Presentation of “On track”

Schools often use many resources on students after problems have developed. A new research project from The Reading Centre will investigate how one can prevent reading and writing difficulties.

Autumn 2014 The Reading Centre will start a new, comprehensive project called “On track”. In Norway a significant amount of resources are spent on special education services later in the school career and less on the first years of school. This means that Norwegian teachers to a great extent work with difficulties after they have already developed, instead of preventing them.

During the 2013-2014 school year, a pre-project will be conducted where measurement instruments and content for the intervention will be developed, and cooperative agreements with schools who will participate with projects will be signed.

Previous initiatives

It often takes too long before children struggling with reading are identified and get the help they need. This happens even though we have knowledge, from comparable countries, that early action gives better results than interventions that are carried out later in the school career. Additionally, this early intervention can contribute to reducing the group who need special education later in their educational career. We also know that early interventions can contribute to preventing reading difficulties. Mastering reading skills becomes a sort of bottleneck, because reading is itself the gateway to text-based learning in other subjects. The importance of this initiative is underlined by the fact that reading difficulties are the most prominent reason for special education in school.

The project is scheduled from Autumn 2014 to Autumn 2018 and is comprised of a core group of three associate professors and two doctoral fellows from The Reading Centre,
in collaboration with international research environments. In the project “On track”, a large, randomized, controlled study will be conducted to investigate the effect of different models for early reading interventions in first and second grade.

**Start-up in schools Autumn 2014**

From the start of school 2014, 1000 children form 17 schools will participate in the study. The schools will be recruited from municipalities in Rogaland. The project schools must be willing to have completed teaching the alphabet in the first grade by May during the project period. The 17 schools will be randomized: 4 control schools, 9 schools with extra interventions in first grade, and 4 schools with extra interventions in second grade. At the “intervention schools” the students among the lowest 20 per cent on a risk index will receive extra support. The groups who receive the intervention will be compared with a control group who will receive standard reading instruction. The children will receive extra support while the class is organized in different stations/groups. The research is designed so that the extra support can be provided by the classroom teacher in the same room with the rest of the class.

**Norwegian version of Finnish learning games**

One of the many important questions in the study is whether a motivating reading game for tablets can help student who struggle “get on track” in reading. The project is called “On track” because it focuses on the importance of a good start, as well as pointing the way forward. As the students get older and the text difficulty increases, new reading challenges arise, and the project name takes into account this insight. However, it is the critical beginning that is in focus. The reading game is a newly developed Norwegian version of a Finnish learning platform, called Graphogame. The game was developed by many leading reading researchers internationally and adapts to the player with focus on maintaining motivation. Additionally, reading can be a decisive point, since the challenge is to get students who struggle with reading to want to do more of what they experience as difficult, namely, to connect sounds to letters.

**Large project**

“On track” is the largest special education intervention project at The Reading Centre, and will provide knowledge about effective teaching methods to prevent reading and writing difficulties, as well as, concrete tools for teachers. The aim of the project is to
contribute to fewer Norwegian children developing difficulties with reading and learning. This type of knowledge had been sought after in many White Papers, without resulting in research programs with similar focus. Thus, “On track” also has potential to have National political implications regarding reading education.