



# **Newcomers in education**

**How do Finland, Canada, and the Netherlands cope with newcomers in education?**

**How can education for newcomers be improved?**

Upplands Väsby kommun

Skolprojekt Ett lärande Väsby

Delprojekt Nyanlända barn och elevers utbildning

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## 1. Introduction

This report has been written as part of the school project Ett lärande Väsby in Upplands Väsby kommun. Ett lärande Väsby is a three year during project to improve the education in Upplands Väsby kommun. The goal of the project is to make sure that all pupils in Upplands Väsby will pass all subjects. Every pupil will be given the opportunity for maximum learning, every pupil should have a safe and stimulating preschool and school environment, Upplands Väsby's preschools and schools present confidence, and Upplands Väsby should have systems that provide preschools and schools the best possible condition and ensures quality. To reach those goals, the project has been split up in eight sub-projects: management support, the digital learning environment, pupils in need of support, newcomers, follow-up of results, the supplying of rooms, distribution models, and dialog for Ett lärande Väsby<sup>1</sup>. See also the website [www.upplandsvasby.se/ettlarandevasby](http://www.upplandsvasby.se/ettlarandevasby).

The goal of this report is to support the sub-project newcomers with information from international literature. When changing working methods or systems it is interesting to read about other countries' working methods and systems. This report about newcomers in education hopefully informs, inspires and motivates readers (how) to improve education for newcomers in Upplands Väsby kommun.

First a summary of this report will be given. In chapter 3 features of education for newcomers in Finland, Ontario – Canada and the Netherlands are described. Following the conclusions about the different ways of working with newcomers and their families in different countries, in chapter 4 there has been written about how to create a welcoming school and how to improve parental involvement in schools. In chapter 5, information is given about foreign language learning, the importance of mixed classes and the effect of traumas on pupils and learning. All the used articles, books, documents and websites can be found in the list of references.

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<sup>1</sup> Ledningsstöd för utveckling av förskola och skola, den digitala lärmiljön, barn och elever i behov av stöd, nyanlända, resultatuppföljning på alla nivåer, lokalförsörjning, ersättningsmodellen, och dialog för Ett lärande Väsby.

## 2. Summary

In order to help Upplands Väsby kommun improving their way of working with newcomers in education, information about newcomers in Finland, Ontario – Canada, and the Netherlands is given. In Finland education for newcomers is arranged in mainstream classes and preparatory classes. Schools form their own curriculum for preparatory classes. Newcomers are in Finland usually placed in a grade that corresponds with their skills and knowledge; they are not matched on age. Stimulation of pupils' mother tongue is seen as important in Finland. Most newcomers in Ontario participate in special programs such as English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development. These programs are organized by the school boards. In primary education, pupils are placed in age-appropriate groups and in secondary education they are matched on their prior education. Reception teams and settlement workers in schools help newcomer pupils and families with getting used to the Canadian school system and society. Creating a welcoming and caring school is one of the core businesses in Canadian schools. In the Netherlands there are different ways of educating newcomers. Most newcomers attend separated education for newcomers before they enter mainstream education. Results from preparatory education in the Netherlands show that after one year in preparatory class, newcomers are still far behind when compared to their Dutch peers.

In Finland, schools are not working with the families of newcomers. Parents are in Finland not involved in education. In Ontario, schools are trying to make families feel comfortable and confident about their integration in the new school system and society. The Ontario ministry of education describe how schools should create a welcoming school and how school and classroom factors play a role in integration and how equity and inclusion can be improved. A few examples are the availability of interpreters, multilingual signs, respect for intercultural communication, the use of their native language, and study material that represents different cultures. In the Netherlands the focus is mostly on parental involvement to make education more effective. Parental involvement has a positive influence on pupils' academic outcomes. Five factors make parental involvement in schools successful: having an integrated approach, having a vision on parental involvement, having a vision on sustainability of cooperation, having common directives, focus on partnerships. Steps schools can take to involve families and the community in education are: create an action team; obtain official support and funds; train the members of the action team; identify starting points; strengths and weaknesses; write a one-year action plan; make use of different activities;

involve school staff, parents, children, and the community to help, evaluate; and celebrate and report all progress.

Next to the creation of a welcoming and caring school and improving parental involvement, schools can improve their education for newcomers by focusing on language learning. Focusing on language learning is important because it is known that it takes approximately four to seven years to acquire appropriate language skills for academic learning. Rehearsal and explicit education about language and vocabulary are effective when teaching a new language. Next to language improving it might be important to think about the proportion newcomers in one class. From Danish research it is known that academic outcomes for both native and immigrant pupils is negatively influenced by the ethnic concentration in classes. When 10 percent of more pupils have an immigrant background, the academic outcomes of immigrant pupils are significantly reduced. The academic outcomes of native pupils were negatively affected when there were more than 50 percent immigrant pupils in one class. Research suggests that reallocating will lead to more equity. Finally it is important to keep in mind that newcomers often experienced traumatic events during their flight or during their stay in the new country. The reactions of newcomers might differ from other pupils reactions on for example bullying or videos about war. Newcomers might in their new country still experience a lot of stress. Stress has a negative influence on learning. So schools should make sure pupils feel safe in their schools.

### 3. How do other countries deal with newcomers in education?

#### 3.1 The educational system for newcomers in Finland

Nowadays Finland is a big name in the educational field. Because of the high results of Finnish students, educators and researchers are interested in how the Finnish educational system works and why Finnish students achieve high results. This is the reason why there has been looked at how Finland works with newcomers in education<sup>2</sup>. During the last twenty years, Finland has become a more multicultural society. Together with the rising immigration level, teachers' concerns regarding how to manage the increasingly diverse school population grow.

One of the basic principles of Finnish education is that everyone living in Finland must have equal access to high-quality education. Therefore, education at all levels is free of charge in Finland. People moving to Finland should get the same opportunities to be members of the Finnish society and therefore all newcomers will get the same educational opportunities as all other people living in Finland (Finnish National Board of Education, 2005). All children who live in Finland have the right to attend preschool and they are obligated to attend compulsory school. Education for newcomers is part of mainstream education. The pupils receive support for their needs in a mainstream class or in a preparation group before they enter a mainstream class (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.). Every newcomer has the right to attend preparatory class for one year.

Newcomers of compulsory age and pre-school age may be offered instruction preparing them for basic education (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.). Different cultural factors, in addition to linguistic disadvantages, may disturb the students' learning and adjustment to the new school system. From the individual's point of view, adjusting to a new culture and a new school system are one of the main challenges of starting education in a new country. Multiculturalism in schools generates challenges for individual immigrants, their families, schools and the entire school system.

Newcomers in Finland are usually placed in a group that corresponds with their knowledge and skills, not with peers with a matching age. Schools organize remedial instruction for newcomers in different subjects according to the pupil's capabilities. During this remedial teaching, teachers might use the pupil's mother tongue as the language of

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<sup>2</sup> Do you want to read more about the Finnish educational system? I would recommend Sahlberg, P. (2011). Finnish lessons. New York, USA: Teachers College Press (The Swedish version of the book is called *Lärdomar från den finska skolan*.)

instruction parallel to Finnish or Swedish. Instruction in Finnish or Swedish and instruction in pupil's native language will stimulate pupils' multicultural identity and their bilingualism. Finnish or Swedish is the primary language of instruction, and every effort is made to develop the pupil's mother tongue as well. Pupils can study their mother tongue for two hours a week (Finnish National Board of Education, 2005).

The goal of the preparatory education is to support pupils' skills in Finnish/Swedish, their continuing development, pupils' integration in the Finnish society, and skills and knowledge to proceed in mainstream education. There are no nationwide guidelines for the use of time in preparatory education. Therefore there are many different ways in which preparatory education in Finland is arranged. Schools develop their own curriculum, but they have to meet the standards set by the Finnish national board of education. The curriculum for the preparatory education has to contain (Utbildningsstyrelsen, 2009):

- The goals for education;
- Conditions for composing a personal study plan for pupils;
- Cooperation with caregivers;
- Supporting activities for retrieving academic skills and different learning environment as a support for the pupils;
- Education for pupils with special educational needs;
- Cooperation with mainstream primary schools;
- Cooperation with the home;
- Cooperation with other authorities;
- Pupil assessment and certification.

Finnish schools do not involve immigrant families in their practices. It is not their responsibility to take care of caregivers and families. Usually, it is the social welfare office or migrant office who is involved in the integration of families helps them to find the right services. Parental involvement is not an issue in Finland in general. Teachers can do their work mostly by themselves or with other professionals, so schools do not need the help of parents (Salo, 2014).

### ***What works according to Finnish teachers?***

Finland is famous for their excellent teachers who have a high status in society. Because of the large amount of autonomy teachers have, they decide how they work with newcomers in their classes (Sahlberg, 2011). Sinkkonen and Tyttlälä (2014) state that, right now, the Finnish school system is far from being an all-encompassing multicultural

environment. But, in their study Sinkkonen and Tyttlälä found many practices that do work. Teachers were interviewed, and based on the analyses of their answers, seven practices were characterized as effective for the learning and social integration of newcomers and other immigrant pupils.

1. Adequate lingual support

All interviewed teachers seem to emphasize the importance of learning the Finnish or Swedish language. Role models in language learning are seen as very important. The teachers also emphasized the importance of practicing the language outside the school.

2. Co-planning and co-teaching

All interviewed teachers emphasized the significant importance of co-teaching and co-planning among professionals working in a multicultural educational system. Co-planning and co-teaching is seen as important for providing appropriate lingual support. For example, by planning lessons together, concepts can be taught in different contexts.

3. Help of school assistants

School assistants' participation in the daily life of preparatory classes is an important support mechanism for both teachers and pupils. Teachers mentioned that the use of preparatory class assistants to support learning in mainstream classes, was one of the best practices to assist newcomers. Assistants who usually work in preparatory classes are aware of the typical problems of newcomers. They can provide effective support when needed in mainstream classes.

4. Integration as soon as possible

The interviewed teachers in this study had the opinion that the integration process should be started as soon as possible. They acknowledge that the integration process does not always goes smoothly. It is important that receiving teachers overcome their negative prejudices about newcomers. Stereotype-based attitudes guide teachers' work. Some of the teachers interviewed in this study mentioned that there has been a positive change in attitudes primarily because of good experiences in teaching multicultural children. The younger generation of teachers seems to keep a more open mind towards the increasing levels of cultural diversity and integration in schools. Teachers who adopt, from the beginning of their teaching career, skills to encounter diversity in students' learning as well as the knowledge about various teaching styles will be capable of facing the increasing heterogeneity in schools (Jokikokko, 2005).

## 5. Social integration

Teachers believe that it is important to not only teach newcomers the Finnish language but also help them to integrate into the new school system, society and culture.

According to Karuppiah and Berthelsen (2011) an important goal of multicultural education is to give students appropriate knowledge and skills to enable successful participation in the surrounding society.

## 6. Mixed groups

Teachers saw the importance of mixing preparatory classes. When too many pupils with the same native language are in the same class, this may hinder language learning. For more information about mixing groups, see further on in this report.

## 7. The quality of teaching

Teachers in this study accentuate the importance of high quality teaching in response to the specific needs of children in preparatory and mainstream classes. They state that pupils in preparatory classes are very much similar to the Finnish children in mainstream classes, usually having the same basic capabilities to learn. In addition to make the transition to and integration in mainstream classes easier, teachers should use the same books and study materials in preparatory classes.

## **2.2 The educational system for newcomers in Ontario - Canada**

When talking about newcomers in education, Canada often comes up as a good example. Education is free to all children of school age living in Canada (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). Canada consists of ten provinces. The provinces have the responsibility for social programs such as education. Here, information about the province Ontario, Canada's largest immigrant province, is provided. In Ontario Canada's biggest city Toronto and Canada's capital city Ottawa are situated.

The Ontario Ministry of Education decides about rules for schools and school boards and about what pupils will learn. All schools in Ontario have to work by those decisions. The schools in the province are grouped together by area. Those groups of schools are led by school boards. The school boards are in charge of planning, building, and operating the schools in their area, and they are responsible for hiring and supervising teachers and principals. There are four types of school boards in Ontario: English speaking schools, both public and catholic and French speaking schools, both public and catholic. Principals are in charge of making sure that the school is a place in which pupils, caregivers, staff, and volunteers are respected and made to feel welcome (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). It

is the principal's responsibility to ensure a high quality of learning for all pupils. Teachers are responsible for classroom discipline, and for guiding, evaluating and supporting pupils. It is their responsibility that everyone is kind and respectful so that everyone feels welcome and can participate fully in activities. School councils play an important role in the way schools work. School councils are a group of caregivers, teachers, and other staff member that work on issues affecting the school's program and how the school runs.

Once a refugee has applied as a refugee claimant in Canada, the children in school age will automatically be eligible to attend school. Many school boards offer special programs such as English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development. English as a Second Language is developed for pupils with limited English skills, so they can catch up with their classmates. English Literacy Development programs are developed for pupils who missed time in school before they came to Canada and who have not learned the basic rules of reading and writing. In both English as a Second Language programs and English Literacy Development programs, schools may make arrangements to provide pupils with additional assistance from the classroom teacher, with additional assistance from a special language teacher in the regular classroom or with structured time to leave the regular classroom to work with the special language teacher (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). A lack of English language skills is not an identification of the need for special educational programs and services. In primary education, pupils with a lack of language skills will be placed in an age-appropriate group. In secondary education, pupils are placed in a grade, depending upon the pupil's prior education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

In Ontario, many school boards have a reception center or reception team. Those teams help newcomer families with registering their children and giving them information about schools. Some schools have settlement workers in schools, who help newcomers to adjust. The settlement workers understand the problems families and pupils might experience when starting education in a new country. The reception team or settlement workers should inform families about the necessary documentation for school registration.

### ***Advices and tips from Ontario***

An extensive guide about supporting English language learners in Ontario is published (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). The guide is designed to help teachers, principals, and other school staff in primary school to work effectively with newcomers. Interesting features and relevant advises will be summarized here.

#### *A welcoming and caring school*

Sheldon (2009) shows that parental involvement has a positive influence on literacy skills, mathematic skills, science, school transition, school attendance, and pupil's behavior. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) states that school staff should make sure that every parent feels welcome in the school. It is important for school staff to know that some parents will have had educational experiences that are significantly different from those of parents born in western countries. Some parents may have limited English proficiency. It is the role of the school to ensure that all parents can access and engage with the school community. There should be competent adult interpreters available who can for example assist in filling out forms. Multilingual signs should be visible in the school (for example symbols for toilets or elevators).

Schools can be surprisingly intimidating places for many parents. Newcomers may have experienced a very different school setting, and may therefore be unfamiliar with the school environment. In order to be able to help new families and pupils as much as possible, all school staff should understand the processes for receiving newcomers in the school. In Ontario, many school boards have a reception center or team. Those teams help newcomer families with registering their children and giving them information about schools. Some schools have settlement workers in schools, who help newcomers to adjust to their new environment. The settlement workers understand the problems families and pupils might experience when starting at school. The reception team or settlement workers should inform families about the necessary documentation for school registration. It should be easy for caregivers and pupils to meet the reception team or settlement workers at school. It is also important that caregivers and pupils are informed about the school routines, rules and policies. A welcome package with information about the schools, its programs, school events, and important dates can be created. Specially trained pupils from the same grade as the new pupils, can help orient the new pupils in the school (by for example showing them around).

Staff member should greet parents using a few greetings from different languages. It is important that school staff pronounces students' names correct. Announcements of school meetings and events should be made in the home languages of the pupils. The school staff should make sure that important school activities or events are not hold on religious holidays. Meetings are held with groups of parents to focus on their concerns, not only the concerns of the school. There should be interpreters available for a variety of purposes. There should be space in the school for families to gather and meet, talk, and share information and experiences (for example a coffee room). Schools should also consider to organize periodic events for parents new to Canada. It is suggested that the Bring a friend program improves

parent attendance. In the bring a friend program, parents who already attend events bring someone new to the meetings or events, and if those parents bring someone new the next meeting, the amount of parents involved will raise rapidly.

#### *School and classroom factors*

A number of school and classroom factors have a positive influence on English language acquisition. The classroom environment is seen as very important. School staff should value newcomers as a positive presence in the classroom and the school. Newcomers' efforts at learning English, sharing their knowledge of the world, and using their first language should be encouraged. Schools should provide books, visual representations, and concrete objects that reflect pupils' backgrounds and interests. The amount and quality of language learning support plays also an important role in the development of newcomers. English language learners benefit when teachers select approaches and strategies that are specifically differentiated in response to the individual pupil's language learning needs. When pupils have opportunities to interact in English with peers and other member of the community, they will learn the language faster. English language learners benefit from opportunities to receive feedback on their language use in a respectful and encouraging way. Supportive language feedback is therefore important. It is helpful when teachers first respond to the content of what the students is saying, before rephrasing. Teachers should focus on one or two errors at a time, rather than trying to 'fix' everything at once.

#### *Equity and inclusion*

Not just the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) acknowledges that education plays a big role in equity and inclusion, Skolverket (2014) also writes that pupils' natural diversity should be seen as something positive. Schools should provide safe learning environments and newcomers should be participating in all school activities (e.g. extracurricular activities after school). According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) the principles of equity and inclusion should be supported, specifically to newcomers. Newcomers should be supported in the development of a sense of personal identity and belonging. They can share information about their own languages and cultures, as well as their experiences. Schools should support newcomers in seeing themselves as fully participating citizens in the society. They should be taught about their rights and responsibilities as pupils and citizens. Teachers should provide inclusive learning resources and materials representative of diverse cultures, background and experiences. This is in accordance with Skolverkets (2014) statement that 'good teaching methods are fundamentally the same for all pupils but require fresh ideas and high

expectations for all pupils within reasonable individual frameworks' (p. 63). Global events can be used as opportunities for multicultural instruction.

Pupils whose first language skills are acknowledged by their teachers, are more likely to feel confident, and will take more risks in learning the new language. School staff should also respect intercultural communication (for example: making eye contact is not polite in some cultures). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) states that including dual language and multilingual resources in the school library and in classroom resources important is. This statement is supported by research from Leacox and Jackson (2012), who found that when adults read out loud in the new language, and pupils get during the reading vocabulary support in their first language, the pupils learn new words faster than when adults just read out loud in the new language. By giving parents the chance to read with their children in their own language at school might stimulate the parents' feeling of equity.

### **3.3 The educational system for newcomers in the Netherlands**

The Netherlands has a long history of immigration. How does the Netherlands deal with newcomers in education? Did they develop an effective system for teaching newcomers? Nowadays there are both many newcomers in the Netherlands, but the Netherlands is also still dealing with the education of immigrants who (or whose parents) earlier came to the Netherlands. During the first six months of 2014, the number of asylum seekers in the Netherlands has been doubled in comparison to the first six months of 2013 (NOS, 2014). Schools do not know how to handle the high number of newcomers in education. In the Netherlands, educators are trying to find the best way to teach newcomers. From eight weeks after arrival in the Netherlands, newcomers should receive education. Schools and municipalities cooperate in providing education for newcomers. The goals of the education for newcomers are to teach newcomers the Dutch language as fast as possible, to make them feel comfortable in the Netherlands, to outline their developmental plan, and to teach them age appropriate academic skills in the different subjects. Right now there are four different ways of educating newcomers in the Netherlands (Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2013):

- Schools in asylum seekers centers. Pupils attend these schools fulltime.
- Schools only focusing on first education for newcomers. Pupils attend these schools fulltime. After 1 – 1,5 year, pupils can continue mainstream education.
- Classes only focusing on first education for newcomers. These classes are connected to/located in mainstream schools. The classes educate newcomers one of more days a week. After 1 – 1,5 year pupils will continue mainstream education.

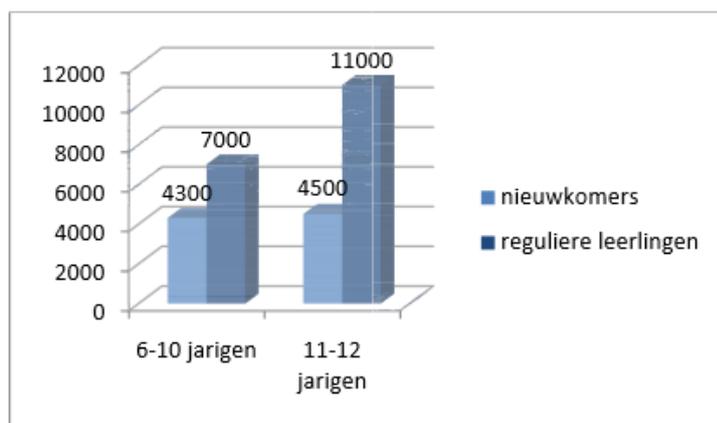
- Newcomers are integrated in mainstream classes in mainstream education. It is possible that newcomers receive adapted education in separated groups a few times a week.

It is not common that newcomers are integrated in mainstream classes. But because of the freedom of education, parents can choose where they want their children to be educated. After 1 to 1,5 years in separated education for newcomers, pupils enter mainstream education. When needed, they will receive extra support from special teachers.

The municipality of Amsterdam has developed their own receiving system for newcomers in education. In Amsterdam, parents register their child at the mainstream school of their choice. If the child's language skills are not sufficient, it is the mainstream school's responsibility to redirect the child to one of the programs for newcomers. There is a central registration point in Amsterdam which takes care of the database and placement of all newcomers in the city. In Amsterdam, all newcomers who do not have sufficient skills in Dutch, attend preparatory classes. In preparatory classes, the focus is mainly on spoken language skills and vocabulary. Most pupils attend preparatory classes for one year. After one year in preparatory classes, pupils are transitioned to mainstream classes. The teacher from the preparatory class writes a report about the pupil, gives an advice about in what grade to continue, and together with the teacher from the mainstream class, an action plan will be written (De Boer, 2011).

### ***Results in the Netherlands***

After one year of education in the Netherlands, newcomers did, by far, not reach the average levels of native pupil (Polman & Mulder, 2009). The older pupils where when they came to the Netherlands, the more behind they were in vocabulary, technical reading, reading comprehension, spelling, and mathematics. The biggest disadvantage of newcomers was their vocabulary level. This means that newcomers, after their transition to mainstream education, still need extra help (Polman & Mulder, 2009). After preparatory class, when the pupils start in mainstream education, 87 percent of the pupils were placed one or two grades lower than expected according to their age (De Boer, 2011). This is most probably a result of the poor language skills of the newcomers, see Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Passive vocabulary after one year in preparatory class.

*Note.* Nieuwkomers = newcomers, reguliere leerlingen = pupils in mainstream education.

In many Dutch schools there are so called ‘intermediate classes’ for pupils who do not have an appropriate level of Dutch. The way schools organize those language classes differ widely, but teaching pupils with low Dutch language skills two times a week after the regular schooling hours is common. Not only newcomers can attend those classes, but also, for example, pupils with a low socio-economic background and pupils with an immigration background are welcome. The language classes are effective for pupils in preschool class and for pupils in grade 3 till grade 6 (Mulder et al., 2008). The classes were the most effective in improving reading comprehension and vocabulary. Following extra education in those language classes did, however, not lead to enough improvement so that the pupils reached the average language level from their peers.

### ***Parental involvement***

In the Netherlands, school is seen as an important as a supporting system for pupils and caregivers during the first time in a new country. Schools can provide structure and routines, challenges and protection, care and attention. Many schools in the Netherlands, however, find it hard to have parents, and especially parents with a non-western background, involved in schools. The focus in the Netherlands is mostly on collaborating with parents, so pupils will have better results. The website [www.Leraar24.nl](http://www.Leraar24.nl) is designed to help teachers and other educational staff in their daily work. Much information about parental involvement for immigrants has been given. The website gives tips for schools about how to involve the families of the pupils. One principal states that the most parents are 100% involved when they bring their child to school for the first time. It is the school’s task to persist this level of involvement. When parents feel themselves welcome, they will come to school and participate. One important aspect he mentions is the possibility for parents to come to the

school whenever they want, so not only when the teacher calls them for a conversation or when someone has a question. A doorkeeper should welcome the parents any time of the school day, help them with what they need, and make sure that no one who should not enter enters. When the school door is locked, and parents have to ring the doorbell or wait till after school time to get in, the threshold for coming to school is higher (and sometimes too high). By having more contact with parents, the parents get the chance to hear more about the pupil than only the teachers' worries or negative results. The Dutch principal states that when parents receive negative information about their child every time they have a conversation with a teacher, or they receive the same information over and over again, they will not come to school anymore.

Another important aspect is that parents should feel that teachers are talking with them instead of just talking to the parents. It is not the school that has to tell the parents how they should behave and how they should raise their children. Because of the different cultures and backgrounds parents sometimes make different decisions than the teacher would make for her/himself. When teachers have real conversations with parents they have the chance to ask them why they do something in a particular way and eventually they can inform parents about the way people from this country do things. Teachers may absolutely not forget that for example refugees have many different life experiences most teachers cannot even imagine. Life experiences have a big impact on parents' behavior. It is the teacher's task not to judge or force the parents but to support and inform them.

### **3.4 What can we, in Upplands Väsby, learn from Finland, Canada, and the Netherlands?**

In Finland, education for newcomers is arranged within mainstream education. Most newcomers attend a one year preparatory class before they start in mainstream classes. Preparatory classes can develop their own curriculum, so there are many differences among the preparatory classes in Finland. The pupils in these preparatory classes are matched at knowledge and skills. Finnish schools acknowledge that adjusting to a new culture and a new school system is a big challenge for individuals, families, schools and the educational system. But schools do not have the responsibility to take care of families or to have parents actively involved in school. During remedial teaching, teachers sometimes use the pupil's mother tongue to explain. This adjusts to the pupil's multicultural identity and bilingualism. Finnish teachers indicate several important practices in working with newcomers: adequate lingual

support, co-planning/-teaching, school assistants, fast integration, social integration, mixed groups, and teaching quality.

In Ontario – Canada, many school boards offer special programs for newcomers, such as English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development. These special programs are arranged in mainstream education, because in Ontario a lack of English skills is not an indication for the need of special education. The pupils in the programs for newcomers are grouped according to their age. A specific future for schools in Ontario is the presence of reception teams and/or settlement workers in schools. Taking care of new pupils and their families and the development of a welcoming school for all are important features of schools in Ontario.

In the Netherlands, there are four different ways of educating newcomers. Schools and municipalities cooperate in providing education for newcomers. Most newcomers attend preparatory classes during one year before they enter mainstream classes. The focus in the preparatory classes is mostly on spoken language skills and vocabulary. Results from the Netherlands show that newcomers do, by far, not reach the average level of native pupils. 87% of the newcomers were after preparatory classes placed two grades lower than expected according to their age. So called ‘intermediate classes’ cannot improve pupils level sufficient. Even though the Netherlands has much experience with immigration, at the moment they do not have an effective and functioning system for the education of newcomers.

It can be concluded that not only Sweden is experiencing difficulties in conducting education to newcomers. As a reader, from Upplands Väsby, somewhere else in Sweden or from somewhere else in the world, it is your task to compare the information of the different countries with your own system. After reading the information about how Ontario works with supporting caregivers and families, there has been decided that deepening the knowledge about creating a welcoming school and parental involvement is relevant for the school project Ett lärande Väsby.

Ontario’s way of working with newcomers in education and the families of newcomers is very different from the way schools work with newcomer’s families in the Netherlands. In Ontario the focus is on creating a welcoming and caring school. The focus is on pupils, caregivers and families, school and classroom factors and equity and inclusion. It is the school’s task to help families in their new country. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, the focus is on having parents involved in their child’s education, so parents can support their child. The two approaches may complement each other. In chapter 4, the features of both a

welcoming school and parental involvement are described. Ideas for the improvement of working with newcomers and their families are described in chapter 4 as well.

## 4. A welcoming school for families and parental involvement

### 4.1 Creating a welcoming school

In paragraph 3.2 has been written how schools in Ontario – Canada work with taking care of pupils and their families. In paragraph 3.4 has been concluded that schools in Upplands Väsby can learn from Ontario. In Ontario, schools take close care of newcomers, their families and all other families and caregivers. Features of the system in Ontario could be implemented in schools that do not yet pay so much attention to newcomer families. In this paragraph there will be given an overview of activities schools should organize. When schools provide these activities, they will create a welcoming school, like they do it in Ontario.

#### *Making families feel welcome*

- Competent adult interpreters
- Multilingual signs in and around schools
- All school staff should understand the processes of receiving newcomers
- Create a reception team
- Settlement workers
- Informing caregivers about necessary documentation for school registration
- Easy to meet reception team or settlement workers
- Inform parents about school routines, rules, and policies
- Provide welcoming packages
- Specially trained student helpers as buddies for pupils
- Space in the school to meet other caregivers
- Organize periodic events for newcomer caregivers
- Greet caregivers in their native language
- Teachers pronounce names right
- Announcements of meetings and events are made in different languages
- Events are not hold on religious holidays
- Meeting are held with focus on parents' concerns
- Pupils and their families should be included in all school activities
- Newcomers should be seen as fully participating citizens
- Teaching about the rights and responsibilities as a pupil, caregiver and citizen
- Respect intercultural communication

- Dual language and multilingual resources in the school library

#### *Stimulating pupils in the classroom*

- Newcomers presence has a positive influence in the classroom
- Pupils should develop a sense of personal identity and belonging
- Newcomers can share their knowledge of the world
- Newcomers can use their native language
- Study material should reflect pupil's backgrounds and interests
- Study material should represent different cultures
- High quality language instruction
- Appropriate feedback on language
- Differentiate to pupil's individual learning needs
- Newcomers in interaction with peers

## **4.2 Increasing parental involvement**

In Ontario the focus is mainly on the creating of a welcoming school, but in educational research the term parental involvement is often mentioned. In the Netherlands the focus is mainly on the involvement of parents in education. During the dialogue as a part of the school project *Ett lärande Väsby* the 23th of October 2014 the parental involvement in schools in Upplands Väsby was discussed. The participants in the dialogue agreed on the importance of actively involving parents in learning and schools. In order to increase parental involvement in schools, different methods and approaches can be used. In this paragraph theory from international literature about parental involvement will be described. Tips are given about how to improve parental involvement.

Parental involvement, along with positive teacher perceptions of parental involvement, positively influence pupils' learning (Bakker, Denessen, & Brus-Laeven, 2007). According to Bakker et al. (2007) teachers' perceptions of parental involvement do mostly affect pupils' spelling and reading comprehension. Sheldon (2009) shows that next to literacy skills, parental involvement has a positive influence on mathematic skills, science, school transition, school attendance, and pupil's behavior. Some parents feel insecure when school asks them to help out. They are not sure whether they can what the teacher is asking or that they know how to do it. It is therefore important to guide parents. When parents experience security and confidence they will come back to help out again. Teachers and principals should cooperate in the coordination of policies and activities for parental involvement. When schools collaborate

and teachers share their ideas with colleagues, schools can benefit from the best practices of other schools (Denessen, Bakken, & Gierveld, 2007).

In one report about parental involvement in Rotterdam – the Netherlands (Smit, Wester, & Van Kuijk, 2012), a scheme with conditions for collaborative relations between parents and schools was presented (see Figure 2). In the school policy should be formulated how schools work with parents. It is important that parents, teachers and other people involved are supporting the actions taken to include parents. It is therefore important to analyze parents and school staffs wishes. Customization of the plans and activities is important in order to reach the right group of parents. The school staff should choose strategies that will lead to reaching the set goals. Getting to know each other is seen as an important preparation. The willingness to participate will be bigger when parents know each other. Teachers should get important information about pupils' home environment and parents should get relevant information about the school's organization, structure, and way of working. Both parents and teachers need to be constantly informed about the development of partnerships.

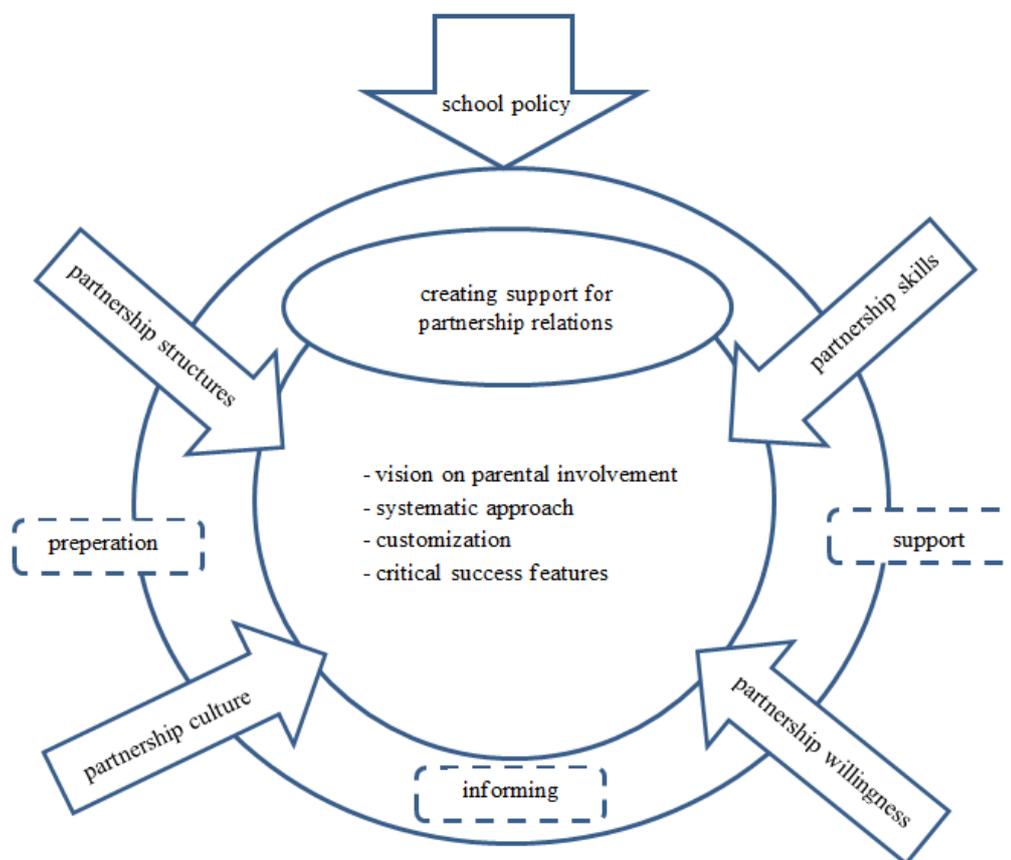


Figure 2. Schematic overview of features in effective parental involvement

Smit, Sluiter, and Driessen (2006) describe six criteria which should be met in order to provide good practices in parental involvement in schools:

- Good practices should contribute to the involvement of parents in school, so that the good practices fit the goals of the commission;
- Good practices should be goal oriented;
- Good practices should focus on participants, adapted to the target group;
- Good practices should adapt to other activities, such as school policies and vision, school organization;
- Good practices should have a wide reach, the good practice should be able to use in different situations and the outcomes should be spread to everyone concerned;
- Good practices should be evaluated regularly and there should be criteria for what good results are.

After analyzing ten different parental involvement programs (three from the Netherlands, two from the United Kingdom, five from U.S.A., and one from Australia), Smit et al., (2006) conclude that there are five factors that make parental involvement successful:

- An integrated approach. The programs are connected to the school's mission and policies, are supported and accomplished by everyone involved. It is important to create support for the program and agreements should be made on who will be involved in decision making and when.
- A vision on parental involvement. The focus is on optimizing learning outcomes, optimizing school organizations, and the parents' role in this optimizing. The school staff, parents, and pupils together are responsible for educating and upbringing pupils. The more parents involved, the more parental involvement can assign.
- A vision on sustainability of cooperation. Parental involvement programs should strive after longitudinal cooperation between parents and school.
- Common directives. There should be a common sense and solidarity about norms, values, and standards. School staff and parents should look for similarities and how they are connected with each other. They are working in the same project, so they should realize the importance of harmonization.
- Partnership. Joint interests are important in the parental involvement programs. Thresholds should be as low as possible, in order to keep in touch, keep having a dialogue, cooperate and influence the education and upbringing process. Teachers

should let go of their professional distance and autonomy in order to work together with the parents.

Epstein (2009) describes six different types of activities of involvement to improve school climate and pupils' success. Type 1: Parenting activities. Schools should help parents to discuss age-appropriate topics with their children, and make sure parents gain confidence to help their children with school work. Type 2: Communicating activities. School should make sure there is an ongoing exchange from school to home and from home to school. They should systemize communication in for example a weekly newsletters. Type 3: Volunteering activities. Schools should make sure there are different kinds of volunteer jobs at school and they should try to increase the participation of parents who might feel excluded. Type 4: Learning at home activities. Schools should provide information about the pupil's academic work, so parents know how to help their children. Schools should also provide tips about how to help at home with improving children's reading skills. Type 5: Decision making activities. Schools should increase parents' voices in school processes by for example creating a school improvement team. Parent representatives are important in hearing parents voice and pass this information on to the school staff. Type 6: Collaborating with the community activities. Cooperation between schools, families, community groups, organizations, agencies, and individuals should be developed. For example involving families in field trips in the community and developing mentorships at libraries. Inspiration for activities and examples of good practices can be found on [www.partnershipschool.org](http://www.partnershipschool.org) (section success stories in the spotlight).

Epstein (2009) composed a list with ten steps to success in school, family, and community partnerships (p. 105).

1. Create an action team for parental involvement;
2. Obtain official support and funds;
3. Train all member of the action team;
4. Identify starting points – present strengths and weaknesses;
5. Write a one-year action plan for parental involvement;
6. Apply the framework of the six types of activities;
7. Involve school staff, parents, pupils, and the community to help conduct activities;
8. Evaluate the quality and outreach of the activities and results;
9. Celebrate and report progress to all participants;
10. Continue working toward a successful, goal-oriented program of parental involvement.

## **5. Important to realize when working with newcomers**

While searching for information about newcomers in education, three interesting topics came up. Information about language learning, mixed classes and traumas are added in this section of the report, because these aspects might be important in creating a system for the education of newcomers.

### **5.1 Language learning**

Even though newcomers may, within one or two years, adopt sufficient conversational language skills in their new language, it takes approximately four to seven years to acquire appropriate language skills for academic learning (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). After spending one year in a preparatory class, pupil's language skills do not reach a level that is necessary for academic learning (Sinkkonen & Tyttälä, 2014). Sufficient language skills are essential for both academic learning (Hakuta et al., 2000) and social integration (Martinovic, Van Tubergen, & Maas, 2009). This means that after leaving the preparatory class, a child will need additional support, but in many cases, there is no obligatory plan to provide this support. Continual assessment of language skills and a close observation of language development are important in order to know how to teach the new pupils. Along with supporting the acquisition of a second language, the school system should also support the development and use of first languages.

In a nine year longitudinal research Bahrack, Bahrack, Bahrack and Bahrack (1993) investigated the long-term effects of word learning in adults. They concluded that the intervals between the rehearsal of the words should be two months. When new words are repeated every two months during five years, the vocabulary of the participants increased the most. Words should be rehearsed six times per school year in order to reach the best learning outcomes. While rehearsing, it is more effective to let pupils produce the new words themselves than only imitating the pronunciation. When during vocabulary training a picture is shown, pupils should get the chance to think about the word themselves before they receive feedback about how the word is pronounced (Kang, Gollan, & Pashler, 2013). This method of word learning will lead to a more active use of new words.

Leacox and Jackson (2012) examined what the most effective way of teaching pupils new words is. In one condition adults were reading a book several times out loud to 6 year old pupils. The adult reads the title of the story and the rest of the story without giving any extra explanation or information. In the other condition adults read from an e-book in which

additional information about important words was given in the pupils' native language. The new words were three times repeated before the adult continued reading. The pupils who learned new words while reading an e-book with additional information and repetition of the words learned more words and learned the words more easily.

Research from Vermeer (2007) shows that the explicit education of language and vocabulary is more effective than an implicit way of teaching language and vocabulary. Native speakers acquired most of their language implicitly. But for pupils who are learning a new language, it is important that they get explicit information about the content of the new words. One year later, pupils who learned new words explicitly performed still better than pupils who learned new words implicitly (Groossens, 2003). In order to help pupils reach a high level of language skills as soon as possible, new words should be taught explicitly.

#### **4.2 Mixed classes**

Newcomers and immigrant pupils perform worse than native pupils in school. Part of this effect may be due to the composition of the school. It is suggested that when most of the pupils at school are of foreign origin, and when most of them speak a different native language, they do not learn correct Finnish/Swedish; rather, they create a 'new' language. The proportion immigrant pupils and native pupils have effects on pupils' achievements (Andersen & Thomsen, 2011). The academic outcome for all pupils decline substantially when there are 50 percent or more immigrant pupils in the class. Native Danish pupils' academic outcomes were significantly reduced when the immigrant concentration in the class is 50 percent or more. For immigrant pupils, their academic outcomes are significantly reduced when there are 10 percent or more immigrant pupils in the class. Another Danish study shows that the academic outcomes of both native pupils and immigrant pupils are significantly reduced when there are 50 to 85 percent immigrant pupils in the class. Two Swedish researchers (Szulkin & Jonsson, 2007) recommend policy makers to limit the immigrant concentration to less than 40 percent. When there were more than 40 percent immigrant pupils in a class, the academic outcomes declines dramatically.

The results of the Danish study show that the effect of immigrant concentration on educational outcome is almost twice as large for immigrant students as for native Danish students (Andersen & Thomsen, 2011). Immigrant pupils are more affected by the ethnic concentration in classes than native pupils are. The results indicate that total pupil achievement would be improved by reallocating immigrant pupils and thereby establishing

more ethnically mixed classes. Equity can also be reached by reallocating immigrant pupils in a Danish lower secondary context. By establishing ethnically mixed classes, the educational gap between native Danish pupils and immigrant pupils would be reduced. It needs to be considered that reallocating pupils may have negative side effects. For instance, the parental involvement might decrease and reallocating is expensive (think for example about transport for the pupils) (Rivkin, 2000).

### **4.3 Traumas**

Ideally, school staff should have knowledge about recognizing traumas and dealing with traumas (Hart, 2009). Both events in the past as the current living conditions can be traumatizing for newcomers (Hodes, 2000). Feeling safe at school is important in the decrease of stress experiences and supports therefore academic and social development. In order to find out how newcomers could be supported in their social-emotional development, Kassenberg, Bongaards and Wolfgram (2004) analyzed two Dutch training programs that were developed to increase newcomers' wellbeing in education. They found no differences in wellbeing between pupils who participated in one of the two training programs and pupils who did not participate in a program focusing on wellbeing. Both pupils and their teachers did not report any differences in outgoing behavior, work attitude, pleasant behavior, emotional stability, social behavior, psychological functioning, and psychosomatic feeling. However, teachers and pupils are very pleased with the programs. According to the teachers, the added value of these programs were the possibility to talk about different topics, pupils' backgrounds and experiences. They also think that working with the program leads to better group dynamics. Most refugees come from countries with many conflicts (Hart, 2009). The extent to which pupils were exposed to violence and other traumatic events differs a lot among newcomers. Not only different experiences in the home country, but also experiences during the migration and experiences in the new country can be traumatic for newcomers (Hodes, 2000). Refugees' experiences are usually very different from the experiences of other immigrants (Hodes, 2000).

From neuroscientific research is known that immigrants (adults in this research) with a posttraumatic stress disorder had different brain reactions than immigrants who did not experience any traumatic events or immigrants who did experience traumatic events but did not have a posttraumatic stress disorder (Adenauer et al., 2010). Immigrants with a posttraumatic stress disorder react faster on threatening signals than immigrants without a posttraumatic stress disorder. The results of this study suggest that refugee pupils might show

different reaction on happenings than other pupils. For example other pupils' behavior (teasing/bullying) or videos about certain topics (for example war) might be experienced as threatening. Pupils can show different extreme reactions on those threatening experiences.

Children with a posttraumatic stress disorder can reach the same learning outcomes as their peers, but the brains of pupils with a posttraumatic stress disorder work much harder to achieve those learning outcomes (Turley & Obrzut, 2012). Next to this it is shown that pupils with a posttraumatic stress disorder often have problems with their memory. Pupils with a posttraumatic stress disorder find it harder than pupils without a posttraumatic stress disorder to remember broad information and verbal information.

Hart (2009) suggests that everyone working with refugees should be aware of the possible differences between all pupils. The reactions of refugee pupils might be different than from other pupils and their reactions on stress and traumatic events might have a different meaning than we, from a west European perspective, interpret. While working with newcomers, the focus should be on both processing the trauma's from the past and making sure that the pupil do not experiences any more trauma's in their current living situation. School staff should be aware of the fact that children are more sensitive to developing posttraumatic stress disorders than adults (Turley & Obrzut, 2012).

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