

The Norwegian Educational Psychological Service:

A systematic review of research from the period

2000–2015

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Abstract:

The article reviews research on the Norwegian Educational Psychological service (EPS) in the period spanning 2000–2015. The material investigated consists of high quality research in terms of PhD studies and blind peer-reviewed articles. The analysis revealed three overall categories: research on work behaviour and professional identity; research on specific problem areas and expert assessment; and research on collaboration and users' experiences. The purpose of the article is to highlight and map out investigated areas, to identify where little or no research has been conducted, and to make suggestions for further research.

Key words: Norwegian Educational Psychology services, reviewed research

Introduction

The Norwegian Education Act stipulates that every municipality shall provide an educational psychological service (EPS). (The Norwegian term for the service is *pedagogisk psykologisk tjeneste*, abbreviated to *PPT*). Norwegian municipalities differ when it comes to area, regional location and the size and composition of the population. For this reason, no national standards have been established for how large the service should be or how it should be organised. This is left up to each municipality to decide. Moreover, there are no national guidelines when it comes to demands as to the educational backgrounds of the EPS staff. Today, the service's ranks may include special educators, psychologists and social workers. The larger offices may have representatives of all these disciplines, but smaller offices might have fewer. Parents must give their consent when a school refers their child to the service. Parents can also contact the service directly. Section 5-6 of the Norwegian Education Act establishes the guidelines for the service's activities. Here, the Act states that the EPS '(...) shall ensure that expert assessments are prepared where this is required.' Furthermore, 'the service shall assist schools in their work on competence enhancement and organisational development in order to improve the adaptation of the education for pupils with special needs.' (Lovdata, 2017). This dual mandate means that the service works both with individuals referred to the service and with organisations. Traditionally, the service has focused its work on individuals, aiming to identify special needs and give advice to teachers and parents when needed. However, in recent decades, the national authorities in Norway have called for a change in the priorities of the EPS. In addition to continuing to assess individuals and write reports in connection with this (work at the individual level), calls are being made to give higher priority to prevention and system intervention (work at the systemic level) in schools. The reasons for this are both the increasingly high referral rates to the service, and research suggesting that a systemic and prevention-oriented approach may be a more effective way of providing educational psychological services than traditional work with referred individuals (e.g. Bjørnsrud & Nilsen, 2014; Hausstätter, 2004; Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000). National funds have been granted to address this desire for change. First, there was the *Samtak* program (2000–2003), where the aim was to support the EPS staff and develop their competence in systemic work. This was followed in 2008–2012 by a new program, *Faglig Løft for PPT* [Competence-raising for the EPS], which highlighted continuing education within specific areas, but where the primary focus was on the systemic level. University courses were established so the EPS staff could increase their formal competence. Today we have the SEVU-PPT program (2014–

2018) for training and continuing education, which provides courses at the university level. Under this program, students and EPS employees can earn a Master's degree in educational-psychological counselling. Systemic work is still in focus. However, according to evaluation reports on the Norwegian EPS (Fylling & Handegård, 2009; Hustad, Strøm & Luckner Strømshvik, 2013), there appears to be a limited ability to give priority to system intervention and prevention work and programs. One of the reasons may be that teachers most often prefer that the EPS focus on individual children they are concerned about. Furthermore, the evaluation reports state that the EPS seems to be struggling with high referral rates, a heavy workload, a minimal number of professionals on staff and a long waiting time before casework begins.¹ These are the same problems that school support services in Denmark (e.g. Szulewicz & Tanggaard, 2015), Sweden (e.g. Persson, 2008) and other European countries (see e.g. Anthun, 2002) seem to experience. Both evaluation reports on the Norwegian EPS (Fylling & Handegård, 2009; Hustad, Strøm & Luckner Strømshvik, 2013) and scientific publications (e.g. Aagaard, 2011; Anthun, 2002; Idsøe, 2007; Solvoll, 2000; Stenberg, 2006) conclude that there is a need for more research on the EPS. However, before conducting more research there is a need to locate and explore the research that already exists. This paper describes and synthesises research on the Norwegian EPS in the time span from 2000–2015. The purpose is to map out the investigated areas, identify where little or no research has been conducted and make suggestions for further research. The following research question guides this work: *What do we know about the Norwegian EPS, and what do we need to explore further?*

Methodology

The analysis of the state of art in the Norwegian EPS is based on a systematic review of research. The following selection criteria were used in the review process: high quality research from doctoral dissertations and blind peer-reviewed articles published in journals during the period 2000–2015. This ensured that the material was scientifically approved, relevant and had similar empirical grounding. The search words 'educational psychological service' and 'school psychological service', and the Norwegian equivalents '*Pedagogisk psykologisk tjeneste*' and '*PP-tjeneste*' were used to search for relevant literature. Using the BIBSYS library system, searches were carried out in the PsycNET (APA), ORIA, Scopus (Elsevier), Web of Science ISI, and Idunn.no databases. The searches generated a total of five results for doctoral theses and 118 results for peer-reviewed articles. The texts were printed

and examined individually and collaboratively by the four members of the research group. After applying the selection criteria, a total of 24 publications were considered relevant. The publications that were omitted did not have EPS as their main focus. Rather the EPS was briefly mentioned as a possible support for various difficulties. Nineteen of the selected 24 publications were peer-reviewed journal articles. Five of the publications were doctoral theses. Three were monographs while two were sets of journal articles. An overview of the selected high quality research is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: List of high quality research of Norwegian EPS 2000–2015

As seen in the table, six of the peer-reviewed articles stem from two of the doctoral theses. What the table does not show is that the selected texts cover a variety of methodological approaches. Ten of the publications have quantitative approaches (Anthun, 1999, 2000a, b; Anthun, 2002; Anthun & Manger, 2006, Idsoe, 2003; 2006; Idsoe, 2007; Idsoe et al., 2008; Posserud & Lundervold, 2013), eight have qualitative approaches (Aagaard, 2011; Iversen et al., 2006; Phil, 2002a, b; Sandbæk 2004; Solvoll, 2000; Stenberg, 2006; Ødegaard, 2005), four are theoretical studies (Fasting, 2015; Lund, 2015; Sjøvoll, 2015; Wold, 2006) and two are innovation studies (Olaisen, 2015; Stranda, 2015).

After sorting the relevant studies, the research material was analysed. This followed a procedure where the four collaborating researchers studied the texts to ascertain, differentiate and understand the meaning of the content in each study. The analysis involved the search for similarity in content and development of analytical categories that described the focus and primary concerns in each of the studies. This involved constant ‘critical and sustained discussions’ (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) for mutual construction of meaning between co-researchers in the developing categories.

Findings

Based on analysis of the selected high quality research, it was found that three categories describe the state of art in the educational psychological service in Norway: (1) research on work behaviour and professional identity (2) research on specific problem areas and expert assessment, and (3) research on collaboration and users’ experiences.

Research on work behaviour and professional identity

The topics of work behaviour and professional identity in the EPS are considered to be closely related. A total of eight publications focus on these topics. The review revealed that seven of them address issues related to EPS counsellors' work behaviour (Idsoe, 2003, 2006; Idsoe et al., 2008; Lund, 2015; Fasting, 2015; Sjøvoll, 2015; Olaissen, 2015), while one study focuses on professional identity (Solvoll, 2000).

Work behaviour

Idsoe (2003) discussed a framework for work behaviour in the Norwegian EPS, focusing on differences at the individual and systemic level. Self-reported work behaviour was investigated among 470 counsellors. The analysis showed that the EPS as a whole allocated different priorities to aspects of work behaviour, where traditional individual-centred work was favoured. No difference in service delivery was found between offices. Rather the analysis indicated that the largest variance component could be attributed to the individual EPS counsellors and their priorities when it came to aspects of their work behaviour. The individual differences were considered the most important source of variation in the measure of work behaviour. Idsoe (2006) also investigated the predictive value of individual and systemic work behaviour among 470 EPS counsellors, using the outcome variables of job satisfaction, job involvement and organisational commitment. In addition he explored the extent to which such associations were mediated by positive challenges at work and perceived control at work. The analysis showed that systemic work behaviour was positively related to job attitudes, while the traditional, individual work behaviour was not. Furthermore, these associations were partially mediated by positive challenges at work and perceived control at work. Control for age did not alter the magnitude or pattern of regression coefficients in any substantive way.

Idsoe, Hagtvet, Bru, Midthassel & Knardahl (2008) studied change in systemic-level work during a three-year national intervention program (the *Samtak* program 2000–2003), and explored whether participation in the intervention program and employees' beliefs about systemic prevention predicted change. Self-reported longitudinal change, as well as retrospective change, was studied among 195 psychology counsellors. Overall, no significant mean-level change in systemic work was found. However, retrospective, self-reported significant positive mean-level change for systemic level prevention (SLP) was detected among the EPS counsellors. Intervention program participation was associated with individual

change in SLP. Self-efficacy beliefs about SLP, and school-related etiology beliefs predicted individual change to a certain degree. Moreover, the findings showed that individual change in the systemic-level work was positively associated with individual change in job satisfaction.

Lund (2015) investigated the on-going SEVU-PPT program (2014–2018) for training and continuing education of employees in the EPS. The research question for the study was: how can courses for individual EPS counsellors contribute to developing the EPS towards systemic work behaviour? To answer the question, course descriptions, including literature for the course and students' exams connected to one of the courses, were investigated. The analysis revealed relevant literature and theory connected to systemic work behaviour. Furthermore, that literature and theory were closely connected to the EPS counsellors' systemic work in day care and schools. It was also found that systemic work was a key aspect in the exams. The author concludes that the SEVU-PPT courses so far have achieved their aims but that this finding cannot predict whether the courses will come to influence the EPS counsellors' practice.

Fasting's (2015) point of departure in his study was the fact that EPS has a long tradition of individual work behaviour including work with expert assessments. Schools are part of this tradition, and what they still want from the EPS is help and support with individual children. The research question is how can the EPS also become a legitimate collaboration partner for schools so they can increase their knowledge and develop their organisations? In his theoretical approach to answering this question, Fasting mainly relies on Bakhtin's theory on dialogue and argues that a common space for communication is necessary in order to negotiate towards an intersubjective understanding of the EPS contribution to school support.

Sjøvoll (2015) investigated nine EPS counsellors' Master's theses. The aim of the investigation was both to identify what kind of topics the students/EPS counsellors focused on and to identify individual and systemic work behaviour in the studies. He found a variety of topics and also found that the EPS counsellors seldom used the concepts of individual and systemic work behaviour. Instead of individual work behaviour they talked about special education, and instead of system work behaviour they talked about the learning environment. He further found that the students/EPS counsellors did not problematise any possible tensions between individual work behaviour and systemic work behaviour. Rather it seemed as if they perceived both kinds of work behaviour to be necessary parts of the EPS work behaviour.

One of the studies in this category is an intervention study. Olaisen (2015) describes a particular EPS's systemic work in terms of action learning and research. She was the leader of the project in her position as an EPS counsellor. The aim was to increase the knowledge and understanding of attachment theory in a group of teachers and milieu therapists so that they could better understand, help and support children. The project, lasting from January to April, involved nine seminars that included teaching, discussions in reflection groups and group reflections on particular children the participants were concerned about. The data material was collected through conversations with the participants, a questionnaire and logs. In the analysis of the data material, it was found that the participants reported that they had increased their knowledge and were able to relate attachment theory to their everyday practice.

Professional Identity

The topic of Solvoll's (2000) PhD study is the professional identity of psychologists in the EPS. He interviewed 19 psychologists with the aim of investigating how they experienced working in the service, and how this workplace influenced their professional identity, autonomy and development. In the analysis he found that the informants considered it hard to maintain a traditional psychologist's role that involves working with individuals; that the role, to a large degree, was defined by the needs of the schools; and that the work was rather bureaucratic, as most of the time was spent on expert assessments. The conclusion was that the 19 psychologists found that they have limited opportunities to define and influence what kind of tasks they are to work on.

Summary and suggestions for further research

As well as working with individual students who are referred to the service, the national authorities clearly request that the service should also give priority to prevention and system intervention in schools. This has been the case for the last two decades, and could be the reason why seven of the publications in this category mainly focus on the topic of systemic work behaviour. The studies show that traditional individual-centred work has been preferred and that it has been hard to develop and implement system work behaviour in the EPS; that individual changes (rather than service changes) occurred in the three-year national *Samtak* program (2000–2003); that system work behaviour is positively assessed by the employees in the EPS; that the on-going SEVU-PPT program (2014–2018) aims to contribute to developing system work behaviour; that intersubjective understanding between the EPS and institutions is crucial in system work behaviour; and that only one intervention study at the level of high-

quality research has been published. When it comes to professional identity, it is interesting to note that only one study focuses on this topic, more precisely on the professional identity of psychologists in the EPS. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the EPS teams, this is an important finding in itself. Another finding is that the psychologists in the study report that others – not themselves – define what kind of tasks to work with.

The results of the analysis indicate that in the future there is a need for high-quality research within a variety of areas addressing questions relating to both work behaviour and professional identity in the EPS. We would like to point out three of them. First, there is a need to further explore systemic work behaviour in the EPS. This means, for example, investigating what kind of systemic help and support particular schools need, and how the service in question actually deals with and meets these needs. Depending on the research questions, the methodological approaches could be qualitative case studies, longitudinal studies and innovation studies. The innovation studies could be of on-going innovations such as the study referred to above. In addition, there could also be innovation studies where researchers cooperate with the EPS to develop practice and increase competence in system work behaviour. Second, the dual mandate of the service involves not only working with systems, but also working with individual students who have been referred to the service. The review reveals that there is a need for high-quality research focusing on individual work behaviour. We will return to this point later. Third, we have seen that only one study, from 2000, has focused on professional identity, more specifically on the identity of psychologists in the EPS. Today, approximately 10% of EPS staff are psychologists, while 70% are educators and special educators, while the rest are social workers (Hustad et al., 2013). What is the identity of these groups? Or more precisely, independent of professional background, what is the identity of an EPS counsellor? Depending on the research question, the methodological approach could be both quantitative, in terms of questionnaires and self-reported data, and qualitative, in terms of qualitative interviewing.

Research on specific problem areas and expert assessment

The topics of specific problem areas and expert assessment are considered to be closely connected. There are, altogether, six publications focusing on these topics. The review revealed that two of them address issues related to specific problem areas (Stenberg, 2006; Posserud & Lundervold, 2013), while four focus on expert assessments (Phil, 2002a, 2002 b; Wold, 2006; Aagaard, 2011).

Specific problem areas

In his PhD study, Stenberg's (2006) concern was how the EPS deals with problem behaviour in schools. The overall research questions were: how does the EPS understand problem behaviour, and what kinds of routines are activated when students with problem behaviour are referred to the service? Stenberg interviewed counsellors at two EPS offices in northern Norway, and used a grounded theory approach in his analysis of the data material. Four main findings are presented. First, he found that schools and parents have differing views on what constitutes problem behaviour. Second, he found that these differing views may lead to conflicts between the parties involved. Third, he found that the EPS counsellors often experienced that they came between parents and teachers due to the high level of conflict, and four, he found that the EPS counsellors had to address the different expectations for their service in a professional way. Posserud & Lundervold (2013) studied the relationship between the use of the mental health service and the number of problem areas as reported by parents and teachers in the Bergen Children's Study, involving more than 9000 children 7–9 years of age. Using teacher and parent questionnaires, a broad range of problems was assessed. Among the problem areas were: emotional and peer problems, attention deficiency, hyperactivity and oppositional behaviour. Informants were asked whether the child had been referred to the children's and adolescent's mental health services (CAMH), to the educational psychological service (EPS) or to a community health nurse/physician for any of the problems reported in the questionnaire. Findings show that the mean number of problem areas for children in the EPS was 4.4, thus predicting multisymptomatology in children in specialised services. The number of symptom areas was highly predictive of all service use. Male gender was a significant predictor for service contact.

Expert assessment

In relation to children with minority backgrounds, Phil (2002a) studied the EPS's use of Wechsler's Intelligence Scales for Children – Revised (WISC-R). This test is standardised for children with Norwegian language and cultural backgrounds. Phil's main concern is that the test is also being used to measure the intelligence of children who have different language and cultural backgrounds than the group that is reflected in the test. The sample consisted of 125 cases reported to the EPS due to language difficulties, subject difficulties, and socio-emotional and behavioural problems in the period 1990–2000. Three of these cases were analysed in the article. The findings describe how students' bicultural backgrounds affect the

test results. Findings also describe how the ethnic relationship influences the categorisation of minority-student difficulties and the consequences of ethnic marginalisation and segregation in school. One of the main conclusions is that this testing establishes an ethnic hierarchy where ‘normality’ and Norwegian ethnicity coincide. Pihl (2002b) has also investigated a particular expert assessment connected to a minority student in year nine. The student had lived in Norway for nine months. He had never attended school in his native country, and was illiterate. Pihl used a narrative approach in her analysis of the expert assessment where the EPS counsellor, a social worker, recommended that the boy needed 12 hours of special education instruction weekly. Pihl found that the description of the boy, the assessment, conclusion and recommendation appeared to be based on common sense and the will to do good rather than on professional clarification and exploration. In this way, the EPS counsellor contributed to constructing and defining the boy as a student with ‘special needs’.

Referring to Pihl’s criticism of the EPS’s work with expert assessments, Wold (2006) is also concerned about how the service deals with expert assessments connected to minority-language students, and questions the validity of Pihl’s research and conclusions. She also argues for the necessity of the EPS counsellor to clarify if a child’s learning difficulties are connected to language, culture, background and insufficient schooling in the native country, or if the child has underlying special needs, which would then entitle him or her to special education.

In accordance with Pihl’s research, the starting point for Aagaard’s (2011) PhD is that minority-language children are assessed predominantly as though they were majority-language students without sufficient account being taken of their social, cultural and linguistic characteristics. Forty EPS counsellors participated in the study, which involved a three-phase design with an embedded intervention, where expert assessments were evaluated before and after the intervention, and where the researcher was looking for the long-term effect after a two-year latency period. The intervention consisted of a two-day program where each day consisted of a lecture focusing on the language factor and group supervision of on-going work with expert assessments. In phase 1, interviews with the participants prior to the intervention revealed limited knowledge and competence for assessment of minority-language children. In phase 2, substantial improvements, attributable to the intervention, were documented. In phase 3, two years after the intervention, some counsellors showed further improvement and some showed few or no signs of improved understanding. Aagaard argues that improvements could have been sustained with a minimum of supervised work over a period of time.

Summary and suggestions for further research

In the 2015/16 school year, 7.9% of all the elementary school children in Norway had expert assessments concluding that they were in need of special education. This amounts to 49,258 students. There are various problem areas that may be the underlying reasons for these special needs: general and/or specific learning difficulties, reading and writing difficulties, mathematical difficulties, visual or hearing impairment, various syndromes, and so on. Compared to the number of students with special needs, and the variety of problem areas behind the special needs, it is an alarming finding that only two of the publications are concerned with specific problem areas. The study of socio-emotional problems reveals challenges relating to an intersubjective understanding of the problem area and that EPS counsellors have to deal with various points of view. The study focusing on mental health revealed that children and youths with such problems are referred to various support services, including the EPS, and that the problem area could be characterised in terms of multisymptomatology (or comorbidity). Compared to the number of students who have received expert assessments concluding that they have some kind of special need, the review revealed that surprisingly few high quality publications explore this topic. The review of the four studies showed that they are all concerned with the EPS's assessment of minority-language students. The studies showed that the EPS might use WISC-R, a test standardised for children with Norwegian language and culture, to measure the intelligence of children who have different language and cultural backgrounds; that social, cultural and linguistic characteristics are not taken into account in the assessment of minority-language students; that the conclusion about and recommendation for special education of a particular minority student was based on common sense rather than professional judgement; and that minimum supervised work over a period of time may improve the EPS's assessment of minority-language students.

The findings from the analysis reveal that there is a need for more high-quality research within a range of areas that address questions related to both specific problem areas and expert assessments. We would like to point out two of these. In accordance with the proposals for further research on individual work behaviour presented in the first category, there is first a need for high quality studies on additional specific problem areas and how the EPS deals with these. Such problem areas could be reading and writing difficulties, difficulties with maths, visual or hearing impairment, various syndromes, and so on. Depending on the

research questions, the methodological approaches could be qualitative case studies, longitudinal studies and innovation studies. Innovation studies could be studies of on-going innovations, but these could also be studies where researchers cooperate with the EPS, both to develop practice and to gain further insight into such practices and report on them. Second, there is a need for more research on expert assessments and how the EPS deals with this important task. The EPS's assessment of minority-language students is a crucial and socially responsible topic that should be constantly explored at the research level. However, when it comes to other problem areas, high-quality research on expert assessments is equally important. Until now there have been no reports on individual expert assessments on other specific problem areas. Depending on the research question, the methodological approaches used were longitudinal studies and studies of actual practices, as opposed to reported practices and innovation studies.

Research on collaboration and users' experiences

The topics of collaboration and users' experiences are considered to be closely connected. There are, altogether, eight publications focusing on these topics. The review revealed that five of them address collaboration (Anthun, 1999; Anthun & Manger, 2006; Stranda, 2015; Iversen et al. 2006; Ødegaard, 2005), while three focus on users' experiences of the EPS (Anthun, 2000a; 2000b; Sandbæk, 2004).

Collaboration

Anthun (1999) examined how elementary school teachers and school administrators evaluated their collaboration with the EPS. An analysis of responses to a questionnaire sent to 136 administrators and 333 teachers showed that the teachers and administrators had different priorities when it came to the quality of the collaboration with the EPS. The administrators focused on responsiveness and the promptness of the EPS support, in addition to the availability of services. The teachers primarily focused on the adaptability of support, meaning the EPS's ability to adapt to the teachers' needs to be listened to, understood and offered appropriate solutions to their problems. Another study addresses collaboration between the EPS and schools as reported by EPS professionals. Anthun & Manger (2006) point out that schools with special education teams (SET) have more EPS collaboration compared to schools that do not organise themselves into special education teams. These findings indicate that internal organisation within the schools affects the collaboration with the EPS.

Two studies explore ways the EPS can collaborate with teachers to support and offer appropriate solutions to challenges. In her study, Stranda (2015) explores how the service can come closer to teachers in upper secondary school. In an action research project, an EPS counsellor worked as a collaboration partner by being present at one school, making informal and formal observations in classes and teachers' meetings and actively participating in meetings concerning students with special needs. Stranda argues that a prerequisite for being a legitimate participant in the school's everyday life is that the EPS counsellor has competence in both working traditionally with a focus on individual students and working with the school as an organisation. Another study by Iversen et al. (2006) explored how the EPS collaborated with teachers and children in 27 schools to enhance the quality of the start of school. The EPS supported teachers and children by holding workshops and arranging dialogic seminars with external professionals. The findings show that collaboration through participation workshops and dialogues provide a better school start for all, particularly so in the case of vulnerable children. The collaboration efforts also improved the multidisciplinary teamwork and relationships, increased the focus on developmental and healthcare issues, developed professional knowledge and practical skills and increased support to local educational staff. Available time and external professional resources were the main constraints.

The final study within this sub-category explored how EPS professionals perceive interdisciplinary collaboration (Ødegaard, 2005). Seven informants were interviewed due to their extensive experience of interdisciplinary collaboration in relation to children with mental health problems. Findings from the study show that there are variations in interdisciplinary groups, and that variation is natural, as any group must be formed according to the problems that are to be addressed and the assistance that is to be given. The findings also show that professionals are challenged by the complex process with the number of professionals involved in providing treatment, as well as by collaboration as a work method.

Users' experiences of the EPS

The aim of a study by Anthun (2000a) was to ascertain the quality dimensions of the EPS as reported in questionnaires by teachers, administrators and parents. The findings suggest five key EPS quality dimensions: availability, participation, consideration, effectiveness and security. Effectiveness had the strongest impact on the evaluation of the service quality of the cases for all three user groups. The other dimensions had varying significance for different

user groups. The different expectations of the various interest groups with respect to the same services were clearly demonstrated by the differences in dimensions found in the parent and school personnel samples. In another study by Anthun (2000b), the aims were to obtain information about parents' experiences of the EPS and to reveal parents' service quality dimensions. The analysis of the participants' responses to a questionnaire showed that the parents' general experience is one of satisfaction. For parents, the strongest service quality expectations concern participation and courtesy, followed by effectiveness and security. Although the general experience is satisfaction, half of the responding parents had complaints and comments, and nearly one-third felt coerced or in doubt or conflict about their interaction with the EPS. Complaints mainly concerned not being listened to, and the type of feedback, intervention and follow-up. Sandbæk (2004) discusses the role of children in the child welfare services, including the EPS. Twenty-four children were interviewed about their experiences of the child welfare services. Based on theoretical assumptions of children as actors, the author argues that children should have more influence on the process. The first steps towards increasing children's influence would be to focus more on the child's own agenda and to understand that the provision of information is a two-way process including both the adult and the child's perspectives on problems and solutions.

Summary and suggestions for further research

The EPS mandate implies that the service should never work in isolation and independently of the context and particular surroundings. On the contrary, both individual and systemic work behaviour imply collaboration, either with external collaborators, such as teachers, parents, students and other support services, or internal collaboration with colleagues in the particular service in question. Five of the reviewed studies address collaboration. The studies show that school teachers and administrators may have different expectations when it comes to the quality of collaboration with the EPS; that internal organisation within schools may affect collaboration with the EPS; that collaboration may be better when the EPS counsellor is situated at school; that workshops and dialogues function as tools when collaborating on particular topics; and that interdisciplinary collaboration may be challenging and complex. Closely connected to collaboration is the topic of the users' experience of the service. Three of the reviewed studies address users' experiences. The studies show that teachers, administrators and parents have varying expectations about the service; that even if parents do complain, they also report general satisfaction with the service; and that the service should pay more attention to the children and listen to their voices.

These findings reveal that there is a need for more high-quality research on various aspects of collaboration and users' experiences of the EPS. We would like to point out four here. First, there is a need for research on actual practices and not only on reported practices. Depending on the research questions, the methodological approaches could be qualitative case studies, longitudinal studies or innovation studies. Second, when research findings show that schools with special education teams (SET) have more EPS collaboration compared to schools that do not organise themselves into such teams, future research should explore different ways of organising collaboration between the EPS and schools and between the EPS and other collaboration partners. Depending on the research questions, the methodological approaches could be qualitative case studies and innovation studies. Third, the reviewed research reveals an acquired knowledge concerning various aspects of collaboration and users' experiences of EPS. The studies include the perspectives of teachers, school administrators, parents, EPS employees and children. However, only one study focuses on children as research informants. There is a need for further studies aimed at highlighting the experiences of the children and youths who are referred to the service. Depending on the research questions, the methodological approaches could be quantitative in terms of questionnaires and self-reported data, and qualitative in terms of qualitative interviewing. Finally, when research findings show that different EPS user groups have differing needs and varying expectations for the same service, future research should address how the EPS can best tailor the collaboration as a working methodology to meet these differing needs and varying expectations.

Concluding remarks

The purpose of the systematic review of research on the Norwegian educational psychological service, 2000–2015 has been to map out the investigated areas, identify where little or no research has been done and make suggestions for further research. The selection criterion used to identify studies were doctoral theses and blind peer-reviewed articles. The review revealed that five doctoral theses and 19 peer-reviewed articles (six stemming from two of the doctoral theses) were relevant. The analysis of the publications resulted in three categories. The first is research on work behaviour and professional identity, comprising eight publications. The second is research on specific problem areas and expert assessments, comprising six publications, and the third is research on collaboration and users' experiences, comprising eight publications. The review contributes to highlighting a knowledge base of

high-quality research on the Norwegian EPS in the timespan stretching from 2000 to 2015. At the same time, the knowledge base also reveals a wide range of areas that have still not been investigated. As seen above, we have made several suggestions for further research, and in addition to this we would like to add three final suggestions.

First, since 2000, the national authorities have granted funding for both informal courses (the *Samtak* program, 2000–2003) and formal courses at the university level (*Faglig Løft for PPT*, 2008–2012; SEVU-PPT, 2014–2018). As stated in the introduction, the aim of the courses has been to support EPS employees in raising their competence when it comes to work at the systemic level. However, the review has revealed that it has been hard to develop and implement system work behaviour in the EPS. Thus, there is reason to address such basic questions such as how experienced EPS counsellors learn, what they learn and if or how they contribute to developing work behaviour in the service. With the on-going SEVU-PPT course as a starting point, there is an opportunity to explore these basic questions and develop knowledge about how EPS counsellors learn and if the university courses they attend actually have an impact on their own and the service's work behaviour. Closely connected to this is our second suggestion. Studies (e.g. Moen, 2009; Rismark & Sølvsberg, 2011) show that cooperation between teachers and researchers may be particularly useful when it comes to developing practice in schools. The aims of such projects are to develop or even change practice, to reveal new knowledge and to create local theories of practice. A major principle is that the topic should be defined by the practitioners themselves. The topics or problems should, in other words, come 'from below' or 'from within' (Postholm & Moen, 2010). Perhaps collaboration between EPS counsellors and researchers would also be useful when it comes to developing practice in the EPS, revealing new knowledge and creating local theories. The methodological approach could be action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), such as the two studies referred to above (Olaisen, 2015; Stranda, 2015), or systematic research and developmental (R&D) work (Postholm & Moen, 2010).

Third, the review revealed that 14 of the publications are in Norwegian and nine are in English. This means that relatively few of the studies communicate with the international research community. Publications in English are important because they enable communication on common and important topics, where researchers can share knowledge and learn from comparisons between countries. In this connection, comparative studies of the Norwegian EPS and equivalent school support services in other countries may be a topic for

future research. These could be comparative studies of school support services in the Nordic countries, as well as other countries where a comparison to Norway could prove to be interesting and productive.

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ⁱ In an evaluation report from the ongoing SEVU-PPT program (2014–2018), it appears that the concept of system-based work is challenging and that there are various understandings of what it means for EPS work (Hustad, Lødding, Fylling & Ulriksen, 2016).