al.*, 2006). School-wide behavior support is a proactive prevention approach supporting positive behavior of all students across all grades and school settings with emphasis on positive rather than punitive approaches to behavior management (Sprague & Walker, 2005). Since the positive behavior approach promotes the twin goals of academic achievement and social development (Sprague & Walker, 2005), both dimensions were included among the outcome variables, along with the externalizing and internalizing dimensions of problem behavior. The main outcome variables were measured with the social skills rating system (SSRS, Gresham & Elliott, 1990) which includes teacher and student ratings of social competence and teacher ratings of academic competence and problem behavior in the classroom.

Social competence is identified as one of the key protective factors in the study of resilience and, therefore, is of special interest to programs aimed at preventing the development of problem behavior in children. Several studies in Norway and in other European countries show that immigrant students often fail to adapt to school and are thus at risk of developing problem behavior in school including acting out behavior, truancy and school drop-out (e.g. OECD, 1998). Therefore, Norwegian authorities have taken great interest in identifying preventive and remedial interventions that support the successful inclusion of immigrant students to school and in programs that contribute to risk reduction through the promotion of protective factors.

The PALS school-wide intervention model

The PALS model is an elaborated version of the 'school-wide positive behavior support' model (SWPBS) (Sprague & Walker, 2005) and is adapted to the Norwegian school system. It is a part of the Norwegian nationwide system of care that seeks to enhance resilience by strengthening protective factors, such as social competence (Ogden *et al.*, 2005). The PALS approach combines modification of the social learning environment with direct teaching and behavioral interventions implemented by the school staff. The overall effectiveness of PALS was examined in an earlier quasi-experimental study that included all students at the participating schools. Results from the earlier investigation showed a reduction in problem behavior in students in all eight participating schools after two years of implementation, but the reduction was significantly greater in the intervention schools than in the comparison schools (Sørlie & Ogden, forthcoming).

Finding and reporting overall effects of intervention models is important in that it communicates the general effectiveness or the universal applicability of programs. Evaluations of structured intervention programs are now starting to address not only the questions of 'what works', but also the inquiry 'what works for whom'. The

second question addresses differential effects, that is, whether there are particular sub-groups in the sample that might benefit more from the program than others. In the present study, we examined whether PALS facilitated the adjustment of immigrant students in particular, based on teacher and student assessments.

The PALS model is linked to resilience through the intention to reduce risk factors and to promote protective factors. The PALS interventions aim at reducing problem behavior and promoting social competence through the systematic application of social learning principles (Patterson, 1982). The PALS model addresses skills that are essential for coping with the social demands of the classroom and the school environment in general. The wider aim of changing the school ecology in a pro-social direction is accomplished by the school-wide, multi-component, and multi-year approach of PALS.

Risk, resilience, and social competence

Risk factors for various child disorders include individual level factors (e.g. physiological factors, prematurity), family environment and interaction (e.g. poor and inconsistent parenting practices), peers and social interaction (e.g. social rejection or affiliation with deviant peers), and school experiences (e.g. academic failure, low bonding to school) (Consortium on the school-based promotion of social competence, CSPSC, 1994). Exposure to risk increases the probability that children will enter into dysfunctional developmental trajectories that may result in drug use, criminal involvement and delinquency, long-term unemployment or mental health problems. However, social skills, which form the basis of social competence, are among the factors often found to influence trajectory-changing processes (Rutter, 1985; CSPSC, 1994; Luthar, 1995).

One study of children at risk, conducted by Sundell and Collbiörnsen (1999) assessed the characteristics of students who were rejected by their peers in Swedish schools. The study included 1111 students in second grade from 63 student groups in 31 primary schools in Stockholm. Students were asked to nominate three classmates with whom they did not want to play. Eighteen percent of the students were consistently rejected by their peers and they consisted mainly of noisy boys, shy and withdrawn students and immigrant students. Further analyses of the rejected group indicated that the primary reason for their social rejection was their lack of social skills, and this in turn seemed to have detrimental effects on their academic achievement. Studies like this illustrate both the challenges faced by many immigrant students and the relationship between the students' peer status, social functioning, and academic achievement. At-risk children sometimes struggle with social acceptance and integration to pro-social peer groups, and meeting of normative developmental goals, such as social competence, is often difficult.

Resilience might be defined as the presence of protective factors in the face of adversity (Rutter, 1990), and as a capacity to respond adaptively to challenges and hardship (Masten *et al.*, 1990). Resilient children are children who over time, in spite of stressful experiences, show better than expected outcomes for their particular

circumstance. Resilient children are those who are exposed to known risk factors, but manage to circumvent the negative effects that typically accompany those factors. While earlier studies (Garmezy, 1974; Werner & Smith, 1982) emphasized individual characteristics of resilient children (e.g. social competence and academic performance, conformity and plans for the future), later investigations have highlighted how these characteristics interact with contextual conditions present in the family and in the social environment in which children are embedded (e.g. social support and parenting skills) (Masten *et al.*, 1988). Studies like these highlight the potential contribution of teachers, peer students and more generally the school environment to the development of resilience. If a child succeeds in coping with stressful life events, it is likely because of an interaction between his or her constitutional qualities and favorable characteristics of the environment. Luthar *et al.* (2000) also add effective schools to the list of main protective factors identified in studies of resilience, along with close relations with supportive parents and other competent, pro-social grown-ups. This implies that school-wide efforts promoting positive behavior support within a framework of good student–teacher relations, might contribute to an enhancement of protective factors in students at risk. An immigrant student status is often considered a risk factor because these students' scholastic challenges are greater both in number and in scope than are those of non-immigrant students (e.g. language, societal norms). Studies focusing on school problem behavior, social functioning, academic achievement, and school drop-out report that immigrant students fall short in these arenas compared to the student body as a whole (OECD, 1998). In compulsory school, immigrant students with Norwegian as their second language experience difficulties understanding the language, norms, rules, and expectations of the majority culture. However, they may fare better if there are protective factors present negotiating the adverse effects that these risk factors may have on adaptive outcomes. Both competencies and difficulties may co-exist, change, and wane across time and contexts. This underscores the fact that children at risk are a heterogeneous group and that the study of risk and resilience poses special definitional and methodological challenges. To illustrate, Luthar *et al.* (2000) claim that it is to be expected that children and youth function differentially, and one would expect consistent results in areas that are conceptually interrelated (e.g. good grades and positive classroom behavior), but not when cognitive functioning is compared to the social and emotional functioning. Kaufman *et al.* (1994) found in their study of maltreated children, that while only 21% were considered competent in the social arena, two-thirds of the sample performed adequately in academics. Precision in definitions of competence is therefore important in order to differentiate between academic resilience, emotional resilience and behavioral resilience. We think this is an important distinction, and therefore set out to investigate how the promotion of positive behavior and social skills in children at risk influenced their social competence as compared to their academic competence.

We hypothesized that the social learning facilitated by the PALS model would reduce the risk factors impinging on immigrant students and it would contribute to their successful mastery of the social aspects of the student role. We wanted to

examine whether PALS was more effective in promoting social competence in foreign students with Norwegian as their second language compared to foreign students in the comparison schools. To put these results into a larger perspective, we also analyzed group differences in academic competence and problem behavior and compared the outcomes for immigrant students with outcomes for non-immigrant students.

Method

Participants

Four elementary schools and four comparison schools were recruited to the PALS project and the present study was conducted on a sub-sample of the students at these schools. The school size ranged from 110 to 450 students; 54% were girls. Students in the third to seventh grades ($n=735$; 81%) together with their teachers and other staff ($n=82$; 71%) present at both data collection time-points were included in the analyses. Among these, 49 (6.7%) had Norwegian as their second language and were mainly from Asia (Pakistan and India) or Eastern Europe. The numbers of immigrant students in grade levels at baseline were 10 second graders (20%), 12 third graders (25%), 11 fourth graders (23%) and 16 fifth graders (33%). The PALS schools volunteered to participate based on preliminary information they received about the PALS model and the evaluation study. They all reported to have an above average prevalence of student problem behavior, although no formal screening was performed before they were included in the project. In order to be included they had to commit themselves to implement the PALS model with high fidelity. The intervention schools were encouraged to recruit a neighboring school of approximately the same size and geographical location to serve as a comparison school. As would be expected, the comparison schools turned out to have a lower prevalence rate of student problem behavior as evident from the baseline comparisons.

PALS as implemented

The PALS model aims at strengthening the students' capacity for coping with social and developmental challenges such as risk factors at school. The intervention strategies were described in a handbook tailored to the situation and needs of each school. Implementation teams with participants from staff, administration, parents, and school psychological services were established at each school. Team tasks were to plan and implement interventions, develop the schools' own handbook, monitor the progress and outcomes, organize school-wide assessment of risk and protective factors, and introduce PALS to parents and staff.

In order to match interventions to the students' risk level, the interventions were organized into a three-level model of interventions aiming at the universal, selected, and indicated level respectively. The universal interventions targeting all students consisted of the following components: (a) the positive formulation of essential school-wide rules and expectations of student conduct and their application in different school settings; (b) a comprehensive program for teaching these rules to all

students; (c) staff consistently encouraging compliance with rules and positive student behavior, and consistently reporting and managing problem behavior according to the procedures of the School-Wide Information System (SWIS). The PALS teams at each school received a mean number of 25 h of local training and supervision from the project manager each of the two years. This was a combination of two monthly meetings lasting for two hours and 2×30 min of telephone consultation. In addition, one-day seminars of 5 h duration were arranged for all the teams, three times in the first and five times in the second year of implementation. At each school, the members of the PALS teams spent a minimum of 2 h per week on planning and project activities, and members of the schools' staff took part in discussions and training activities approximately one hour per week. Additionally, three school-based seminars of 3 h duration were held each year with lectures on classroom management, functional behaviour assessment and strategies for positive behavior support, including social skills training. Each of the two years of implementation was initiated by daily lessons for two weeks (10 h) consisting of direct teaching and practicing of rules of conduct and social skills. For the remainder of the year, one lesson per week was set aside for teaching, explaining, discussing and practicing school rules and expected behavior. In order to implement the PALS principles and behavioral standards at all school arenas and in all lessons, the staff was trained in how to recognize and reward compliance with the standards of positive and pro-social behavior.

Procedures

The pre-intervention assessments of individual student social and academic competence and problem behavior were carried out before the upstart of the PALS intervention and at the same time in both target and comparison schools. Post-assessment was conducted 20 months later, at the end of the second school year. The comparison schools had initiated alternative projects in order to promote positive student behavior and/or improve learning conditions. Two comparison schools implemented parts of the second step program (Committee for Children, 1997), a third school ran a combined organizational and teaching project, while the last school continued an ongoing school-wide socio-cultural learning project.

Measures

Social competence was measured with the Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliott, 1990), which is a standardized, multi-rater, and multi-factorial assessment scale that assesses how often a student exhibits certain social skills. The teacher and student forms used in this study consisted of 30 and 33 items respectively. Each item was rated on a four-point frequency scale (1=never to 4=very often), adding one response choice to each item in the original version (Ogden, 2003). The social skills dimensions as measured by factor-based subscales in the teacher version are cooperation, assertion, and self-control. *Cooperation* includes behaviors such as

helping others, sharing materials, and complying with rules and directions. *Assertion* is made up of items describing initiating behaviors, such as asking others for information, introducing oneself, and responding to the actions of others. *Self-control* includes behaviors that emerge in conflict situations, such as responding appropriately to teasing, and in non-conflict situations that require taking turns and compromising.

Problem behaviors were rated by teachers on a ten-item four-point scale in the SSRS (1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often) according to their perceived frequency in two sub-domains measuring externalizing and internalizing problems in the classroom (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).

Academic competence was measured by teacher ratings on a nine-item scale in the SSRS including items measuring reading and mathematics performance, motivation, parental support, and general cognitive functioning (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The items were rated on a five-point scale (1=10% lowest, 2=20% second lowest, 3=40% medium, 4=20% second highest and 5=10% highest).

Program implementation quality was measured by the total implementation quality scale (TIQ, based on Sugai *et al.*, 2000; Horner *et al.*, 2004). The implementation scale consisted of 55 teacher-rated items ($\alpha=0.97$) measuring the fidelity of interventions implemented at the school, classroom and individual student level. The PALS schools teachers were asked how various statements corresponded with the actual situation at their school, by using a three-point scale (1=fits completely, 3=does not fit). Examples of statements are: 'In our school we have a few and clearly formulated school-wide rules' and 'Students with severe behavior problems get individually adjusted teaching in this school based on functional problem analysis'. As the comparison schools did not implement a structured program like PALS, and because the program implementation scale was especially designed to measure the implementation quality of the PALS model, it was only applied to the target schools.

Baseline comparisons

Among the 49 immigrant students, 37 were attending the PALS schools while 12 were attending the comparison schools. As previously mentioned, the intervention schools had a significantly higher prevalence of problem behavior as observed by teachers compared to the comparison schools at pre-assessment (Sørlie & Ogden, forthcoming). No significant baseline group differences between students at intervention and comparison schools were found in student background variables.

Analyses

Univariate (ANCOVAs) and multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVAs) together with repeated measures analyses of variance were run to examine changes over time and to investigate intervention effects at the end of the two-year intervention period. One-way ANOVAs were used to test group differences respectively at baseline and post-assessment.

Results

Immigrant students in the PALS schools were rated by the teachers as significantly more socially competent than their counterparts in the comparison group at post-test when baseline differences and school differences were accounted for [F (1.47)=24.20, *P*<0.001] (see Table 1). In order to control for the possible effect of differences in number of immigrant students both within and across the two groups, school membership was used as a covariate. When the non-immigrant students at post assessment were compared across the PALS and the comparison schools on teacher-rated social competence, the difference was non-significant when scores at baseline were controlled.

The group differences in favor of the intervention schools were evident in all social skills domains, but more so in self-assertion [F=(1.45)=19.95, *P*<0.001] and self-control [F (1.45)=17.92, *P*<0.001] than in cooperation [F=(1.45)=8.0, *P*<0.05]. While self-assertion is the social competence dimensions closest affiliated with internalizing problem behavior and self-control closest related to externalizing problem behavior, cooperation is the domain of the three that usually correlates highest with compliance to the student role in the classroom (Gresham & Elliott, 1990; Ogden, 2003). When non-immigrant students were compared, there was a significant increase in favor of the comparison schools on the cooperation subscale [F (1.655)=3.85, *P*<0.05], but the group differences in self-control and self-assertion were insignificant.

No intervention effects were detected in immigrant students' *self-ratings* of social competence, neither in the sum scores (Table 1) nor in scores on subscales (not shown in the table). Neither did we find any group differences when social skills self-ratings of non-immigrant students were compared across intervention and comparison schools, when pre-assessment scores were taken into account.

Analyzing teacher-rated problem behavior in class, no significant difference across school groups was registered in teacher-rated externalizing problem behavior, but significantly fewer internalizing behavior problems were registered in PALS schools when immigrant students were compared across intervention and comparison schools [F (1.45)=4.77, *P*<0.05]. When changes in problem behavior in non-immigrant students were compared, a larger reduction in externalizing [F (1.655)= 6.75, *P*<0.01] as well as internalizing [F (1.655)=22.09, *P*<0.001] problem behavior was registered at the PALS schools.

Only a marginally significant intervention effect was detected when the immigrant students' academic competence was compared between the PALS and the comparison schools group [F (1.46)=3.3, *P*=0.075]. For the non-immigrant students, there was a non-significant difference between intervention and comparison groups at post-assessment, when scores at pre-assessment were controlled.

The school differences among the four PALS schools in total implementation scores were significant, but modest [F (3.56)=6.7, *P*<0.001] and *post hoc* analyses showed that the school ranked as number one scored significantly higher than the other three schools. There was also a significant difference in the total implementation score between the schools ranked as numbers two and four on the TIQ scale. As

Table 1. Immigrant students—main outcome variables. Mean, standard deviation and multivariate/univariate analyses of covariance by type of school condition

Variables	P-schools (*n* immigrant students=37)		C-schools (*n* immigrant students=12)		Intervention effect	
	Pre Mean (SD)	Post Mean (SD)	Pre Mean (SD)	Post Mean (SD)	*F*	*P*
SSRS problem behavior (teacher)						
Sumscore	27.2 (7.7)	26.7 (6.7)	27.8 (5.5)	27.9 (5.8)	0.27	n.s.
Externalizing behavior problems	16.6 (6.3)	16.7 (5.2)	16.5 (4.2)	16.6 (3.9)	0.54	n.s.
Internalizing behavior problems	10.6 (2.8)	10.0 (2.6)	11.4 (3.6)	12.4 (4.1)	4.77	<0.05
SSRS social competence (teacher)						
Sumscore	82.8 (15.5)	95.7 (13.2)	80.3 (22.0)	76.4 (11.4)	24.20	<0.001
Cooperation	31.8 (7.0)	36.7 (6.3)	30.7 (8.9)	31.4 (6.8)	8.00	<0.05
Self control	25.4 (5.4)	29.7 (4.6)	25.5 (5.9)	24.0 (3.8)	17.92	<0.001
Self assertion	25.6 (6.0)	29.3 (5.4)	24.1 (9.8)	21.0 (6.1)	19.95	<0.001
SSRS social competence (students)						
Sumscore	100.7 (13.7)	100.4 (12.4)	101.5 (13.6)	102.3 (12.5)	0.18	n.s
SSRS academic competence (teacher)						
Sumscore	24.6 (9.6)	26.0 (7.9)	28.5 (9.2)	25.8 (9.5)	3.32	n.s.

P-schools, PALS intervention schools; C-schools, comparison schools

an indicator of the level of implementation of the PALS model, we rank-ordered the schools according to their scores on TIQ and compared that to their rank order in terms of change scores on the main outcome variables.

School differences in change scores on the main outcome variables indicated significant differences on teacher-rated social competence [F (3.351)=19.85, $P<0.01$] and problem behavior [F (3.352)=6.89, $P<0.01$]. *Post hoc* analyses showed that schools one and two, which were ranked highest on the implementation scale had the highest mean change scores on teacher-rated social competence. School one also had the highest mean change scores on problem behavior in the classroom. Moreover, there were significant school differences in student-rated social competence [F=(3.349)=4.11, $P<0.05$] and again school one differed significantly from schools two and three in the positive direction. To sum up, school one that had the highest mean implementation score (TIQ) also had the largest increase in teacher- and student-rated social competence and the largest decrease in teacher-rated problem behavior measured by change scores. The school that was ranked as second best according to the total implementations scores was ranked second on increase in teacher-rated social competence and decrease in problem behavior.

Discussion

The steep social learning curve of immigrant students in the intervention schools in this study illustrates the value of emphasizing social learning and positive behavior support in the PALS program. Even if all students included in the study turned out to improve socially (Sørlie & Ogden, forthcoming), the rate of improvement was higher for students in the PALS schools and within these schools even higher for the immigrant students. Immigrant students in the PALS schools exhibited a substantial increase in their social competence compared to their counterparts in the comparison schools, something that might be explained as a better than expected outcome in school. Anecdotal reports from staff at the PALS schools indicated that the substantial increase in immigrant students' social competence was due to the more explicit behavioral expectations and responses as well as practical skills training opportunities in relation to what is considered normative pro-social behavior in the Norwegian school context.

The group differences were especially evident in self-assertive social skills but there was also a significant reduction of internalizing problem behavior, which is functionally related to lack of assertion (Ogden, 2003). This indicates that immigrant students who lacked assertiveness skills, and immigrant students with internalizing problem behavior (or a combination of the two), profited most from the PALS program. Contrary to our expectations, the PALS program did not bring about any substantial decrease in externalizing problem behavior, but the immigrant students at the PALS schools also improved their self-control skills, which are proven to counteract externalizing problem behavior (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The positive changes in teacher-rated social competence in favor of the immigrant

students in the PALS schools were not matched by comparisons of non-immigrant students. There were no significant differences in teacher- or student-rated social competence between non-immigrant students in intervention and comparison schools.

The results showed a marginally significant positive change in academic competence in favor of the immigrant students at the PALS schools, but it was not of the same magnitude as the change in the social competence variable. This may be taken to mean that the promotion of social competence in immigrant students through PALS did not immediately generalize to the academic area of functioning. The fact that the PALS model did enhance the students' social competence more than their achievements compared to immigrant students at the comparison schools might actually add to the credibility of the program's theory of change; the PALS model aims primarily at social and behavioral improvement. The intervention model does not target improvements in academic achievement directly, but is supposed to have an indirect positive effect on academic competence. Therefore, the possibility should not be ruled out that increased social competence over time might positively affect the immigrant students' academic achievement as well. In order to test this assumption, a follow-up study is called for.

There were some indications in the results of an expected relationship between the level of implementation in the PALS schools and increases in student social competence and a decrease in student problem behavior. The association between implementation quality and outcomes was most consistent for two of the schools, and the failure to differentiate between the other schools might be explained by the fact that the differences among the other three schools in terms of mean scores on the TIQ were rather small.

Some limitations of the study should be mentioned. Academic competence was measured by teacher ratings on the academic competence scale in Gresham and Elliott's (1990) SSRS. Although direct measures of the students' academic achievements (e.g. grade point average or standardized achievement tests) would have been better outcome indicators, these were not available to us. However, the academic competence scale has proven to correlate significantly with actual academic achievements in the range of 0.62–0.70 in earlier studies (Ogden, 1995). Therefore, it was considered an acceptable indicator of academic achievement. Another limitation of the study is that the results rest mainly on teacher assessments, who also were responsible for implementing the intervention program. It would have strengthened the findings to have teacher ratings corroborated by student ratings or by other multi-informant indices. However, the credibility of the findings of differential positive effects for immigrant students is strengthened by the fact that these results were not explicitly expected when the PALS intervention was launched. Finally, owing to the small number of participants and the fact that the post-assessment was conducted immediately after the second year of implementation, the generalizability of the results across participants and time might be called into question. This is what could be expected, because most at-risk groups defined within regular samples will

constitute a small proportion of the participants. Therefore, replication studies testing out the PALS program on larger groups of immigrant students are needed. This study should be considered a pilot-study of social competence as a well-established protective factor that might enhance the resilience of immigrant students in primary school. There is also a need for more multi-informant assessments and longer follow-up periods in order to substantiate the findings of this study. The PALS program is at present being implemented in 47 Norwegian elementary schools and this implementation project will be followed up by a controlled evaluation study.

The CSPSC (1994) argues that the perspective on social competence must reflect the ever increasing complexity of our society, and that we should be prepared to examine the differences between nations as well as between national subgroups from this perspective in order to be '… less likely to overestimate the parameters of generalization of knowledge, attitudes and skills to these subgroups than is currently the case' (p. 276).

Further, because the school system is undergoing serious socio-demographic erosion and is developing a culturally diverse array of students, it should prepare all students for future citizenship through school-based programming. The concept of protective factors or protective processes indicates that the reduction of risk may be accomplished both through direct attempts at risk reduction but also through the promotion of protective factors that moderate or mediate the effects of exposure to risk (CSPSC, 1994).

Our main goal for this study was to try to find new and improved ways of supporting immigrant students to learn and develop social competence, a well-established protective factor enhancing resilience in children. In the search for effective interventions that support coping with the student role and the successful inclusion of immigrant students in Norwegian compulsory schools, any results indicating that risk-reducing protective factors are operating, should be welcomed.

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