



Book Review of Ahlholm, Maria, Piippo, Irina and Portaankorva-Koivisto, Päivi (Eds.) 2023. *Vastasaapuneet Luokkahuoneissa: Ikkunoita Valmistavaan Opetukseen Ja Monikieliseen Kouluun*. Tampere: Vastapaino, 376 pp.

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BOOK REVIEW

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The book *Vastasaapuneet luokkahuoneissa* [*Newly Arrived Students in Classrooms: Insights into Preparatory Education and Multilingual Schools*] delves into the themes of language acquisition among newly arrived migrant children, young people and adults. It comprises 13 peer-reviewed chapters as well as four short introductory texts on educational policy and four short texts that provide examples of everyday language pedagogy in classrooms. The book is edited by Maria Ahlholm, Irina Piippo and Päivi Portaankorva-Koivisto, who have also authored several chapters within the volume. Contributors to this book are eminent scholars in the field of language pedagogy and teachers with extensive experience in teaching Finnish, either in comprehensive school or in education targeted for adult migrants. Thus, the book combines theoretical insights and understanding of language instruction with practical experience from day-to-day engagement with newly arrived students.

In this book, ‘newly arrived’ refers to individuals who have been living in Finland for less than 4 years and who are, therefore, in the initial stages of learning the Finnish language. Most of the chapters presented in this book are based on the results of two research projects involving newly arrived children and young people in preparatory education that typically lasts for one school year and aims to provide students with necessary skills in Finnish (or Swedish) to integrate them into primary or lower secondary education (15–17). In addition, some chapters draw on data from other settings, such as basic education for adults. The book presents new insights into language teaching and learning of newly arrived migrants in Finland. An ethnographically oriented approach in many of the chapters sheds light on what happens in classrooms where language learners of all ages and diverse backgrounds learn Finnish – a language that stands out in its divergence from most languages spoken in Europe or in the countries of origin of most migrants. Consequently, the editors Ahlholm, Piippo and Portaankorva-Koivisto highlight that, although multilingualism is a global phenomenon and has been widely studied internationally, the specific characteristics of the target language and the context in which language learning takes place must be considered (11). Indeed, research on education of newly arrived students is still sparse in the Nordic countries

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([Helakorpi et al. 2023](#)), and there is a growing demand for knowledge on how Finnish can be taught and acquired in classrooms as well as how social inclusion of newly arrived migrants can be promoted.

The book is divided into four sections. The chapters in the first section concentrate on the societal and research contexts of Finnish language teaching and learning. They review previous research in the field and outline the challenges faced by educators and newly arrived migrants during the initial stages of language learning. The strength of this section is that it clearly describes the Finnish context and explains the importance of producing new knowledge on the topic. The second section assembles research on socialization into a new language. The chapters in this section focus on student–student and student–teacher interactions, along with language pedagogy in classroom settings. The overarching theme of the third section is multilingual mathematics, and the chapters in this section examine interactions and practices in mathematics classrooms. This section consists of five chapters, thus being the most extensive section of the book. The fourth section is the shortest, presenting only one chapter that addresses issues of social justice within multilingual schools and in society more broadly.

The backgrounds of newly arrived children, young people and adults are heterogeneous, ranging from highly educated professionals to those with no prior experience of institutional education. In this sense, Chapter 6 of this book, authored by Irina Piippo and Sanna Markkanen, is eye-opening: Some of the newly arrived adults cannot read in their first language. In Finland, they simultaneously learn a new language *and* how to read, the latter for the first time in their lives. To learn the language of the new country of residence is vital, especially in a text-based society such as Finland, although the question also concerns how we can support the various needs of all newly arrived individuals, ensuring that they feel included in society and are able to contribute to it. Significantly, Chapter 13, authored by Anna-Leena Riitaoja and Irina Piippo, considers the societal context of newly arrived migrants and how issues of social (in)justice relate to language learning and the often unequal positions migrants and other minorities hold within Finnish society (see also [Helakorpi et al. 2023](#)).

Moreover, the issue of teacher qualifications is raised in one of the shorter texts on education policy. The authors Jenni Alisaari and Heli Vigren point out that there are no official qualification requirements for teachers teaching in preparatory education classes (57–60). It is noteworthy that this absence of requirements also extends to integration training for adult migrants ([Ruuskanen & Väänänen 2022](#)). The lack of teacher qualification standards in education for migrants raises concerns regarding educational equality: Newly arrived children, young people and adults deserve instruction from qualified teachers and access to effective language teaching. The legislation and policies within the Finnish education system should support this by ensuring that teachers in all educational institutions and across municipalities possess the necessary skills and qualifications.

Overall, the book addresses many significant issues related to teaching of newly arrived migrant students. Its intended audience encompasses class and subject teachers, student teachers, educational planners and researchers. Given the diverse educational backgrounds of these groups, it can be presumed that their knowledge about language teaching varies as well. Some chapters employ a broad range of linguistic concepts that may be challenging for readers not versed in the field, while others are crafted to be accessible to a broader audience. When reading the book,

this can sometimes lead to confusion, as some chapters include detailed academic descriptions of data and results, while others almost oversimplify the language and bypass important concepts: For example, one of the central themes in Chapter 13 is intersectionality, but the concept is only mentioned in a footnote. Moreover, some readers might be interested in a more detailed description and elaboration of ethnography as a research method. Consequently, the entire volume may not cater to all its target readers, making it necessary for them to select the chapters that most closely align with their needs. However, all chapters and shorter texts may stimulate thinking and provide food for thought for all readers, regardless of their prior experience or knowledge on Finnish language teaching and learning, or the societal context of newly arrived migrants.

The book is plentiful in information, but its overall composition could have been considered more carefully. First, since several concepts such as translanguaging and multimodality recur in many chapters, an index would have helped readers to find places where a specific concept appears. Second, there are overlapping themes and repetition across chapters, particularly in the third section that focuses on mathematics in multilingual classrooms. Third, the central role of mathematics in this book raises questions, even though the editors explain this deliberate emphasis in Chapter 1 by stating that fairly many lessons are allocated to mathematics in basic education and that mathematics is not only about numbers and symbols; it also requires linguistic skills (25). Yet, there are many other subjects in school, such as history, biology and geography, in which conceptual knowledge and understanding is of importance. In this book, only one of the shorter texts touches upon approaches that can be used to support simultaneous language and content learning in different subjects (67–71). Good practices in mathematics can certainly be applied to other subjects, and the chapters especially in this section emphasise the importance of multilingualism and translanguaging; that is, language learners' own languages must be seen as a resource, not a hindrance to language learning. However, insights into language teaching across subjects would have provided more practical tools particularly for class teachers and teachers in preparatory education who teach a broad range of subjects.

To sum up, the book *Vastasaapuneet luokkahuoneissa* is an important contribution to the field of language pedagogy and education. It provides theoretical insights into and practical examples of language teaching and learning of newly arrived migrants in Finland. New and effective practices for teaching and learning Finnish are undoubtedly welcomed at all levels of the educational system. Moreover, the book contributes to migration studies by considering the societal context of language learning and highlighting issues of social justice. Certainly, newly arrived migrants need opportunities for effective language instruction, but it is not enough: We must be aware of discriminatory practices in Finnish society to promote equality in education and other aspects of life.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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