

Summary

Since a couple of years, the Social Skills training sanction (Sova) and the Sexuality learning sanction have been inflicted as learning sanctions for minors. In this research, attention is given to the 'what works' elements in both. This is done by looking at the theories that lie behind it and by five 'what works' principles. The way the learning sanctions are finished and possible aftercare and referral are important as well.

For both learning sanctions the focus in this research is on the most common variants, which are successively the Sova learning sanction as it was developed by the Paedologisch Instituut (part of the Free University of Amsterdam) and the Sexuality learning sanction as it was developed by the Rutgers Nisso Groep (in co-operation with RIAGG (Regional Institute for Community Mental Health Care)).

The five principles of effectiveness ('what works' principles) that will be used in this report are successively:

- risk principle (high risk on recidivism requires more intensive intervention);
- needs principle (intervention is focused on factors that cause the criminal behaviour);
- program integrity (intervention has been carried out the way it should);
- professionalism (requirements concerning education, intervision and execution and working methods of trainers);
- responsivity principle (matching of style of learning of the minor on the one hand and style and form of the intervention and the trainer on the other hand).

At the start of the research, a selection has been made of three locations of the Child Protection Board in the Netherlands (Rotterdam, Utrecht and Arnhem). The data were collected by means of interviews, document analysis and available registration material. In the interviews (and with them in the research as well) four perspectives could be distinguished:

- theoretical perspective (the developer of the materials);
- practical perspective (trainer);
- referral perspective (coordination of the community sanctions);
- perspective of the participants (minors).

Social Skills learning sanction (SOVA)

The Sova learning sanction is an intervention that has been developed about 20 years ago. The last update was in 1999. The intervention is adjusted about once every four years. It is an individual training that takes up eight meetings of one and a half hour each. Most important is the increase of social skills. The competence model forms the basis of the Sova learning sanction.

The Sova learning sanction has a comprehensive manual in which theoretical principles are being discussed. Developmental tasks form the key in the explanation of (the deficiencies of) social skills.

In the manual, different techniques are described to increase competence. A training design with instruments has been worked out as well. The theoretical support of the Sova learning sanction has been described in a thorough and clear way, as is the translation of the principles to the design of the program.

Before the start of the Sova learning sanction, no risk taxation is done. However, during the training, attention is given to risk factors. It is questionable which institution should be responsible for the risk taxation: the Child Protection Board or the supplier of the learning sanction.

Because the Sova learning sanction is an individual training that focuses heavily on risk factors, protective factors and the needs and characteristics of the minor, the needs principle has been met in a strong degree.

In spite of the thoroughly developed theoretical basis and manual (program design), in practice there is a lot of freedom concerning the material (whether it is used or not and the way in which the material is used).

Furthermore, the theory that lies behind the program design is not always known. Because of this, there is a large discrepancy between the program as it is described and the program as it is executed.

Over the country, there is a difference in the level of the trainers (that is: the suppliers). This is because different suppliers execute the Sova learning sanction in different variants and consensus concerning aftercare and referrals lacking. The requirements concerning professionalism are therefore not met. One of the good things of the Sova learning sanction is the fact that it can be adjusted in a more than sufficient way to the style of learning and motivation of the minor. Hence, the responsivity principle is met in a strong degree. Although the Sova

learning sanction is always ended with a final conversation at the end of the project, trainers only incidentally direct their trainees to supplementary assistance and aftercare.

In practice, inclusion and exclusion criteria are used that give an indication whether the intervention is suitable for a specific minor. However, for the Sova learning sanction, these criteria either seem to be insufficiently clear or they are used in an incorrect way. This is the reason that the number of young people that gets involved into a Sova learning sanction is disproportionately large (57% of all learning sanctions is a Sova learning sanction) and that there is a mismatch between the target group as it is meant and the group of minors that gets the intervention.

Sexuality learning sanction

The Sexuality learning sanction is an intervention that has been developed almost 20 years ago. It is based on experiences with information and prevention regarding sexual and relational formation. In the Sexuality learning sanction, transfer of knowledge, formation of opinion, explanation of values and the forming of attitude are central concepts. The aim of the sanction is to reduce recidivism by changing the behaviour of the minor. It is an individual intervention that consists of ten meetings, with duration of one and a half hour each.

Although the material does not explicitly refer to theories, the content of the interviews indicates that it has some theoretical starting points (cognitive behavioural therapy and social competence model). However, the manual does describe some different techniques to influence behaviour. Also, a couple of connecting themes are being described that are used as guidelines in performing the training.

Because the theoretical support is not explicitly described, the translation of principles to design of the program could not be established.

As with the Sova learning sanction, the Sexuality learning sanction does not have a preceding risk taxation. Neither is there any risk taxation during the execution. This means that the Sexuality learning sanction does not sufficiently meet the risk principle. We refer again to the question whose responsibility it is to carry out such an analysis (Child Protection Board or supplier). The practitioners of the Sexuality learning sanction are of opinion that preceding information of the Child Protection Board (reports of the Board, official reports, further investigations) are essential. For this, it is concluded that the Sexuality learning sanction does not sufficiently meet the risk principle.

Following the themes in the Sexuality learning sanction, individual goals are described in which the offence forms the key in the execution of the sanction. In spite of the fact that risk taxation and a standardized instrument to describe the needs of the minors are both lacking, the design of the learning sanction meets the needs principle in a sufficient degree.

In the design of the program and the way it is performed in practice, themes, practical rules and training methods are emphasized. Usually, trainers are less concerned with theoretical background. However, the learning sanction is carried out according to the design of the program in a uniform way. Also, it is carried out by only one supplier. The requirements concerning program integrity are therefore met.

Besides the fact that there is only one supplier, the in-service training and refresher courses are well organized as well. Furthermore, there is a good overview of how the training should be performed. Therefore it can be concluded that the Sexuality learning sanction meets the requirements concerning professionalism in a strong degree.

During the intake of the Sexuality learning sanction, much attention is given to the motivation of the minor. The learning sanction is best suitable for young people from 14 till 16 years old. Because the learning sanction has cognitive elements in it, special training methods are used for children with learning disabilities. Involvement of the parents of the child in an active way is a central issue. All in all, the Sexuality learning sanction meets the responsibility principle sufficiently.

The Sexuality does not give attention to supplementary assistance and aftercare. In the final conversation at the end, attention is mainly given towards the positive rewards that the minor gained from joining the training. Inclusion –and exclusion criteria, like they have been described for the Sexuality training sanction are sufficiently clear. It appeared however that proper application of them is difficult; despite this the largest group of young people seems to satisfy the criteria. The target group is therefore reasonably reached.

General remarks

Some general conclusions and recommendations are described in the report as well. A national and uniform registration of learning sanctions is missing. From the quality perspective of learning sanctions this should be developed (registration of the same items for all learning sanctions).

Another problem is the risk taxation. Decisions have to be made whether or not the Child Protection Board, following its selection function, should be kept responsible for the risk taxation. It is possible that the revised Basic Inquiry of the Child Protection Board (BAxisRaadsOnderzoek, BARO) can be used for this.

Another point of uncertainty is the information that is given to the suppliers of the learning sanctions. On a national level, there should be consensus about which information can be provided. In doing this, the privacy of participants should be kept in mind

Finally, there is no unequivocalness concerning the replacement value for learning sanctions (e.g. what is the ratio between the number of weeks of detention and the number of hours of learning sanction or community service inflicted instead. This point requires more clarity).