



LET'S READ TOGETHER –project

Period 2007-2010

Final Report

English edition
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD

SUMMARY

1. INTEGRATION AND KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN
2. AIM OF LET'S READ TOGETHER –PROJECT
3. BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT
4. BEGINNING AND ORGANIZATION OF THE PROJECT
5. LOCAL COOPERATION – SUPPORT FOR THE PROJECT
6. TRAINING OF THE TEACHERS
7. FINANCING
8. MANAGEMENT, FOLLOW-UP AND REPORTING
9. SCOPE OF THE PROJECT
 - 9.1. Work in different areas
 - 9.2. Number of students and teachers
 - 9.3. Number of lessons
10. STUDENTS
11. TEACHERS
12. METHODS OF TEACHING
13. LEARNING PREMISES AND ORGANIZATION
14. LEARNING RESULTS
 - 14.1. Assessments by teachers

14.2. Feedback from students

15. PUBLIC RELATIONS – RECEIVED SUPPORT AND IMPACT

16. INTERNAL EVALUATION AND NEEDS FOR DEVELOPMENT

16.1. Challenges of teaching groups

16.2. Needs for development of the project

17. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

FOREWORD

The role of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is constantly growing in the function of the civil society. They can, at their best, support and complement the work of the official authorities. The importance of the NGOs is well reflected in the joint Let's Read Together -project of UN Women in Finland and Zonta International District 20.

The background of the project lies in the teaching of reading of Finnish, organized by members of a Local Un Women association in Vantaa, Helsinki Metropolitan Area, to immigrant women who could not, perhaps, read or write even in their own language. Action according to this model has now spread over whole Finland. The country-wide project was made possible by the collection of financial resources in the Zonta International District 20 Yellow Rose Campaign. The members of the organizations act as voluntary teachers and, thus, it has been possible to use the financial resources in the purchase of study books and in the annual seminars for the teachers.

In the discussion of immigration, the work done at the grass roots level is often forgotten. I believe that both the teachers and the students in the study groups have gained a lot also personally. We have been able to help our fellow sisters in their daily life and to open the doors to the Finnish society.

Our project has received a price of the YWCA, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs has supported our activities. The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra supported financially the printing of the final report. The experiences gained in the project are utilized in the recently initiated Women's Mentor Network WOMENTO, which aims at the promotion of the position of the educated immigrant women in Finland.

A broad collaboration of different organizations has grown from a small beginning. During the period of 2011-2012, the Let's Read Together -project is supported by the Finnish Cultural Foundation, and the lead of the project is taken by the Finnish Federation of University Women. UN Women in Finland and Zonta International District 20 remain as collaborating partners. Work in the learning groups continues in the previous way.

I would like to thank all students and teachers as well as all other persons and official bodies who have participated in and given support to the project. We have learned to become conscious and to understand questions – sometimes difficult – related to migration. Of the members of the Steering Committee especially Raija Kalimo, Ulla Salonen and Marja Liisa Toivanen have carried a great responsibility, for which warm thanks are presented to them.

In Helsinki, 14 February, the Day of Valentine, 2011

Helena Ranta, Professor

Let's Read Together –project

Chairperson of the Steering Committee 2007-2010



LET'S READ TOGETHER –project

Period 2007-2010

English edition of Final Report

Editor: Raija Kalimo, Project Coordinator

www.luetaanyhdessa.fi

SUMMARY

The development of the reading and writing skills in the Finnish language of the immigrant women and girls was started as a joint project of UN Women in Finland and Zonta International District 20 in 2007. At the same time this was the Yellow Rose Campaign of Zonta District 20 in 2007-2010.

The aim was to teach Finnish or (in some areas) Swedish language to illiterate or partially literate women and girls. It had been noted that certain immigrant groups, e.g. mothers of small children and elderly women remained often without training. The aim was also to promote the overall integration of the immigrant women in the Finnish society.

The action spread quickly around Finland. Teaching groups were formed in 27 regions, in many of them several groups. There were 237 participating teachers and 706 students in the second semester of 2010. The total number of lessons given by the end of 2010 was 10179.

The project was financed for the most part with the funds collected by the zontians, and it was completed totally by voluntary work. The learning material was given totally or almost free to the students. Several seminars and workshops were organized for the teachers to support their work.

The project gained acknowledgements and support from both the governmental and community authorities. Cooperation with the authorities was frequent and productive. Voluntary work was done side by side also with other organizations. The project gained ample attention in the media.

There has been willingness to utilize the valuable information and experience gained during the project. Several cities, universities and other parties have invited representatives of the project as experts in the development and implementation of their own projects.

The most important achievement of the project is perhaps an increase of an overall understanding of the immigrant people and especially of a willingness to help these people to become equal members of the Finnish society. It has increased – for its part – the appreciation of voluntary work in the integration of the new members of the Finnish society. The public interest for the project may further generate social consideration of the role of the voluntary work done by the non-governmental organizations for the whole society.

Let's Read Together –project continues as a network with the support by the Finnish Cultural Foundation in 2011-2012. The lead was taken by the Finnish Federation of University Women, while UN Women in Finland and Zonta International District 20 remain as partners.



1. INTEGRATION AND KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN

One of the prerequisites of integration of the immigrant people in a society is a functional capability of the local language. Actions for integration aim at the prevention of social and cultural problems and at the improvement of the possibilities to cope independently in the country. The ongoing revision of the legislation of integration aims at improving the actions further.

Finland receives different kinds of immigrant groups: on the basis of family ties, to work, to study, and refugees. According to the estimates, a few hundreds of illiterate persons are among them annually, a majority of them women. Slightly more than a half of the immigrant women belong to the labour force. The integration of a person who comes to the country on the basis of a family tie is usually under the responsibility of the spouse.

The society organizes to the immigrant people training which involves language studies and learning about the society. There are, however, large differences among the immigrant groups in their language skills and qualifications for study and adoption of the local language. Women have fewer possibilities for language studies than men. Their basic education is lower and their more limited experience from studying reduces their possibilities for the participation in public language training. Their participation is limited also by family reasons, especially the care of children and sometimes also issues related to women's role in their own culture. Thus, many immigrant women do not have a possibility to participate in the training offered by the society to promote integration. Literacy of women is, however, crucial for their own coping and one of the cornerstones of the well-being of the family.

The attention paid to the needs of language training as a part of integration is increasing. The Finnish and Swedish Cultural Foundations jointly with governmental bodies launched a project called Participative Integration in Finland, implemented by a provisional law. The aim is to promote holistically the integration of immigrants. The programme gives many opportunities for improving women's position, for instance by supporting the language studies of the parents of small children.

2. AIM OF LET'S READ TOGETHER –PROJECT

UN Women in Finland and Zonta International District 20 initiated in 2007 a project to improve the reading and writing skills of the immigrant women. The aim was to give

training of Finnish or (in some areas) Swedish language for immigrant women and girls who were totally illiterate or whose knowledge of Finnish language was poor. The purpose was to complement the official activities of the authorities with voluntary work. Those women who remained outside the public training systems because of their own limited qualifications of study or because of family and cultural reasons were the special target group. They were especially mothers of small children and elderly women. The project activities were, however, kept open also to other immigrant women, for instance to those who wanted complementary training along their other studies. Furthermore, the aim was to promote the overall integration of the immigrant women into the Finnish society.

3. BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

A group of retired teachers who were members of the local UN Women association in Vantaa, Helsinki Metropolitan Area, started training of Finnish language for the immigrant women in 2004. The District meeting of Zonta International District 20 decided in its turn in 2007 to take the language training of the immigrant women as the target of its Yellow Rose campaign. After this the two organizations combined their forces and started a joint project, called Let's Read Together for 2007-2010.

4. BEGINNING AND ORGANIZATION OF THE PROJECT

The beginning of voluntary work for the project was based on the initiative of the members of local Zonta clubs and UN Women associations. A training seminar was organized as a common starting point in the autumn of 2007, where women who were interested in the participation in the teaching were invited.

Organization of the teaching started thereafter in many localities. It was obvious right from the beginning that learning should take place in small groups because of the needs of the participants. Teachers organized themselves locally and searched premises and other prerequisites for the meeting of the groups.

The teachers cooperated with local authorities and educational organizations in order to get meeting places and to inform target groups. The local authorities of employment, immigration and education as well as congregations and various associations were involved in helping to get started. Information leaflets were circulated also via health centres and the announcement boards of the shops.

The groups nominated a regional contact teacher, who took care of internal information and connections with the Steering Committee and other bodies.

After the initial starting seminar five other country-wide seminars and several regional workshops were organized for the training of the teachers and for the exchange of information and experiences.

The Project had also an Internet site (www.luetaanyhdessa.fi). The internal pages included e.g. teaching materials, instructions and reports.

5. LOCAL COOPERATION – SUPPORT FOR THE PROJECT

The implementation of the project was crucially dependent on the cooperation at the local level. On this basis the meeting places were mostly obtained without pay. A contact with immigration or other local officials was often a starting point in the beginning of the training groups, and these connections were often continuous. The groups convened in many areas in local multicultural centres, where they received various kinds of help including information about possible students. They also offered premises for language learning in practical situations, e.g. kitchens.

In some places important connections were made with educational authorities, and the teachers of the project acted sometimes as additional teachers in their courses. University students acted as teachers in some cities and they received study points on the basis of their teaching in the groups. In some other places public social and health care officials had a central role e.g. in introducing students in the groups. The libraries and congregations offered also premises and information services for the groups. As a whole the connections with local authorities and other bodies were active, multi faceted and fruitful.

It can be stated that in addition to the acquisition of the language, the learning groups promoted the integration of the immigrant women also in a broader sense. This was indicated by a general positive attitude in the regions and certain special attentions were also received. In one city the Let's Read Together –project was accepted as a part of the general plan of integration.

6. TRAINING OF TEACHERS

Country-wide seminars were organized for the teachers once or two times per year. The seminars were open to all teachers and their participation rate ranged from 60 in the beginning to about 150 later on. Among the lecturers were experts of various aspects of immigration and teaching and learning of language, representatives of officials of immigration and other related fields, participating students or other immigrated women, and teachers of the project. Exchange of experiences of the teachers in the groups was an important part of the seminars. The travel costs to the seminars and the meals during them were covered by the project funds.

A number of local workshops were organized for the teachers in different regions for the exchange of experience and learning. Furthermore, individual Zonta clubs and local UN Women associations arranged their own meetings on teaching and learning of foreign language. All these events had a very important role in providing a platform for sharing of knowledge and information and for keeping up the spirit of the joint effort.

7. FINANCING

The project was financed primarily by the funds collected by Zonta District 20. The zontians let manufacture and then sold 40 000 safety reflectors to be carried around the arm or pinned on clothing. The funds were used mainly to cover the costs of the learning books and other materials of the students and the seminars of the teachers.

Altogether over 100 000 € were gained with the sale of the reflectors. This involves about 4 000 € collected by the Estonian members of Zonta District 20.

The project received a reward of 11 000 € from the YWCA for its work to promote the social involvement of women and girls, a grant of 2000 € from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and some small-scale donations.

Nearly a half of the funds, i.e. 45 600 € were used for the acquisition of the learning books, and 20 400 € for other learning materials for the groups. Altogether 33 800 € were used for the seminars.

As a whole roughly 90 % of the expenses were used to materials and seminars immediately related to the support of the teaching. Administrative costs were minor.

All teaching and other work was done on a voluntary basis without financial compensation. Meeting premises for the groups were received without pay with the help of local

authorities or other organizations. A possibility for e.g. free photocopying and information services were often included.

8. MANAGEMENT, FOLLOW-UP AND REPORTING

The project was guided by a Steering Committee, whose chairperson was Professor Helena Ranta (the chairperson of the then UNIFEM Finland and a Zontian) and vice chairperson Ulla Salonen, the project manager (a Zontian). The project was administered primarily by the project manager with the help of the coordinator, information manager and in some matters the office of UN Women in Finland. The Steering Committee involved also a treasurer and five other members.

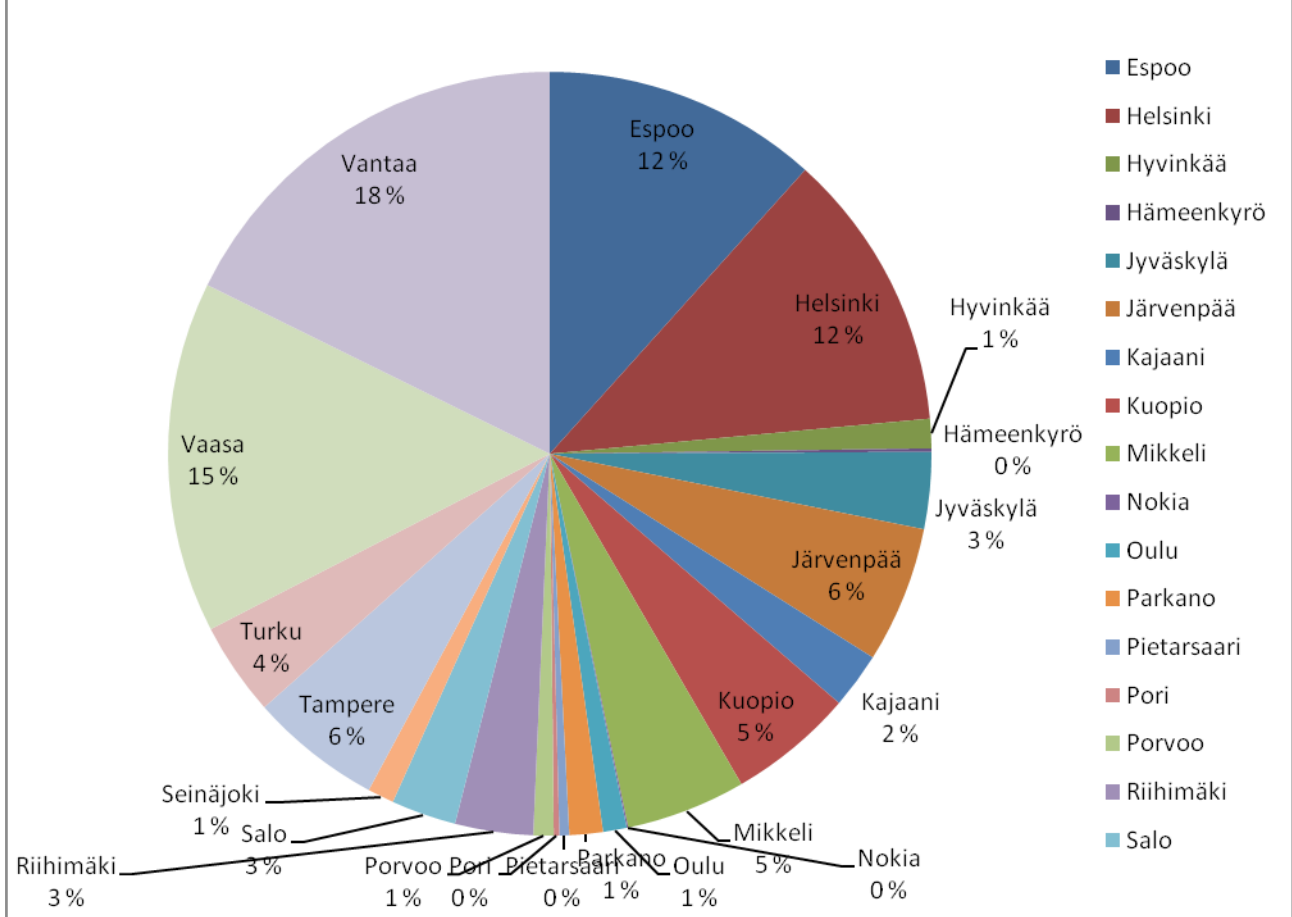
The learning groups reported on their work twice a year in May and in December. Overall reports were prepared on that basis.

9. SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

9.1. Work in different areas

The project expanded rapidly since the early 2008. New localities were continuously involved and new groups emerged in previous places, which meant increasing numbers of students and teachers. There were learning groups in altogether 27 locations around Finland and in many of them there were several groups. Thus the total number of groups was about 80, and since they started, many of them functioned during the whole project period, while some of them finished after a certain period of time. Most frequent action took place in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, where the number of immigrant people is the greatest. However, the project activities were quite dynamic in some smaller towns depending on the interest of the local teachers and authorities. (Figure 1)

**Figure 1. Distribution of students by area, %
2008 - 2010**

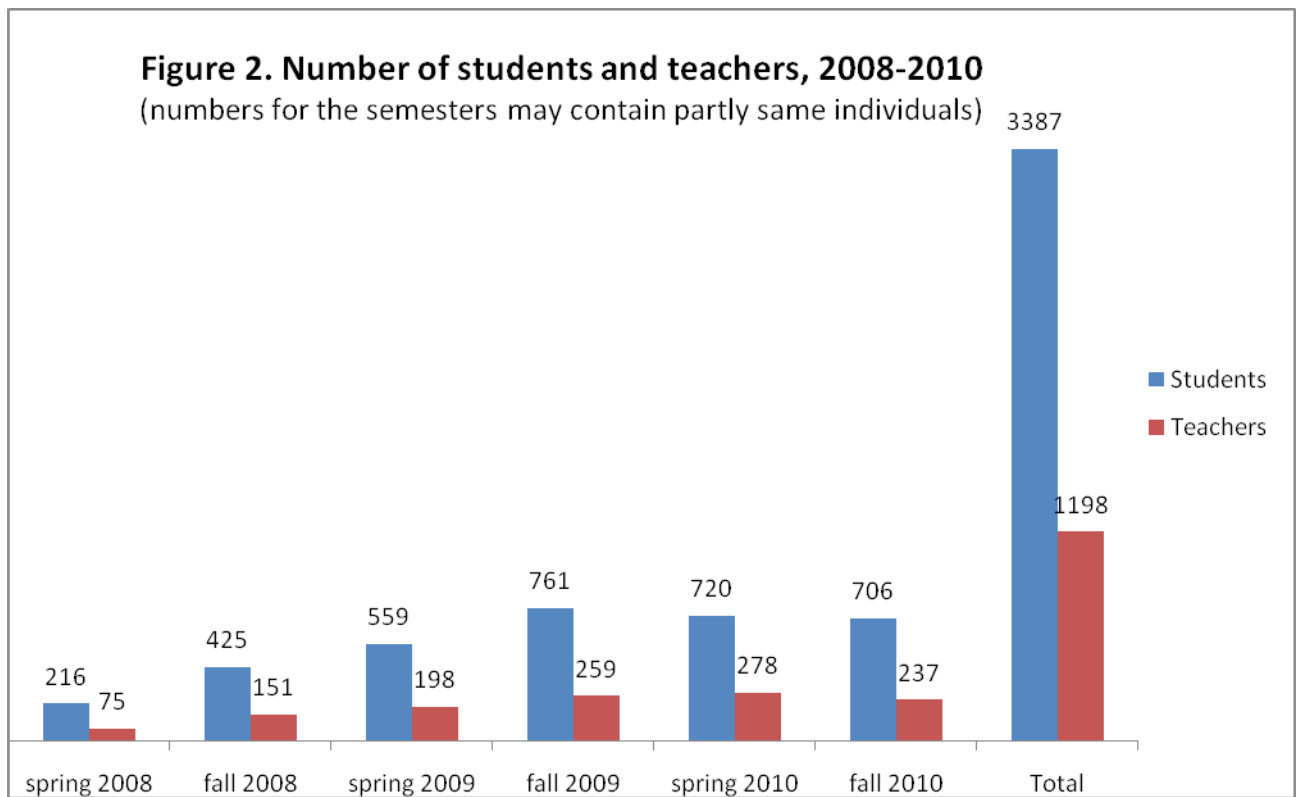


9.2. Number of students and teachers

The number of students participating during a semester grew from slightly over 200 in the beginning to 706 in the end of 2010 (Figure 2). At least two new groups were beginning at the end of 2010 indicating that the number of students was still rising. Altogether 3 387 students participated, when calculated by semester. Some students were involved during several semesters.

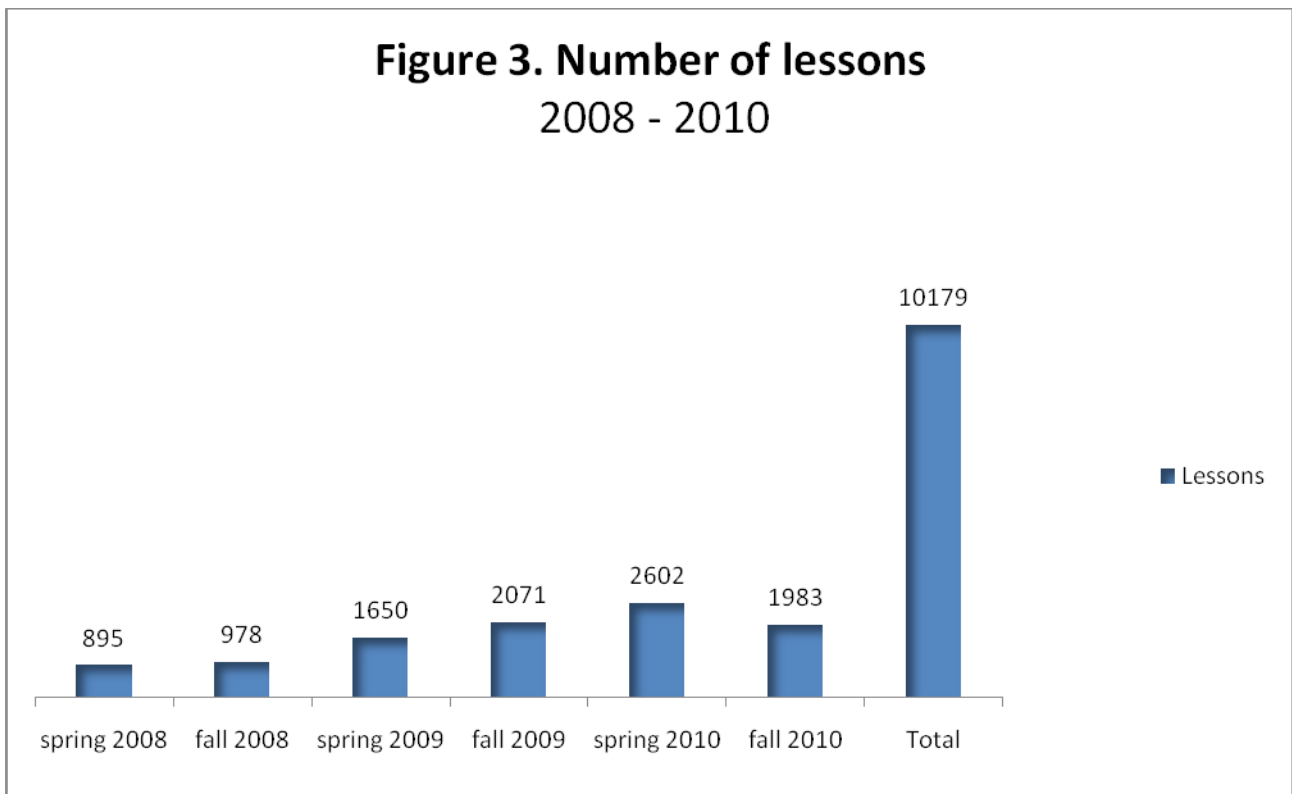
The number of teachers at the end of 2010 was 237. Also their number increased during the project, and 1 198 teachers were involved in all semesters together. Many of the teachers were involved during several semesters, as those who became involved, usually

remained for the rest of the project period. There were three students for one teacher on average.



9.3. Number of lessons

The number of lessons increased to almost fourfold since the beginning of 2008 (Figure 3).



Altogether, 10 179 lessons (á 45 minutes) were given to the groups during the whole project period. Taking into account that due to the heterogeneous groups usually at least two teachers, often even more were involved at the same time, teacher time input is at least double of the above number.

There was a decline of activity in the end of 2010 compared to the previous semester, because some activities were finished. There is also variation between the numbers of lessons during the semesters, because the spring semester is considerably longer than the autumn semester.

10. STUDENTS

Students came from all continents, but from Australia and North-America less than from others. Most students came from Africa, Asia, Near-East and East European countries. Some students joined the groups right after moving to Finland, while some others had lived here even for 20 years.

The differences between the levels of education of the students were very large. Some of them had no formal education, while some had a university degree. A considerable proportion of the students were not able to read and write even in their own language. A

few students took a pen in their hand the first time in their life. Western alphabet caused difficulties for many. However, quite a few communicated fairly fluently in Finnish.

The age range of the students was wide: the youngest were below 20, while there were some at least 70 years of age. Some men were involved in a few groups, and there was one group solely for men.

Most of the students participated regularly. However, absences were frequent among many of them. The absences were usually caused by duties related to child care of mothers of small children and by the health issues of their family members or their own. Commitment to the hours of the lessons was challenging to some students especially in the beginning. There were also students who came to a lesson only once or twice and left without explanation.

11. TEACHERS

Most of the teachers were retired former school teachers and members of Finnish UN Women or zontians. However, an increasing number of women from other fields and even still working women became involved. Participation of working women was limited because the lessons had to be organized mostly in day time because of the needs of the students. Almost all teachers were women, but a few men also participated.

12. METHODS OF TEACHING

Teaching was organized in small groups, usually two hours a week, sometimes more often. The students were often divided in sub groups according to the level of language, when there were several teachers available. It was quite common to give individual teaching especially to those representing extreme groups, i.e. for the least and for the most advantaged. Although individual teaching was much more common than in adult education in general, there was a still greater need for that.

A great flexibility was needed in the teaching methods. The methods applied can be roughly grouped for instance in the following way:

Structural, literary method. This corresponds to typical traditional learning, which proceeds from the basics to more demanding levels. Learning is based on the use of systematic text books. Learning proceeds from individual sounds to the structural aspects of language.

Use of concrete objects and equipment. Along and instead of books, various kinds of concrete objects are used especially for teaching those with minimum background in formal education. The aim is to learn the basic words of everyday life. In addition to the names of the objects, words related to their use are learned.

Functional learning. The learning of persons with minimum background is supported by the help of functions related to daily life. The groups go for instance to a shop or a library or cook together and learn related vocabulary and expressions.

Vocabulary of special fields. A deeper vocabulary is learned in certain areas of women's life, e.g. women's health in order to facilitate their visits to health care services.

Social involvement. Social interaction, doing things together and making friends, is combined to learning. The more advanced students give support for the beginners.

Cultural learning. This involves e.g. learning to know local customs, e.g. festival days of the year and related customs and vocabulary, as well as reading of local newspapers and discussion on issues of life in the neighbourhood. The students, in turn, describe their own culture by words, tools or behaviour, depending on their own skills.

13. LEARNING PREMISES AND ORGANIZATION

The groups convened in general in a premise offered by a local authority or an organization: a multicultural centre, a school, a library, a club room, etc. Quite a few teachers gave lessons also in their homes and some teachers went to the homes of the students to give individual lessons. It was essential to the students that the meeting places were easily accessible by foot or by public transportation. The teachers, in turn, travelled at times long distances and sometimes transported the students with them.

Small children were often with their mothers in the lessons. There were toys, books, paper and pens at their disposal. The mothers took themselves care of the entertainment of their children. In some places there was an organized care for the children during the lessons, but in all cases the responsibility of the child was on the mother. Beds for the children were available in some places.

A general experience was that children brought joy and amusement, although their presence necessitated at times additional measures.

14. LEARNING RESULTS

14.1. Assessments by teachers

Learning targets of the project were flexible. Formal criteria for the results were not defined, and examinations were not arranged. A certificate was given on the participation upon request.

The teachers assessed the progress of their students by criteria of their own and by using the assessment form available from the Internet pages of the project. Some of the students participated also in other courses at the same time, which made it difficult to assess the results of this project.

The teachers were asked to assess the learning results on the following scale at the end of two semesters of study. Some of the groups considered the assessment too difficult or presented descriptive information without specific figures. Teachers of groups in 17 locations had made assessments in the requested way, and they covered altogether 644 students.

How many students have	n	%
- made major progress	190	30
- made some progress	282	44
- made hardly any progress	79	12
- became employed or moved to more advanced studies	93	14
Total	644	100

The majority of the students had made some progress. Almost one third of them had made major progress and as those who had become employed or moved to more advanced studies may involve those who made major progress in the project groups, the impact of the project studies can be considered significant. Only 12 % made hardly any progress.

The students were in some groups asked to assess themselves their own progress. Their assessments were even more positive than those of the teachers. Even 90 % of them thought that they had progressed a lot or rather much.

The students who had a good basic education and who participated regularly in the lessons made best results. When motivation was high and qualifications for learning good, an initially illiterate person could learn to read even in one semester. Orientation towards working life had also a motivating potential. These kinds of success stories were, however, not very common. Most students proceeded, instead, more slowly.

Some students were able to improve their language skills enough to get a job. Some started studies to pass the primary school exams. Some could enter to courses organized by the employment authorities.

Many of the students who made hardly any progress were such who dropped in the lessons irregularly only every now and then and/or were fully illiterate in the beginning. Additional factors contributing to a lack of resources for studying were social insecurity, tiredness, worries about own life situation and health problems in the family.

In the assessment of the results of the learning groups, also those achievements are crucial which are related to women's life in Finland in general. It was seen that participation in the learning groups gave experiences of success and thus increased the women's self confidence and security. According to the teachers the lessons gave to the students a structure for the week, and for many students the lessons were clearly therapeutic experiences. The students also received many kinds of practical information and learned useful skills for coping in the society. Thus, in addition to specific linguistic skills, the so called cultural reading skills, i.e. social and cultural aspects of the language, were developed.

Prerequisites of success in the learning groups

The teachers characterized in their reports things that they considered important for learning:

- multifaceted teaching methods
- individual approach
- concrete and practical contents
- flexibility
- encouraging targets of learning
- safe atmosphere, motivation and encouragement
- interactive attitude
- easy accessibility

14.2. Feedback from students

The attitude of the students towards studying was mostly enthusiastic and positive. They expressed their gratitude for the friendly attitude of the teachers and appreciated the work done for them. Many students would have liked to have more lessons. Students were also dropping out from the groups after a shorter or a longer period. If reasons for that could be identified, they were usually not related to the groups but to some external factors such as entrance to more intensive language studies, employment or commuting problems to the group sites. However, there were also students who just dropped out suddenly and in their cases the reasons for this could not be found out.

The interest and gratitude expressed by the students was experienced by the teachers as a sufficient reward for their work, although it was often quite challenging. The experiences

of many teachers can be crystallized by a quotation from the report of one teacher: “This work enriches my own life: I get a lot of joy and new experiences via them. I do not regret any single moment of being engaged in this project.”

15. PUBLIC RELATIONS - RECEIVED SUPPORT AND IMPACT

The social impact of the project increased considerably over the years. The teachers were gaining the role as experts on the issues related to the integration of those immigrant women who are often not reached by the authorities. This knowledge and experience has been utilized in many occasions.

The members of the Steering Committee made frequent visits to the ministries, including those of internal affairs, employment, and education, meeting ministers and other high officials and informing them about the project. Several ministers participated as speakers in the seminars organized by the project for its teachers. This gave a possibility to increase the awareness of the authorities about the needs among the particular groups of immigrant women and about the impact of the project among them. Corresponding visits were made to local authorities.

The Let’s Read Together -project was involved in the planning of a country-wide program by the authorities of several social sectors aiming at an improved integration of the immigrant people. Language acquisition and the special needs of the parents of small children belong to the point of focus. The program will finance local projects upon application. The Let’s Read Together -project is integrated in some of the local plans. Contributions have been made also to many other project plans of communal bodies and various organizations. The representatives of the project have been invited to be heard for increasing the awareness of various key groups, including the members of the Parliament.

The teachers and students of the project have been interviewed by many local and national newspapers and periodicals and the project has received attention also in TV and radio. This gave visibility and helped for its part women to become students in the groups.

16. INTERNAL EVALUATION AND NEEDS FOR DEVELOPMENT

16.1. Challenges of teaching groups

The teachers evaluated in their two annual reports the activities of their groups as a whole as well as the project as a whole and presented their views for the development of the project. Clear problems were not many, but many challenges were experienced in the teaching of the groups. The following belonged to the main challenges:

- heterogeneous groups: “it is difficult to plan and run action in which the weakest can manage and the advanced are not bored”
- irregular participation: how to make everybody committed to the regular schedule?
- how to teach Finnish when there is no common language or no experience from studying?
- presence of children in the lessons: positive as such, but how to create possibility for concentration for the mother and a peaceful environment of study for the others?
- enormous need for support: how to be able to offer enough support for somebody unused to study, fearful or depressed?

16.2. Needs for the development of the project

The teachers were asked to evaluate in their reports the project as a whole and more specifically such aspects as the support given by the project management for the local action, the information within the project, and the training of the teachers.

Most of the teachers were experienced former school teachers or other professionals, who were used to plan and organize their work independently. Therefore, the need for support from the project organization in these matters was minimal except at the starting phase. The group reports were carefully prepared twice a year, but evaluation of the learning results was considered difficult because of many contributing factors, and all teachers did not do it.

The opinions regarding the available learning material differed. In spite of a great variety of books, some weaknesses were found in their supply. Many teachers emphasized a need for material that would be specifically related to the practical daily life of immigrant women.

The training seminars and workshops were considered important both for the development of skills for running the groups and teaching as well as for the exchange of information between the groups and specifically about their best practices. Even more training would have been wanted specifically on practical teaching methods and

knowledge of the special situations encountered, when teaching women with foreign origin and culture. There was also a need for more knowledge on the general issues related to integration and culture, including Finnish legislation.

The teachers brought also up ideas for new kinds of utilization of the Internet as a channel of communication and training.

Many teachers saw that the project organization should be active in pushing the social authorities to organize training on the functions of Finnish society and culture to immigrant women. It was seen that this kind of general knowledge and awareness of the society would serve also the purpose of learning the language.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Let's Read Together –project was a broad-scale undertaking implemented by two voluntary organizations, whose aim was to carry out bravely and strongly practical work for helping the immigrant women and girls to become equal members of the Finnish society. The purpose was to support their integration by helping them to develop their reading and writing skills of the local languages.

The project was based on the values and principles of two women's organizations, UN Women and Zonta International as well as on the help, skilfulness, enthusiasm and mutual cooperation of the individuals. The project is a sign of a possibility to create broadly reaching action with minimum bureaucracy and small costs as a joint cooperation of the women's associations.

Benefits gained by students

According to the teachers' assessments the language skills developed considerably among almost one third of the participants and to a certain extent among nearly one half. This means that the conditions for integration in a central area were improved for several hundred women annually. The significance of this result is especially important, because this concerns such groups of women whose majority would not have had possibilities for the training offered by the formal authorities. The learning groups opened totally new views for life. It may be difficult for a European woman to understand, how remarkable event it is for an adult woman to possess the first book in her life.

In addition to language skills the participating women gained information and knowledge about Finnish society and culture as well as about many more specific areas such as health and child care, schools, possibilities for hobbies etc. at the same time when they learned corresponding vocabulary. As language learning was integrated into practice, the women learned also useful practical skills such as cooking and contacting the authorities.

Feasible organization

A key factor in achieving the goals of the project were the professionally qualified teachers, who had the capacity to develop and apply creatively and flexibly the individual and group methods of teaching at times even in extremely heterogeneous groups of students.

A characteristic feature which differentiates the functions of the project from many other learning environments was the mutual cooperation and exchange between the teachers and the participating women. The participants brought their own cultural experiences into the groups. It is remarkable, how often the teachers and students who came from totally different circles of life ended up into cooperation that created friendship relations and even contacts with the families. One of the teachers wrote: "The teachers have learned a lot about multicultural work and many of us look at the world with new eyes."

The success of the project was most probably promoted also by its simple and functional organization. Looking backwards it was probably fruitful that the network grew gradually. A small start in a few areas only convinced that results can be achieved even with small resources. This gave basis for the gradual expansion of the project. This kind of approach allowed also the development of local models of action according to the resources and interests of various places.

Social impact

In addition to the improvement of the resources of the participating women, the project had obvious social impact. When the mother of a family learns local language and local rules and ways of living, her role in the family expands as well. She learns to appreciate also the importance of the education of her daughters. This way the opportunities of the girls to conduct studies will gradually improve. According to a previous study, the learning of the mothers predicts improvements of the position of women in Finland in the long run.

One factor that limits the learning opportunities of the local language in Finland and probably also elsewhere is that information of the available possibilities does not reach all those in need. The rules and legislation protecting intimacy and consecutive lack of contact information limit possibilities for targeted approach. Innovative means are needed in the type of projects as Let's Read Together to pass the information to the women most in need for this kind of support.

Significance of voluntary work

One of the most important outcomes of the project is perhaps its impact on the broadening of the overall understanding for the immigrant people and more specifically an urge to get these women and girls as equal members of the society.

This project has increased awareness of the importance of the voluntary work done in the third sector. It has been emphasized that there is a risk that the so called Nordic welfare society will start to degenerate without the strong input of the third sector. In these kinds of discussions reference has often been made to Let's Read Together –project as an example of a well organized and systematically implemented undertaking.

Recognition received

The project received frequent acknowledgements and also support from both the governmental and local authorities. Voluntary work was done in a good spirit in collaboration with different sectors of public administration.

Several cities and universities showed their recognition by inviting the representatives of the project as experts in planning their own projects. There has been an obvious willingness to use the valuable information and experience available from the project in many kinds of situations.

Action and discussion continue

The outcomes and reception of the project in the country showed that it cannot be finished according to the original plan but, instead, it should be continued. Resources for an extended period of two years, i.e. until the end of 2012 have been acquired. The project adopted the name of Let's Read Together –network for years 2011-12 and Finnish Federation of University Women took over the lead of the project. UN Women in Finland and Zonta International District 20 remained as partners.

Steering Committee of Let's Read Together –project in 2007-2010

Helena Ranta, Chairperson

Ulla Salonen Vice Chairperson, Project Manager

Mirja Jarimo-Lehtinen

Anne Jokipii, Treasurer 2007-2009

Raija Kalimo, Project Coordinator

Elina Multanen

Tellervo Mäkelä, Treasurer 2010

Terhi Nieminen-Mäkynen

Raili Rauvala

Riitta Sivenius, Information Manager

Marja Liisa Toivanen