

## Long-term effects of one-to-three-years school development projects? School improvement capacity in 16 preschools

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine how development projects and prerequisites for change are prioritized in 16 Swedish preschools. According to earlier research, projects may pose problems, as they indicate delimitations in time, economy and a particular purpose in relation to ordinary practice. In addition existing experiences and knowledge, agency, external actors and leadership constitutes facilitating factors of school development. In-depth interviews with 108 participants provided data, which were transcribed, coded, categorized and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results indicate that projects are perceived as “something different” from ordinary practice. When the project is over a new project is required for change to continue, according to the participants. One year after the closure of the projects, no remaining effects were to be found. Only in one preschool guidelines in the activity plan for the project’s continuation were included. In this preschool form and content of the project emanated from local needs and questions, as opposed to projects where externally imposed. Thus, turnover among personnel and directors, and project design emanated as obstructing factors for long-time effects. Significant facilitating factors found were participatory leadership, agency and assigned time. How personnel perceive the concept of projects seems to be an important dividing line of how implementation of projects and their effects may progress and turn out.

**Keywords:** agency; long-term effects; participatory leadership; conceptualizations of projects; preschool projects