



# Multiprofessional collaboration in Finnish schools



Mari-Pauliina Vainikainen<sup>a,\*</sup>, Helena Thuneberg<sup>a</sup>, Samuel Greiff<sup>b</sup>,  
Jarkko Hautamäki<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Centre for Educational Assessment, Department of Teacher Education, P.O. Box 9, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland

<sup>b</sup> Research Group Computer-Based Assessment, ECCS, University of Luxembourg, Cognitive Science and Assessment, ECCS unit, Room E306 11, Porte des Sciences, 4366 Esch, Luxembourg

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 9 January 2015

Received in revised form 19 May 2015

Accepted 17 June 2015

Available online 2 July 2015

### Keywords:

Multiprofessional collaboration

Student welfare team

School psychologists

Three-tiered support model

Early intervention

Finland

## ABSTRACT

In Finland, a three-tiered support model was introduced in 2007, emphasising early intervention and preventative multiprofessional student welfare. Nationally representative principal data were used in analysing how the availability of student welfare personnel and the regularity of multiprofessional team meetings influence principals' experiences about the functioning of multiprofessional collaboration in learning-related issues in different parts of Finland. The regularity of the student welfare team meetings increased principals' satisfaction in multiprofessional collaboration especially in geographical areas with a limited availability of services. Reaching the goals of early intervention was explained by the reactivity of the multiprofessional team. It was concluded that principals' expectations are influenced by the availability of services. The qualitative aspects of the work receive a greater emphasis first when the basic structures are at a satisfactory level.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Multiprofessional collaboration in Finnish schools

A partial reform of educational legislation took place in Finland in 2010, mainly to counteract the growing number of special education referrals. According to the Statistics of Finland, as many as 8% of the pupils received special education in 2006, of which half were taught in segregated classes or special schools (Lintuvuori, 2010). Therefore, the reform can be considered as a response to the international call for the more inclusive school policies. To give the organisers of education a possibility to be prepared to the upcoming change of legislation, a Special Education Strategy (SPES) was launched by the Ministry of Education (2007). The strategy introduced a new three-tier support model (see Thuneberg et al., 2013), which stresses *early intervention* and a *pedagogical* approach instead of former psychological and medical ones. *Preventive multiprofessional student welfare work* and collaboration are strongly emphasised.

The strategy implementation was organised by the National Board of Education as an extensive three-years lasting project. It included in-service training for school representatives in different areas of Finland, developmental evaluation of the educational municipality plans conducted by two universities, and reflective dialogue between the participants at many levels (Ahtiainen et al., 2012; Thuneberg et al., 2013).

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +358 503465050.

E-mail address: [mari-pauliina.vainikainen@helsinki.fi](mailto:mari-pauliina.vainikainen@helsinki.fi) (M.-P. Vainikainen).

The aim of the present study is to evaluate whether the principles of early intervention, which are strongly emphasised in the current legislation, are reached in the Finnish comprehensive schools as reported by the principals of them. It also takes a look at what kind of organisational and qualitative factors of multiprofessional collaboration explain the possible regional differences. As multiprofessional collaboration and student welfare work are in Finland organised very systematically through on-site teams, it can be evaluated how the regularity of team meetings and the presence of different professionals predict the reaching of the goals of early intervention and functioning of student welfare from the pedagogical perspective.

Since the school administration was decentralised in 1980s (Sahlberg, 2007), the municipalities have organised education relatively independently, having their own curricula, which however is based on the National Core Curriculum (National Board of Education, 2004). The municipalities allocate resources for their schools, and there may be considerable differences between municipalities how this is done in practice. Accordingly, the resources an individual school gets for multiprofessional collaboration – in this study measured by the number of working days per month of different student welfare professionals – may depend on local educational policies or the financial situation of the municipalities in addition to being related to the number of pupils in the school. Therefore, in the present study the principals' opinions about the functioning of multiprofessional collaboration and the realisation of the principles of early intervention are predicted in two stages: It is expected that resources influence the way the work is organised in schools, that is, how systematic the team work is and how available the student welfare professionals are. These together are expected to influence the principals' satisfaction of the work. As resources and availability of student welfare services are expected to be different in different parts of the country, it is important to study regional differences in the outcomes too.

Because the present study is based on cross-sectional data, the organisational change and learning cannot systematically be compared to earlier practices. It can, however, show the situation just after the renewed legislation came into force, and thus provide a comparison possibility for the future studies.

### 1.1. The Finnish support model

Since the implementation of comprehensive school in Finland, a key component for securing educational equity has been the system for supporting the weakest learners (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011; Sabel, Saxenian, Miettinen, Kristensen, & Hautamäki, 2011). The support system can be interpreted as having been relatively effective as in international comparisons the weakest Finnish students have usually outperformed their comparison groups in other countries (e.g., OECD, 2013), whereas the differences between better performers have been much smaller. Nevertheless, the system has been adjusted during the recent years to meet the constantly increasing support needs and to better follow principles of prevention and early intervention (Thuneberg et al., 2013, 2014).

Earlier, the support system consisted of general support, which was meant for anyone needing temporary help in learning, and special education, which required an official administrative decision based on a statement from either a school psychologists or a medical doctor (see Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011; Jahnukainen, 2011). During the reform, the division of general education and special education was replaced by a three-tiered support model. The starting point of the new model is that – with some exceptions – moving to the next tier is possible first when the previous has proven to be insufficient. The first tier, *general support*, should be provided immediately when any concern is raised. The first-tier interventions can be conducted at a school- or class-level, or they can be individually designed for specific pupils. The most common means of support at this tier are differentiation, remedial instruction, and part-time special education either as co-teaching or in a smaller group (National Board of Education, 2011; Thuneberg et al., 2013). If general support is concluded to be insufficient based on observations, screenings and discussions between the pupils, parents, teachers and school welfare professionals, a *pedagogical assessment* is conducted. According to that assessment, an individual *learning plan* is created and *intensified support* is organised. Intensified support consist largely of the same type of means as general support, just that their intensity increases and multiple types of interventions are typically implemented simultaneously. The effectiveness of intensified support should be monitored systematically and the interventions adjusted according to the individual needs.

When intensified support fails to provide sufficient support for the pupil, a *pedagogical evaluation* is conducted in multiprofessional collaboration. The traditionally used psychological or medical statements can complement the pedagogical evaluation, and based on it, an official decision of starting *special support* can be made according to an *individual education plan*. Full-time special education always requires the official decision of special support. However, in the special support tier all the other means of support can also be used, only their intensity is further increased. Also at this stage, pupils are not placed in part-time or full-time small groups unless it is absolutely necessary. In some cases the official decision of special support can be made without first providing general and intensified support. This is possible only in sudden serious incidents or, more commonly, if an individual child's support needs are considered as extremely high and it is very unlikely that the lighter means of support would suffice. If this is the situation, the child has usually needed a lot of support also in the daycare and pre-school.

### 1.2. Student welfare work in schools

Student welfare refers to a multiprofessional support system, which is different in each country – even in the Nordic Countries, which have otherwise a relatively similar history of comprehensive schools (Antikainen, 2006; Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006). In Finland, the term *student welfare* is understood broadly as covering much of the non-teaching-related work

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/356859>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/356859>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)