



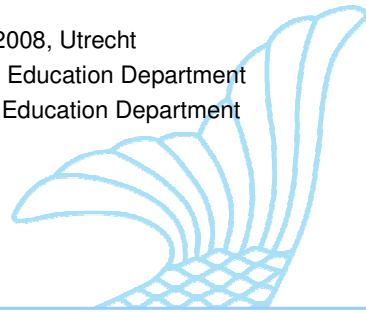
VANTAAN KAUPUNKI  
VANDA STAD

## The role and the challenges of consulting school psychologists in multicultural education in Finland

ISPA Colloquium 2008, Utrecht

Sirkka Vilén, City of Helsinki, Education Department

Elise Sailas, City of Vantaa, Education Department



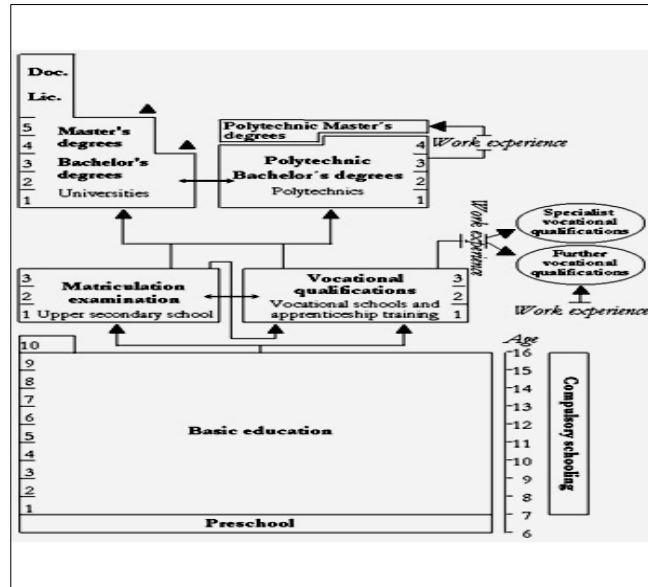
VANTAAN KAUPUNKI  
VANDA STAD

### Proportion of multicultural students, school-year 2007-2008 in comprehensive basic education in Helsinki and Vantaa

- in Helsinki 12% (4600, learners of FSL) of students, 42 different mother tongues, largest language groups: Russian, Somali, Estonian, Arabic, Vietnamese, Chinese (Mand.), Albanian, English
- in Vantaa 10% (2766, mother tongue other than Finnish, Swedish or Same language), 30 different mother tongues, largest language groups: Russian, Somali, Albanian, Estonian, Vietnamese, Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish
- students have different background (first/second generation immigrants, reason for immigration: work-related migration, refugees/asylum seekers, returning expatriates, marriage)



## The Education System in Finland



- Most children go to kindergarten and pre-school before they start the school.
- Students go to their nearest school at least for the first six grades.
- Equal opportunities: teaching arrangements and support according to individual needs.
- Proper and adequate support at the right time is essential.
- Possibility for life-long learning for everybody.
- No dead-ends in the education system.



VANTAAN KAUPUNKI  
VANDA STAD

## Teaching arrangements in Multicultural Education

### Preparatory tuition

- for newcomers
- different classes for different age-groups from pre-school on
- teaching of FSL
- mother tongue tuition
- 1-2 years
- small groups, in average 10 students

### Supported tuition

- for newcomers after preparatory tuition
- extra FSL
- in mother tongue / extra mother tongue lessons

### FSL

- min. 2 hours / week
- own curriculum + support for other subjects



VANTAAN KAUPUNKI  
VANDA STAD

### Mother tongue tuition

- min. 2 hours/week
- min. 4 students/group

### Tuition of minority religions

- Buddhism, Catholic religion, Islam, Judaism, Orthodox religion

### Various means of assessment

- written, oral, extra time, in mother tongue, use of dictionaries, etc.

### Pedagogical advisors for multicultural education (Helsinki)

### Bilingual tuition

- in Helsinki in Chinese, Russian, Estonian and English
- in Vantaa in English
- in 0-6 grades



VANTAAN KAUPUNKI  
VANDA STAD

**•Special classes in basic education for those immigrating to Finland in adolescence and having little or no educational background (Vantaa)**

- possibility to study until the age of 24

**•Interpretation services**

**•Guideline documents and in-service training for school personnel on multicultural education and assessment**

**•Financial support for extra education material**



VANTAAN KAUPUNKI  
VANDA STAD

## **Ordinary support for learning**

- student guidance
- remedial teaching
- part-time special needs education
- full-time special needs education
- individual study plan independent from course group
- resource and support teachers
- student welfare services: multi-professional student welfare group, school social workers, school psychologist, school health services
- after-school home work tuition
- regular meetings with parents



VANTAAN KAUPUNKI  
VANDA STAD

## Role of consulting school psychologist in multi-cultural education

- to collaborate, consult, listen to, evaluate
- to promote good practices in psychological assessment, teaching and co-operation with parents
- increase understanding on how children learn languages and on social aspects of immigration
- increase understanding and dialogue between the cultures present in schools
- to ensure that the students get the teaching and support they need
- to consult and work together with other school-psychologist, teachers, other relevant professional, students and their parents in challenging cases



VANTAAN KAUPUNKI  
VANDA STAD

## Assessment is a process

Close collaboration with parents and teachers (including mother tongue teachers) is important from the beginning.

Assessing and teaching immigrant students is a challenge since each of them has a different background in regard to

- languages (mother tongue, other languages that are spoken at home and the child has learned, school languages etc.)
- school/learning history (time, teaching language(s), teaching/learning methods, subjects, student/teacher roles etc., possible earlier learning difficulties)
- developmental history of the child (traumas etc.)
- student's social role in school
- home culture vs.. the culture that the school represents
- family situation and history
- educational background of the parents



## →It is important (1)

- to support the student's self-confidence and multi-cultural identity in the process of integration and learning the new language
- appreciate the student's effort and what he already knows and has learnt
- to see the student's abilities to learn beyond the developing proficiency of the school language
- to look into the linguistic environment of the student
- to understand that learning a new language and studying in that language at the same time is difficult
- to avoid overestimating children's ability to learn languages (Cummins: it takes 6-8 years to reach cognitive/academic language proficiency, CALP)



## →It is important (2)

- to find out what kind of learning support the student has received so far
- to give time and support for learning
- to understand that psychological tests are culture-limited, even the non-verbal ones
- to work with networks (social welfare, immigration, health, youth welfare, etc.)
- to avoid underestimating the social challenges the school environment poses on multicultural students
- to ask right questions and be resilient
- to use interpreters for equal possibilities of expression
- to know the student and the parents, build trust and hear their story



VANTAAN KAUPUNKI  
VANDA STAD

## Challenges

- Evaluating the child's progress in relation to his own starting point, at the same time aiming high.

- Inclusion vs. exclusion

- With parents: educational partnership and genuine dialogue.

Interpreting the school practices to the parents, school is the entry to a culture

→requires time

→special parents' groups for multicultural parents useful

- Understanding the challenges the immigration poses on the family as whole and its individual members

- changing family roles, identities

- different pace of integration of family members

- To get cultures to meet in schools

- The situation of the young adults with little educational background