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**Proactive and Preventive Student Welfare Activities
in Finnish Preschool and Elementary School:
Handling of Transition to Formal Schooling and
a National Anti-Bullying Program as Examples**

by

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*Huomispäivän koululaisille,
erityisesti Hertalle ja Oivalle*

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ABSTRACT

Prerequisites and effects of proactive and preventive psycho-social student welfare activities in Finnish preschool and elementary school were of interest in the present thesis. So far, Finnish student welfare work has mainly focused on interventions and individuals, and the voluminous possibilities to enhance well-being of all students as a part of everyday school work have not been fully exploited.

Consequently, in this thesis three goals were set: (1) To present concrete examples of proactive and preventive psycho-social student welfare activities in Finnish basic education; (2) To investigate measurable positive effects of proactive and preventive activities; and (3) To investigate implementation of proactive and preventive activities in ecological contexts. Two prominent phenomena in preschool and elementary school years—transition to formal schooling and school bullying—were chosen as examples of critical situations that are appropriate targets for proactive and preventive psycho-social student welfare activities. Until lately, the procedures concerning both school transitions and school bullying have been rather problem-focused and reactive in nature.

Theoretically, we lean on the bioecological model of development by Bronfenbrenner and Morris with concentric micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems. Data were drawn from two large-scale research projects, the longitudinal First Steps Study: Interactive Learning in the Child–Parent–Teacher Triangle, and the Evaluation Study of the National Antibullying Program KiVa.

In Study I, we found that the academic skills of children from preschool–elementary school pairs that implemented several supportive activities during the preschool year developed more quickly from preschool to Grade 1 compared with the skills of children from pairs that used fewer practices. In Study II, we focused on possible effects of proactive and preventive actions on teachers and found that participation in the KiVa antibullying program influenced teachers' self-evaluated competence to tackle bullying. In Studies III and IV, we investigated factors that affect

implementation rate of these proactive and preventive actions. In Study III, we found that principal's commitment and support for antibullying work has a clear-cut positive effect on implementation adherence of student lessons of the KiVa antibullying program. The more teachers experience support for and commitment to anti-bullying work from their principal, the more they report having covered KiVa student lessons and topics. In Study IV, we wanted to find out why some schools implement several useful and inexpensive transition practices, whereas other schools use only a few of them. We were interested in broadening the scope and looking at local-level (exosystem) qualities, and, in fact, the local-level activities and guidelines, along with teacher-reported importance of the transition practices, were the only factors significantly associated with the implementation rate of transition practices between elementary schools and partner preschools. Teacher- and school-level factors available in this study turned out to be mostly not significant.

To summarize, the results confirm that school-based promotion and prevention activities may have beneficial effects not only on students but also on teachers. Second, various top-down processes, such as engagement at the level of elementary school principals or local administration may enhance implementation of these beneficial activities. The main message is that when aiming to support the lives of children the primary focus should be on adults. In future, promotion of psychosocial well-being and the intrinsic value of inter- and intrapersonal skills need to be strengthened in the Finnish educational systems. Future research efforts in student welfare and school psychology, as well as focused training for psychologists in educational contexts, should be encouraged in the departments of psychology and education in Finnish universities. Moreover, a specific research centre for school health and well-being should be established.

Hyvinvointia edistävä ja ongelmia ennaltaehkäisevä oppilashuoltotyö esi- ja perusopetuksessa. Esimerkkeinä nivelvaiheen yhteistyö ja KiVa Koulu -toimenpideohjelma

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tässä väitöskirjatyössä tutkittiin hyvinvointia edistävän ja ongelmia ennaltaehkäisevän oppilashuoltotyön vaikutuksia ja ennakkoehtoja suomalaisessa esi- ja perusopetuksessa. Lainsäädännön ja opetussuunnitelmien perusteiden linjauksista huolimatta esi- ja perusopetuksen oppilashuoltotyö on tähän saakka ollut melko yksilö- ja ongelmakeskeistä, ja mahdollisuutta edistää kaikkien koululaisten hyvää oppimista ja hyvinvointia osana koulun arkea ei ole hyödynnetty riittävästi.

Tämän työn tavoitteina oli: (1) Tarjota konkreettisia esimerkkejä siitä, mitä hyvinvointia edistävä ja ongelmia ennaltaehkäisevä oppilashuoltotyö on. (2) Tutkia tämän työn mahdollisia myönteisiä vaikutuksia. (3) Tutkia hyvinvointia edistävän ja ongelmia ennaltaehkäisevän oppilashuoltotyön toteutumiseen vaikuttavia tekijöitä esi- ja perusopetuksen ekologisessa kontekstissa. Tutkittaviksi ilmiöiksi valittiin peruskoulun aloittaminen sekä koulukiusaaminen, joihin on aiemmin puututtu lähinnä ongelmakeskeisesti arvioimalla koulutulokkaiden kouluvalmiutta ja puuttamalla ilmenneisiin kiusaamistapauksiin. Koska koulun aloittaminen sekä toverisuhteet ja ryhmäilmiöt koskevat koko ikäluokkaa, hyödyllisempää olisi pohtia jo ennalta, miten niiden onnistumista voidaan tukea kaikkien lasten kohdalla.

Tutkimuksen teoreettisena taustana on Bronfenbrennerin ja Morrisin bioekologinen kehitysteoria, joka perustuu sisäkkäisille konteksteille, mikro-, meso-, ekso- ja makrosysteemeille. Tutkimus on osa kahta mittavaa hanketta, Alkuportaat-pitkittäistutkimusta sekä KiVa Koulu, kiusaamisen vastainen toimenpideohjelma -vaikuttavuustutkimusta.

Tutkimuksen ensimmäisessä osatyössä havaittiin, että kun esikoulu ja alkuopetus tekivät esikouluvuoden aikana runsaasti nivelvaiheyhteistyötä, oppilaiden akateemiset taidot kehittyivät 1. luokan aikana nopeammin. Toisessa osatyössä tutkittiin hyvinvointia edistävän ja ongelmia ennaltaehkäisevän työn vaikutuksia opettajiin ja havaittiin, että osallistuminen KiVa Koulu -ohjelmaan vaikutti opettajan itsearvioituihin valmiuksiin tarttua kiusaamiseen. Kolmas ja neljäs

osatyö keskittyivät tarkastelemaan, mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat hyvinvointia edistävien ja ongelmia ennaltaehkäisevien toimenpiteiden toteutumiseen kouluissa. Kolmannessa osatyössä osoitimme, että rehtorin sitoutuminen KiVa Koulu -toimenpideohjelmaan vaikutti myönteisesti siihen, miten aktiivisesti opettajat pitivät ohjelmaan kuuluvia ennaltaehkäiseviä oppitunteja. Kun opettajat kokivat rehtorin olevan sitoutunut kiusaamisen vastaiseen työhön ja saavansa häneltä tukea, he pitivät enemmän oppitunteja ja käsitelivät tunneilla enemmän aiheita. Neljännessä osatyössä selvitimme, miksi kustannustehokasta nivelvaiheen yhteistyötä tehdään joissain kouluissa enemmän kuin muissa. Näkökulma oli erityisesti kuntatason toiminnassa, ja pystyimme osoittamaan, että kahden kunnan väliltä löytyi merkittävämpiä eroja kuin koulujen tai yksittäisten opettajien väliltä. Toisessa tutkimuskunnassa nivelvaiheen yhteistyön kehittämiseen oli systemaattisesti panostettu esiopetuksen ja perusopetuksen hallinnon tasolla. Myös yksittäisten opettajien arvio nivelvaiheyhteistyön tärkeydestä oli yhteydessä heidän ilmoittamaansa nivelvaiheyhteistyön määrään.

Yhteenvedon voidaan todeta, että hyvinvointia edistävät ja ongelmia ennaltaehkäisevät toimet voivat olla hyödyllisiä paitsi oppilaille myös opettajille ja että ylhäältä alas suuntautuvat kehittämistoimet, kuten rehtorin sitoutuminen ja tuki sekä hallintokuntien kehittämistyö, voivat edistää käytännön oppilashuoltotyötä ja sen puitteita kouluissa. Tulokset korostavat aikuisten merkitystä lasten hyvinvoinnin kannalta: jos lasten elämää halutaan parantaa, on keskityttävä siihen mitä aikuiset tekevät. On myös tärkeää vahvistaa psykososiaalisen hyvinvoinnin merkitystä sekä tunne- ja ihmissuhdetaitojen itseisarvoa suomalaisessa koulussa. Yliopistoissa tulisi panostaa oppilashuollon ja koulupsykologityön tutkimukseen sekä kasvatuksen ja koulutuksen konteksteissa työskentelevien psykologien kouluttamiseen. Oman kouluhyvinvointiin keskittyvän tutkimuskeskuksen perustamista tulisi myös harkita.

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PREFACE

Professor Pekka Niemi first offered me the opportunity to begin PhD studies already in 1999. Yes, I sure wanted to become a PhD, but I did not really know what to study. After careful consideration, I turned down the offer and started to work as a practicing psychologist. I found my place as a school psychologist, and the research questions started to emerge in my mind. I looked into the challenging position of psychology in the educational context in my licentiate thesis in 2007. When professor Niemi contacted me in 2008 and asked, again, whether I would be interested in PhD studies, I was ready.

I am truly grateful for my supervisor, professor emeritus Pekka Niemi for giving me this exceptional opportunity. He has fostered my independent scientific skills with his well-timed and well-adjusted interventions. I have been on my own—but not alone. My second supervisor, the co-leader of the KiVa Koulu, senior researcher Elisa Poskiparta has been most supportive and helpful. Her deep understanding of the work of teachers has repeatedly impressed me. As for professor Christina Salmivalli, the co-leader of the KiVa Koulu, after having her as my third supervisor, I completely understand her success in the scientific field. She is the most inspiring researcher, and apparently there is no problem she cannot solve, including soothing a disputant on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Thank you Pekka, Elisa and Christina.

I feel honoured to have adjunct professor Matti Rimpelä as my opponent and reviewer, and professor Sheri Bauman as my reviewer. I am indebted to Academy of Finland and KiVa Koulu, funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, for financial support.

It has been a privilege to work in two top-quality projects, First Steps and KiVa Koulu. Professor Jari-Erik Nurmi, the leader of the First Steps -study and my co-author, has been very encouraging, and his straightforward feedback and advice have been invaluable. Gintas Silinskas' help with the statistical modeling was indispensable. I also had the pleasure to work and write with Pirjo-Liisa Poikonen and Marita Kontoniemi, who welcomed me warmly to the world of school transitions. Thank you Anna-Liisa Lyyra, Asko Tolvanen, Noona Kiuru, Ihno Lee, and Erkki Alanen; Janne Lepola; Jenni Salminen, Jenni Ruotsalainen, Jonni Nakari, Tuija Tuomisto, Marita Kantola, and Henna Ruohonen for your help and support with statistical, scientific, and practical issues. I also want to thank my fellow students in the KiVa group for their help, empathy and valuable comments: Virpi Pöyhönen, Miia Sainio, Mira Turtonen, Annina Vartio, An Yang, Claire Garandeau, Silja Saarento, Sanna Roos, and my co-author Anne Haataja. I am grateful to Jacqueline

Välimäki and professor Ernest Hodges for their help with my English. All mistakes in this thesis are, of course, my own.

Department of Psychology has been an ideal working environment; peaceful and supportive. I have been able to fully concentrate on my thesis, and usually the practical and administrative issues have been taken care of before I was even aware of them. I want to thank especially professor Heikki Hämäläinen and professor Jukka Hyönä for the facilities at the department, and Terttu Kauppinen, Outi Nieminen, Minna Varjonen, Nina Kramsu, and Mika Iivari for all your help. During my four years as a project researcher, the most important persons in terms of my daily work have been Antti Kärnä and Tiina Turunen. From the very beginning, Antti, who defended his fine work in June and is also my co-author, has made me feel at home, and later on his help with the statistical questions has been priceless. With Tiina I have shared not only the office but practically all of my emotions, problems and ideas through this process. Your sympathetic ear and intellect have been such a help. And we had lots of fun, too!

In the process of pursuing my own way to be a psychologist, I have been lucky to have had three excellent teachers, whom I consider to be my mentors and role models in combining practice and science in the field of psychology. Juhani Tiuraniemi, Hanna Kiiski-Mäki, and professor Hannele Rähkä, you have helped me in so many ways during the past years, both as a psychologist and as a researcher. Today, I am proud to be your junior colleague. As I have tried to understand school, psychology, and school psychology, previous work of several people as well as discussions with them have helped me along. For this I want to thank Pirjo Laaksonen, professor Thomas Oakland, professor Arto Jauhiainen, and professor Joel Kivirauma, as well as Inger Dahlgren and Jorma Fredriksson. I am grateful to Päivi Oravainen for giving me the idea to study school transition, and to Cecilia Forsman for your thoughts, help and support. I also want to thank professor Maarit Silvén for her enthusiasm as I started my scientific efforts in late 1990s. In addition, I want to thank all of you who have been of assistance but whom I fail to mention here.

Being involved in the activities of Finnish Association of Psychologists has been most elucidating and inspiring, and I have become acquainted with several fine colleagues, whom I also want to thank for co-operation and support: Tuomo Tikkanen, Teemu Ollikainen, Vesa Nevalainen, Arja Sigfrids, Kristiina Laitinen, Markus Salonen, Mari-Pauliina Vainikainen, Minna Kontturi, and professor Jarkko Hautamäki. The committee of school psychologists, the present members being Sari Raninen, Heini Ahlberg, Johanna Welander, Saija Alatupa and Ann-Kristin Åkerholm, has become an important forum of support, sharing and developing. Contacts with European colleagues,

Ana Potes from Madeira and the EFPA NEPES members, have helped me to understand that, after all, things are quite well here in Finland.

I would not be here without my years as a school psychologist in Turku Basic education. I want to thank my superiors of that time, Tapio Alapaattikoski, Outi Rinne, Tea Kiviluoma, and Seija Anttila, for enabling my training and research efforts. The staff, children and families in Pallivaha, Käräsämäki, Paimala, Runosmäki, Nunnavuori and Lyseo schools, thank you for our years together. My friends and colleagues in the field of (school) psychology are important in many ways: Marjo Ahola, Kirsi Salonen, Leena Kaistaniemi, Piialiisa Suominen, Susanna Manninen, Piritta Kuusimäki, Riitta Huolila, Tiina Vidqvist, Jonna Salvi, Hanna Väisänen, Anu Aromäki-Stratos, Anu Puukka, Satu Salmi, Kimmo Häärä, Jutta Torsti, Päivi Saranpää, Aija-Mari Väänänen and Risto Valjakka. Thank you Anna-Lotta Högbacka, Vera Leo and Anne Sten for taking care of "my schools" when I was away doing research. Miia Lappalainen and Anne Syvälahti; I admire your active and happy stance, not to mention your faith in Finnish musical efforts. I also am happy to share this special autumn with the staff of Turku University Hospital child psychiatry. By the way, like any normal person, I do have some friends who are not psychologists, such as Teemu Salonen, Minna and Jaakko Kaartinen-Koutaniemi, and Teemu Kuusimäki.

Being a big sister is an essential part of my life. My sister Katariina and her husband Lassi: I am happy to have you in my life. As an aunt and as a psychologist, I am privileged to be able to take part in the life of your wonderful children Hertta and Oiva. Aren't they the loveliest! My sister Tellu and her companion Tomi, my style gurus and the real pedagogical professionals, thank you for being who you are! I also want to thank my mother, Kristiina, and my late father, Otto-Markus, who have always supported me, whatever I have been up to, and from whom I inherited the passion and skill to write.

Finally, I want to thank my husband and companion Tomi for your love and patience. With You and Bella, our beloved basset hound girl, I have always been able to relax and just be who I am. Our home and life together means everything to me.

Turku, September 30, 2012



LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

- I** Ahtola, A., Silinskas, G., Poikonen, P.-L., Kontoniemi, M., Niemi, P. & Nurmi, J.-E. (2011). Transition to formal schooling: Do transition practices matter for academic performance? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 26, 295–302.*
- II** Ahtola, A., Haataja, A., Kärnä, A., Poskiparta, E. & Salmivalli, C. (2012). For children only? Effects of the KiVa antibullying program on teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28, 851–859.*
- III** Ahtola, A., Haataja, A., Kärnä, A., Poskiparta, E. & Salmivalli, C. (2012). *Implementation of Antibullying Lessons in Primary Classrooms: Principal Support Matters*. Submitted for publication.
- IV** Ahtola, A., Poikonen, P.-L., Kontoniemi, M., Niemi, P. & Nurmi, J.-E. (2012). Successful handling of entrance to formal schooling: Transition practices as a local innovation. *International Journal of Transitions in Childhood*, 5, 3–21.*

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1 INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, the use of psychological knowledge in society has been primarily reactive. The help (e.g., explanations, analyses, and interventions) provided by psychologists is usually requested *after* a problem related to mental health, psycho-social well-being or learning has occurred. As Huppert (2011) notes, “we can do better than that”. First, psychologists should try to reduce disorder not only by intervening reactively, but also by trying to prevent the onset and worsening of problems; otherwise new problems will keep emerging indefinitely. Second, psychologists should not only concentrate on problems but also on enhancing well-being. Acting *before* the problems occur takes place not only in the personal contacts with individual clients but also at the level of public service delivery, administration, and politics. The decisions made at these system levels have crucial impacts on the everyday life of people by regulating factors that enhance, protect, and risk healthy development, learning and psychosocial well-being.

The main developmental contexts of children and adolescents are home and school. In promoting children’s well-being, operating through the educational system involves obvious benefits. First, in modern societies, basic education reaches practically every child. Second, the society is able to directly regulate the school environment to a greater extent than, for example, the private home environments. Third, obviously, the whole school system exists because of the need and will to influence children—to give them basic skills and knowledge, to socialize them to the society, and to qualify and to select them for the needs of working life. Accordingly, the essential role of schooling in the development of personality and in preventing learning and behaviour problems was acknowledged already in the 1960s (see, e.g., Lambert, 1965; see, also, Miller, 1969). School can and must have other aims than purely academic ones. In particular, psycho-social and physical well-being and health of students should also be pursued. This is possible when the traditional pedagogical approach is supported by multiprofessional perspectives, such as psychology and medicine. In Finnish basic education, this manifests itself as mandatory student welfare activities; promotion of good learning, good psychological and physical health and social well-being.

When considering promotion of well-being and prevention of problems, the public health approach and the concepts of universal, targeted and indicated actions are useful. The public health oriented student welfare system is responsive to the educational and health needs of *all* students, not only to those who already show significant problems, or severe risk for those (Gordon, 1983; Merrell & Buchanan, 2006). Universal activities reach all children and require, at most, a moderate amount of

initiative from individual families. Teachers are the key persons because they have the natural direct contacts with children and families, whereas, for instance, psychologist's role is primarily consultative. In contrast, targeted actions for high-risk children and indicated actions for children whose risk has already actualized require involvement from additional professionals. These actions are remedial in nature—even when they take place early in childhood and are thus “preventive” from the perspective of the whole life cycle.

Already in 1965, Bower stated that “Prevention has all the qualities of a slippery fish but with even less substance to hang on to.” Today, more solid empirical evidence on the effects and prerequisites of proactive and preventive activities is still needed. The present thesis comprises a study of the proactive and preventive psycho-social student welfare activities in Finnish pre- and elementary school education. Three goals were set: (1) To present concrete examples of proactive and preventive psycho-social student welfare activities in Finnish basic education; (2) To investigate measurable positive effects of proactive and preventive activities; (3) To investigate implementation of proactive and preventive activities in ecological contexts.

1.1 Student Welfare in Finnish Basic Education

1.1.1 Features of Finnish Basic Education

The Finnish school system has become internationally known during the 2000's due to success in the OECD's PISA surveys. Finnish 15-year-olds are among the best in reading literacy, mathematical literacy, problem solving, and scientific literacy, and the between-school variance is small (OECD, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010). This reflects not only the good quality of the educational system, but also the lack of strict stratification in the Finnish society: on an international scale, the wealth distribution in Finland tends to be equal and social classes are less distinctive. Finnish society heralds egalitarian values, with the school system offering the same basic nine-year education with free lunch to everyone. This decision to invest in a high-quality unified school system is related to the fact that Finland is a country of limited natural resources.

The preschool and basic education are organized and, with government support, funded by local municipal authorities. Local authorities have considerable powers to guide education policies and contents, as the municipalities and, ultimately, each preschool and elementary school are allowed to apply and modify the national core curricula (Core Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2000; National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2004). National assessments of student performance are scarce in Finland, and the achievement levels of individual schools are not compared with each

other or released to public. Private schools are quite rare, but private daycare and preschools are more widely available. Unlike in the United States and many European countries, formal schooling in Finland (as in Sweden and Denmark) begins rather late. The compulsory education, grades 1 to 9, starts from the year in which the child turns 7 years of age and ends when he or she is 16 years of age. However, before entrance to elementary school, practically all 6-year-olds attend voluntary, free-of-charge preschool (Kumpulainen, 2009). Another feature of the Finnish educational system is the high quality of teacher education; a Master's degree in education is the norm for primary-school teachers, and a Bachelor's degree for preschool teachers. Consequently, teachers enjoy considerable autonomy in their work, and teaching is a desirable career choice among young Finns (see, e.g., Sahlberg, 2011). Finally, multiprofessional student welfare activities as well as strong special education services can be seen as prominent characteristics of Finnish education (OECD 2011; Sabel, Saxenian, Miettinen, Hull Kristensen, & Hautamäki, 2010).

1.1.2 Early Student Welfare Activities: External Agents

The term “*oppilashuolto*” (student welfare) was first used in Finland by Helasvuo in 1965 (Jauhiainen, 1993). However, the basis for student welfare activities, if not under that title, in Finnish basic education can be traced to the founding of the folk school in 1866. By establishing mass schooling for every child the society adopted the right and responsibility to socialize next generations. During the second half of the 19th century, when larger sections of the Finnish population started to attend school, it also became necessary to address the health and social problems of the students coming from poor environments. According to Jauhiainen, school welfare of this period had a clear social welfare function, taking care of physical and material prerequisites for school attendance.

However, already at this early phase, there were additional approaches to student welfare. First, also the health problems *caused* by school attendance, such as weak musculature and spinal problems, were paid attention to as early as in 1867, and the need for school doctor services was brought forth (Pesonen, 1980). Second, when school doctors and school nurses finally started their work during the first decades of the 20th century, their central concern was to educate and enlighten children and families (Jauhiainen, 1993). Third, the determination to educate all children within the same curriculum brought forth challenges associated with individual differences in children's learning, behaviour and personality (Carrier, 1984). Origins of school psychology developed from this need to determine and treat non-normality in the educational system. The first intelligence test was developed in France in the first years of the 20th century by Binet and Simon as a response to the specific request from school authorities: a method was needed to classify children in terms of their

educability (Reynolds, Gutkin, Elliott, & Witt, 1984). Gradually, a new profession of a psychologist emerged to complete this classification task (Fagan, 1992; Kivinen & Kivirauma, 1988). In Finland, the classification of students was institutionalized in 1940s and 1950s by newly founded family guidance centers and their new experts, psychologists (Jauhiainen, 1993; Rinne & Jauhiainen, 1988). The early forms of school social work also emerged in family guidance centers, and in after-care of special school students (Jauhiainen, 1993; Somerkivi, 1975).

Responding to student welfare issues brought several new professionals into the educational system, and basic health services for students are now provided in close relation to school. Even so, the expectations for teachers have by no means lessened. Because of natural everyday contact and interaction with children, the teacher still is in the best position to affect not only educational but also psycho-social development. Moreover, student welfare professionals cannot always remove problematic characteristics and difficulties students may have. Consequently, encountering and handling various challenging situations with students and their families remain a substantial part of teachers' work. Accordingly, a crucial role of student welfare professionals is not only to work directly with students and families but also to consult teachers and administration in questions of learning, well-being and health. Student welfare professionals participate in the co-operative effort of mutual problem-solving, rather than work out problems on their own (Selvini-Palazzoli, 1978).

Unfortunately, the way in which Finnish student welfare services were first organized did not support multiprofessional collaboration and shared problem solving. Until the 1960s (and in many municipalities long after that) all services were located organizationally and also, more or less, physically outside of the schools in municipal health and social service centers. This system did not encourage consultative methods and multiprofessional co-operation at the level of the school community. Instead, it might for its part have supported the idea of external saviours who are responsible for, and who will, somehow, resolve problems. Finland's long history of segregating special education systems and family guidance centers' profile as advocates of segregated services reflects this phenomena (see, Kivirauma, 1989). All this may have, in some Finnish municipalities, strengthened the individual-focused perspective and the impression that absolute solutions for deviant students are possible and advantageous, while the responsibility and potential of the school community have been disregarded. Currently, the degree of integrative or inclusive solutions in special education varies across the country.

1.1.3 Well-Being as a Focus in the New Basic Education

In the 1960's, the physical health care system in the Finnish compulsory school had reached consummation. The continuum of the maternity and child welfare clinics and school health care had become a central part of the Finnish public health care system and a strong foundation upon which healthy citizens will grow. Questions of psycho-social wellbeing and mental health now came into focus (Helasvuo, 1965; Jauhiainen, 1993). The new ideas actualized as a part of the comprehensive basic education reformation (1972–1977), in which new nine-year basic education, comprising free-of-charge elementary (grades 1–6) and lower secondary (grades 7–9) schools, replaced the earlier two-track system, which provided compulsory education only for six years. Moving into the unified educational system was, obviously, a major challenge to the schools and teachers. Grammar schools could no longer select their students and had to be ready to teach all adolescents of the age group. Consequently, the quality of the preparing elementary schools was ensured by moving the training of elementary school classroom teachers into the university (Rinne & Jauhiainen, 1988). The role of new school psychologists and school social workers, who started their work as pilot activity in Southern Finland in the middle of 1960s, was also essential (Jauhiainen, 1993; Kurki, 2006; T. Tikkanen, personal communication, August 8th, 2011).

Psycho-social aspects of student welfare were not explicitly discussed in the original legislation for new basic education (The School System Act, 1968; The Statute on Basic Education, 1970), but the government-set student welfare committee prepared a report on this issue (Oppilashuoltokomitean mietintö, 1974). This extensive and ambitious report stated the aims of student welfare activities: well-being and balanced development of students; promotion of school attendance and learning and overcoming of learning disabilities, and equality in the society; safe and cosy school. Student welfare was considered to be enhanced by holistic activities, which were tightly integrated with other functions of the school. Posts of coordinating school psychologists and school social workers were established in State Provincial Offices and former National Board of Education, and positions for 500 school psychologists and 500 school social workers were proposed.

However, interpretation of possibilities and responsibilities of the school in Finland changed after 1970s. The school concentrated on teaching and learning, whereas homes and social and health services were supposed to take care of everything else (Rimpelä, Fröjd, & Peltonen, 2010; Vesikansa, 2009), and the subsequent progress of student welfare activities within basic education was rather disappointing. Psycho-social aspects of well-being or student welfare were not mentioned in the first Basic Education Act in 1983, let alone school psychologists or school social workers. Student welfare work was practiced and talked about at least in some municipalities, but it

was not regulated in legislation (Laaksonen, 1989; Laaksonen, Laitinen, & Salmi, 2007). Finally, all but two posts of national and provincial coordinators of student welfare work were abolished during the recession in the beginning of the 1990s.

Issues of responsibilities have, of course, been delaying the progress of student welfare activities in Finland ever since the 19th century. The gradual establishment of the psycho-social perspective and professionals in student welfare has been strikingly similar to that of physical health services 50 years earlier (see, Jauhiainen, 1993). Involvement of the government has been weak, and bigger cities and educational organizations have mostly made their own decisions concerning psycho-social student welfare in advance of national legislation, curricula and funding. For the time being, this is once more the case in upper secondary schools, in which psycho-social student welfare activities and professionals are not yet regulated in legislation.

1.1.4 Legalized Student Welfare of the New Millennium

During the 21st century, official documents have finally acknowledged the student welfare activities and professionals. The phrase “student welfare”, referring to all students, appeared for the first time in the 2003 revision of the Basic Education Act (1998), where it was defined as follows: Students are entitled to have free-of-charge student welfare services, which are defined as promotion and maintaining of good learning, good psychological and physical health and social well-being as well as activities that enhance the prerequisites of those. Student welfare is the concern of all persons working in the school community. The 2011 revision of the core curriculum mentions for the first time school nurse, school physician, school social worker and school psychologist as student welfare professionals in basic education. These professionals are directly and solely engaged in promoting pupil welfare. However, usually only school health care professionals personally meet all students; the school nurse every year, and the school physician on Grades 1, 5 and 8.

Current legislation on student welfare activities still reflects the splitting of responsibilities between school versus health and social services; school psychologists’ and school social workers’ activities are regulated by the Child Welfare Act since 1990 (mandatory since 2007), instead of Basic Education Act. In spite of the gap in legislation, which emphasizes the separate “service” nature of this work, most of the school psychologists and school social workers are integral part of school communities both physically and organizationally. School nurses and school physicians are part of the public health services, but usually they have regular appointments in school. In many cases, school nurse is also responsible for preschool-aged and even younger children within the child

welfare clinic services, thus being an important linkage between pre-school and school environments.

Multiprofessional student welfare teams are central to student welfare work in contemporary Finnish basic education. In elementary school, the usual assembly includes the school principal, special education teacher, school nurse, school psychologist and school social worker; and in lower secondary school, also the study counsellor. Unfortunately, school physicians seldom participate. Classroom and subject teachers participate when their students are discussed. Teams meet on regular basis, even weekly or biweekly. The main tasks of these teams are, in theory, twofold: universal promotion and prevention at the level of the whole school community; and targeted and indicated interventions at the level of classrooms and individual students and families. In the real world, interventions and individuals are usually the focus, instead of promotion, prevention, school community and groups; the majority of the teams spend more than half of their meeting time on individual cases, whereas the general level issues are discussed only for 25% of the time or less (Peltonen, 2010). Reflective assessment and development of the team activities is even less. Accordingly, the work of individual professionals, such as school psychologist and school social worker, focuses mostly on the assessments and remedial activities and on the level of individuals, families, or small groups (Ahtola & Kiiski-Mäki, 2010; Ahtola & Kontturi, 2012; Ahtola & Vainikainen, 2012; Sipilä-Lähdekorpi, 2006). What is more, the number of posts established for school psychologists and school social workers varied widely across the country until the first decade of the 21st century, and the 40-year-old goal of 500 psychologists and 500 social workers has yet to be realized (Laaksonen et al., 2007; Wiss & Rimpelä, 2010). These problems are clearly related to the earlier weakness in legislation and coordination. Because psycho-social student welfare activities were not formally regulated, and because national coordination almost ceased in the 1990s, no clear-cut nation-wide aims and methods were available to guide the actual activities taking place in schools nor allocation of resources. In order to standardize practices, the 2011 revision of the Core Curriculum discusses student welfare activities and promotion of safety in schools for 10 pages. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education launched a student welfare development project in municipalities for 2007–2011 (Laitinen & Hallantie, 2011). Quantitative definitions of workloads for school social workers and school psychologists are still missing.

1.2 Promotion and Prevention Effects in School Ecology

Everyone involved in school well-being knows that promotion and prevention are something that are talked about and should be implemented. However, making these approaches real is clearly more challenging. What should be done, exactly? The first step in this process is to define the problem; *what* needs to be changed (Merrell & Buchanan, 2006; Stollar, Poth, Curtis, & Cohen, 2006)? After this we can proceed to contemplate *how* to do it. For the present study, two prominent phenomena in preschool and elementary school years, that is, transition to formal schooling and school bullying, were chosen as examples of critical situations that are appropriate targets for universal promotion and prevention student welfare activities.

Transition to formal schooling is one of the major milestones of the human life course, and maybe the biggest one so far in a child's and his or her family's life. Of course, it is not a problem as such; but, instead, an important moment of and symbol for growth and development. In Finnish context, preschool and entrance to formal schooling reflect many central developmental needs of 6–7-year-olds; such as gaining independence, participating in peer groups, and acquiring new cognitive skills. However, as all the human transitions, it may cause not only stimulation but also stress (Niesel & Griebel, 2007). Because the first years of formal schooling affect the direction of the child's whole school career (see, e.g., Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000), it is worthwhile to try to promote optimal transitions to school. On the contrary, bullying, defined as repeated aggressive behavior against an individual who cannot readily defend him- or herself (Olweus, 1999), is a serious problem demanding attention. On average, the prevalence of bullied children and their perpetrators is 11% across the 35 countries involved in the WHO's Health Behavior in School-aged Children survey (Craig & Harel, 2004). Bullying has well-documented negative consequences not only for the victims, but also for the perpetrators as well as for the bystanders merely witnessing it (Arseneault, Bowes, & Shakoor, 2010; Farrington, Loeber, Stallings, & Ttofi, 2011; Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2004; Rivers, Potteat, Noret, & Ashurst, 2009; Ttofi, Farrington, Lösel, & Loeber, 2011). In grade 1, the rates of victimization and bullying are high, and they go down during the next few years of elementary school (Kärnä et al., 2011a).

Neither transition nor bullying is created only by school. They are, however, especially characteristic to the educational system. Formal schooling leads inevitably to transitions of some kind, and group dynamics, including bullying, will originate when schooling is not based on private tutoring. Because transitions and group dynamics are natural and permanent phenomena in the educational system, preparing oneself beforehand with universal promotion and prevention activities should be obvious. Successful promotion and prevention in these situations would have

various positive results for all participants as well as for society as a whole. Children, families and teachers receive immediate support for the acute situation, and they may get adequate resources and resiliency to face similar challenges in the future. Accordingly, adequate handling of both the school transition and school bullying have increasingly become major subjects of international interest (see, e.g., Farrington & Ttofi, 2009; Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Vernon-Feagans & Blair, 2006). In Finland, co-operation between the elementary school, the preschool, and with the students' homes as well as the promotion of safe school environment are explicitly mentioned in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004; revision, 2010).

The previous overview on development of student welfare activities within Finnish basic education suggested that even though the national regulation has highlighted the idea of promotion and prevention, the Finnish student welfare work has relied on indicated and reactive actions. This is true also for the handling of school transition and school bullying.

At school entrance, the main attention of multiprofessional personnel in preschool, school and health care system has traditionally focused on individual children and their families. Classifying children into different groups for schooling according to their readiness for school has been the fundamental procedure. In Finland, this work is conducted every spring and places enormous demands on staff, especially for psychologists, during this period (Ahtola & Kontturi, 2012). Recently, however, the construct and assessment of school readiness as a quality of individual children, as well as the consequences of these assessments, have been criticized in several ways (see, e.g., Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Graue, 1999; Kim & Suen, 2003; La Paro & Pianta, 2000; Linnilä, 2006; Meisels, 1999, 2007; Snow, 2006). The modern view on school transition emphasizes the relational nature of the concept of school readiness, and *the school's readiness* for children (Graue, 2006; Lewit & Baker, 1995; Meisels, 1996; National Education Goals Panel, 1998; Petriwskyj, Thorpe, & Tayler, 2005; Ramey & Ramey, 1994; Sameroff & McDonough, 1994).

Struggling against school bullying has also been rather unsystematic reacting to those bullying incidents that adults have become aware of. Usually this has been done with those students immediately involved in the situation, and often also with their families. Individual characteristics and life histories of bullies and victims have been considered, and the transferring of students into other classes or schools has been the solution of last resort. Modern approaches examine bullying as a group phenomenon: the role of the onlookers as key persons to stop or maintain bullying is highlighted, whereas the individual characteristics of the bully or the victim are considered to be less central (see, e.g., Salmivalli, Kärnä, & Poskiparta, 2010a). This approach highlights the need to promote healthy social relations between students and preventing new bullying incidents.

To investigate modern alternative methods to handle school transition and school bullying proactively and preventively, the bioecological model of development by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998; see also, Bronfenbrenner, 1979) offers a helpful theoretical tool. Ecological model consists of concentric micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems. Reactive and individual-level student welfare actions take place primarily at the level of the *microsystem*, which is defined as the reality directly experienced by the students. The actual transition from preschool environment to primary school, the possible assessment of school readiness, the social relations and bullying within the peer group, and the direct interventions for bullying incidents are examples of microsystem effects on children. The *mesosystem* takes into consideration the important interrelations among the microsystems in which the child actively participates. For instance, trust and co-operation between the family and the (pre)school, continuity from preschool to elementary school and relations between the child's teachers are part of the mesosystem. The *exosystem* affects children indirectly through, for instance, teachers. Local-level financial, structural and functional decisions and commitments made within local school administration are examples of exosystem effects. Also those interactions and processes in the school's adult community that involve not only the teachers but also other professionals of the school, may be considered exosystem-level phenomena. Finally, Finland as a state is a *macrosystem*, which, for instance, values free-of-charge one-track basic education but has a more controversial position when it comes to the school system's responsibility to educate intra- and interpersonal skills and assure psycho-social wellbeing for all students.

1.2.1 School Transition Practices and Their Effects on School Achievement

An ecological and dynamic model of transition, based on the bioecological model of development, helps to understand the school transition and the whole network surrounding the child and the school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). The main focus of the ecological model of transition is at the level of mesosystem: a net of relationships around an individual child eases the discontinuity between the different cultures of pre-school environments and school. A variety of activities, so-called transition practices, which build and strengthen relationships between the family, the preschool, and the elementary school, are suggested as the primary means to smooth the school transition.

In Finland, seven-year-olds' transition from preschool to Grade 1 of compulsory elementary school may include organizational, physical, pedagogical, and functional disparities. Educational origins and traditions of preschool and basic education are different, and, until recently, the majority of preschool classrooms are located in and organized by daycare centers within social services (Hännikäinen, 2003; Kumpulainen, 2009; Rautanen, 2007). In this setting, the function of transition

activities is, on the one hand, to help children and adults to prepare and adjust in this time of change, and, on the other hand, to actually reduce the discontinuity between the elementary school and the preceding daycare center based preschool.

In the present study, we were interested in universal transition practices, activities that reach all school entrants and their families. Transition practices build upon (and strengthen) vertical connections between preschool and elementary school professionals, characterized by mutual trust and respect, as well as shared responsibility (Dockett & Perry, 2001; Einarsdottir, Perry, & Dockett, 2008; Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke, & Higgins, 2001). The first aim of the transition practices is to familiarize preschoolers with the elementary school environment (e.g., joint events, teaching), and thus reduce the abruptness of the change. Second, it is crucial that the preschool and elementary-school teachers make horizontal connections with families (see, e.g., Mangione & Speth, 1998; Margetts, 2007). Elementary-school teachers, who usually become important persons in the child's life, should establish personal-level trust and rapport with the families even before the school starts (La Paro, Pianta, & Cox, 2000a, 2000b; Nelson, 2004; Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999). Third, useful information about school entrants must be passed on from pre-school environments to primary school (Broström, 2003; Thorsen, Bø, Løge, & Omdal, 2006). The final aspect is the organizational co-operation between preschool and elementary school, for example, joint writing and revising of the curricula. This activity will bridge and reduce the discontinuities between preschool and elementary school (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Einarsdottir 2006; Einarsdottir et al., 2008; Kagan & Neuman, 1998; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

School transition practices are widely used to support school entrance, and there seems to be a practical and theoretical consensus on the importance of these activities (see, e.g., Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; Einarsdottir et al., 2008; Pianta et al., 1999). However, only few efforts have been made to investigate their actual impacts on child outcomes. Schulting, Malone, and Dodge (2005) found a positive connection between implementation of transition practices at preschool–kindergarten transition and academic achievement at the end of kindergarten. LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, and Pianta (2008) found a positive association between preschool transition practices and children's socio-emotional adjustment in the fall of kindergarten. However, these studies only partially cover the topic of transition practice effects. Our study will add to previous knowledge in three ways. First, we make use of longitudinal data on children's school achievement during the transition period from preschool to elementary school, as opposed to LoCasale et al. (2008) and Schulting et al. (2005). Second, our data consist of certain regional preschool–elementary school pairs, as Finnish municipal preschools and schools are, as a rule,

regionally organized. Children who come from preschool to elementary school within these pairs have familiar peers entering the same class (or at least the same school), which is considered to ease the stress of the school transition (Ladd & Price, 1987). Third, we use data from Finland, where the society and school system vary greatly from that of, e.g., the U.S., where both of the previous studies were conducted. An interesting question is whether or not transition practices can have surplus value even when the school system performs well and the physical school transition is intrinsically quite predictable.

1.2.2 The KiVa Antibullying Program and Its Effects on Teachers

The KiVa (an acronym for *Kiusaamista Vastaan*, against bullying) antibullying program is based on the long research tradition on bullying as a group phenomenon; to reduce victimization, it is not necessary to try to change the victims or the behaviour of the aggressive bullies directly (Kärnä, Voeten, Poskiparta & Salmivalli, 2010; Salmivalli et al., 2010a). Instead, influencing the classmates can reduce rewards gained by the bullies and, consequently, their motivation to bully.

The KiVa antibullying program consists of both *universal* and *indicated* actions. The main components of universal actions, which are developed primarily to influence the onlookers, are student lessons. KiVa unit 1 for first graders includes 10 double lessons (2*45 minutes), which classroom teachers carry out according to the detailed teacher's manual during the school year from August until May (Salmivalli, Poskiparta, Tikka, & Pöyhönen, 2009). The central aims of these lessons are: (a) to raise awareness of the role that the group plays in maintaining bullying; (b) to increase empathy towards victims; (c) to promote children's strategies for supporting the victim and thus their self-efficacy to do so; and (d) to increase children's coping skills when victimized. The teacher manuals of KiVa also contain detailed guidelines about the indicated actions, or tackling actual cases of bullying coming to their attention. The procedure has several steps from the screening phase ("Is this bullying?") to the final follow-up meetings ensuring that the bullying has really stopped. In each school implementing the KiVa program, there is a team of three adults (chosen from among the school personnel), a so-called KiVa school team, which is responsible for carrying out these actions. Moreover, the classroom teacher organizes separate meetings with potential supporters of the victim (for a more detailed description of program contents, see Salmivalli et al., 2010a; Salmivalli, Kärnä, & Poskiparta, 2010b).

The KiVa antibullying program has been shown to reduce bullying and victimization especially in elementary school (Kärnä et al., 2011a, Kärnä et al., 2011b, Kärnä et al., 2012). Also, prior literature confirms the effectiveness of whole-school programs in general—even though the

intervention results have been somewhat inconsistent (for the latest meta-analyses, see Farrington & Ttofi, 2009). However, to our knowledge, prior studies have not investigated possible changes in *teachers'* knowledge, attitudes or skills in response to antibullying programs. Theoretically, considering the implementation of an antibullying program from the teachers' point of view is to consider the exosystem level qualities; processes that do not involve students directly but which have important indirect effects on them. This process extends from direct classroom experiences of students (microsystem) to, for instance, the lesson preparation, the discussions and planning with the teacher colleagues and the principal, and the possible experiences of handling acute cases of bullying with a limited group of students who may or may not belong to the teacher's own class.

In practice, possible effects on teachers are interesting for several reasons. First, teachers' understanding of bullying and their commitment to tackle it are essential for an antibullying program to succeed and for it to have a sustainable impact on the school organization, as well as on behavioral norms (see, e.g., Beets et al., 2008; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Heward, Hutchins, & Keleher, 2007; Kallestad & Olweus, 2003; Olweus & Limber, 2010). Accordingly, Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, and Leaf (2009) have shown that a five-year trial of a school-wide prevention strategy had significant positive effects on schools' overall organizational health. This indicates that the effects of school-based programs can also be observed at the level of teachers and organization (see also, Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000; Huang et al., 2009). Second, previous studies have shown that teachers' and teacher trainees' knowledge of bullying tends to be incomplete and partly inaccurate, and that these professionals often feel that they lack skills to intervene (Bauman & Del Rio, 2005; Bauman & Hurley, 2005; Boulton, 1997; Craig et al., 2000; Kokko & Pörhölä, 2009; Nicolaides, Toda, & Smith, 2002). Third, teachers usually remain in their profession for decades, meeting hundreds, even thousands of students throughout their career. If it is possible to affect their competence to handle and understand bullying, the ensuing effects on students can be multiplicative in the long run.

Providing teachers with training on antibullying work may affect teachers' self-efficacy, knowledge and skills related to school bullying and school violence (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004; Sela-Shayovitz, 2009). KiVa, however, unlike some antibullying programs (e.g., OBPP, Olweus, 1991; ZERO, Roland, Bru, Midthassel, & Vaaland, 2009), does not rely heavily on teacher training. The program is introduced to the schools by two-day face-to-face pre-implementation training, but we suggest that the effects of this training on teacher perceptions of bullying are minor. First, not everyone participates in this training. Second, a two-day training is rather restricted in terms of both length and content to provide effective changes compared to the 10-month delivery period. For

instance, many practical issues were also covered in the pre-implementation training, which limited the possibilities to deeply concentrate on bullying and anti-bullying efforts. Instead, it is likely that teachers learn about bullying especially while delivering an antibullying program. This idea of learning by teaching is supported by “common knowledge”, by feedback from teachers implementing the KiVa antibullying program, as well as by research evidence (Bargh & Schul, 1980; Biswas, Leelawong, Schwartz, Vye, & The teachable agents group at Vanderbilt, 2005; Cortese, 2005; Goodlad & Hirst, 1989; Grzega 2005, 2006; Grzega & Schöner, 2008; Ketamo & Suominen, 2010). However, to our knowledge, the learning that takes place when practicing teachers teach has been investigated to a lesser extent.

In the teachers’ delivery and learning process, the KiVa teacher’s manual is essential (Salmivalli et al., 2009). It provides, in the context of each lesson, an information section for the teacher to read before delivering the lesson and specific goals for each lesson. However, the teachers are likely to learn not only from the information provided in written format but also (and perhaps especially) from the interactive activities with the students and from the lesson materials. For one, as they are teaching students how the peer group often plays a role in bullying, this is likely to change or refine their own view of bullying as well. Instead of seeing bullying as determined by personal and permanent characteristics of victims and bullies they might start perceiving bullying as a phenomenon determined by peer group dynamics—something that can be changed through active intervention by school personnel. Consequently, if teachers believe that bullying can be tackled effectively they are more likely to implement the program activities, whereas false beliefs about bullying may lead to reluctance or inability to function adequately (see, e.g., Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Moreover, as the school team members’ experience of handling bullying cases grows during the school year, they are likely to have increasing competence to tackle and understand bullying. Finally, implementing an effective antibullying program might affect teachers’ confidence in the program itself, which may, in turn, increase their implementation activity and the quality of it (Beets et al., 2008; Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

1.2.3 Implementation of Promotion and Prevention Activities in School Ecology

Above, possible positive effects of school transition practices on children and an antibullying program on teachers were discussed. However, the principles, materials and recommendations of even the most convincing school-based programs and policies are only one component of the process of impacting the lives of students. Not even the best program will work, if it is not adequately implemented in the school system (Merrell & Buchanan, 2006; Stollar et al., 2006). In the implementation process, teachers are the key persons (see, e.g., Kealey, Peterson, Gaul, & Dinh,

2000), as they have to familiarize themselves with the new ideas and materials, plan the lessons and other activities, and integrate them into the daily and weekly schedule.

A variety of factors are likely to affect the quality of implementation activity and commitment of teachers. For one, teacher experiences and characteristics, such as training, belief in program effectiveness, and feeling of self-efficacy positively affect the implementation rate (Beets et al., 2008; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001; Klimes-Dougan et al., 2009; La Paro et al., 2000b; Nelson, 2004; Rohrbach, Graham, & Hansen, 1993; Rous, Hallam, McCormick, & Cox, 2010). In the present study, however, following the ecological view of Bronfenbrenner (1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), we were primarily interested in the contexts of implementation; especially those school-level and local-level exosystem characteristics that might regulate the implementation activity of individual teachers and in this way have indirect effects on students (see, e.g., Graczyk, Domitrovich, Small, & Zins, 2006).

At the school level, one of the key agents to facilitate change is the principal (see, e.g., Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Melton, Limber, & Teague, 1999; Smolkin, 1999). First, the principal's commitment to the program and enabling high-level program implementation in the school by, for instance, redirecting resources, is important. Second, the principal is in a crucial position to promote the program implementation by generally supporting teachers (see, e.g., Blase & Blase, 1999). Accordingly, the literature shows that effective leadership and principal support relate positively to the fidelity of implementation of various school-based prevention programs (Beets et al. 2008; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Gingiss, Roberts-Gray, & Boerm, 2006; Gregory, Henry, & Schoeny, 2007; Payne 2009; Payne, Gottfredson, & Gottfredson, 2006; Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009; Rohrbach et al., 1993). What kind of effects might elementary school principals have on implementation of KiVa preventive student lessons? To our knowledge, only Kallestad and Olweus (2003) have studied factors regulating the implementation of a whole-school antibullying program at multiple levels of influence. Surprisingly, they found a non-significant trend towards the teacher-leadership collaboration and program implementation quality being negatively related at the school level.

Interestingly, the level of local school administration, and curricula, which indirectly affect children's development by modulating activities implemented by teachers and schools (see also, Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Fullan, 2007; Gallagher, 1999; Shinn, 2003) have mostly been overlooked in prior studies on implementation. Considering school transition practices, a few earlier studies have looked into the structural aspects of local environments and found that location (metropolitan

vs. non-metropolitan area, high- vs. low poverty area), and school size are related to quality of implementation (La Paro et al., 2000a; Payne 2009; Pianta et al., 1999; Rous et al., 2010). In the present study, we were more interested in the effects of aims and processes of local administration. Possible local-level exosystem effects are essential in countries like Finland, where the macrosystem, the culture as a whole, is based on high quality public services, which are mostly organized autonomously by local authorities. This has been the case since 1993, when the government funding system was reformed and the norm-based government control was mostly abandoned. As more active implementation of comprehensive transition programmes seems to be a relatively simple and inexpensive way to enhance home–school relationships, adaptation, and the better learning of all children (LoCasale et al., 2008; Schulting et al.; 2005), it is of interest to find reasons for why not all elementary schools and local authorities have fully utilized this potential.

2 AIMS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the prerequisites and effects of various proactive and preventive student welfare activities in Finnish preschool and elementary school Grades 1–3. In proactive and preventive activities, the role of psychology and psychologist is primarily indirect, and the positive effects on children and families actualize via the educational system and teachers. The specific research questions were as follows:

1. Do promotion and prevention activities have measurable effects?

- (a) Do promotion activities, so called transition practices, between preschool and elementary school during the transition phase to formal schooling affect academic development during the first year of elementary school?
- (b) Does the implementation of the KiVa antibullying program have effects on teachers' perceptions of bullying?

2. Which factors regulate the implementation of promotion and prevention programs? To what extent should we consider implementation an individual level activity, or is an ecological view more fruitful?

- (a) How does principal support affect implementation of the preventive student lessons of the KiVa antibullying program?
- (b) How do teacher-level, school-level and local characteristics regulate implementation of transition practices in elementary schools?

3 METHOD

Data for the present study were drawn from two large-scale research projects, the longitudinal First Steps Study: Interactive Learning in the Child–Parent–Teacher Triangle (Poikkeus et al., 2006), and the Evaluation Study of the National Antbullying Program KiVa (Salmivalli et al., 2010a,b).

3.1 Participants

3.1.1 Studies I & IV: First Steps

First Steps is a prospective follow-up of approximately 2,000 children living in three towns and one small rural municipality. Data collection extended from the beginning of their preschool year to the end of their fourth school year (2006–2011). Data from two towns, where the preschools were organized within social services and were, as a rule, located elsewhere than in the elementary school building, were included in studies I and IV. The first wave of data in these two towns were collected from 47 elementary schools, 80 preschools, and 1,306 children. In order to draw a subsample that allowed us to study a typical elementary school transition in a Finnish setting, we used four criteria. First, we identified the preschools and elementary schools that were partners in actual transitional co-operation. Second, as the need for transition practices is most crucial when the transition requires overcoming a physical distance, we included the elementary school and preschool only if there was no preschool located in the elementary school building but the preschools were in a daycare center or elsewhere. Third, of these preschool partners, we included those that had sent at least 60% of their preschool children to the partner elementary school, and only the children moving between these partner organizations were included. Fourth, special education classes and special classes (e.g., foreign language class) were excluded, because starting school in these classes is a result of individual guidance or a selection process. Descriptive data on study I and IV participants are presented in Table 1. In addition, for Study IV, the heads of early childhood education and basic education in the two towns were requested to choose three professionals, who were well acquainted with the school transition phase, for a group interview in each town: one professional from the early childhood education administration, one from the basic education administration, and one elementary school principal.

Table 1. Basic statistics for study variables

	Study			
	I	II	III	IV
Elementary schools, <i>n</i>	22	62	27	22
Number of students, <i>M (SD)</i>	264 (103)	244 (153)	261 (160)	264 (103)
Intervention schools, <i>n</i>	-	33	27	-
Teachers, <i>n</i>	36	238	93	36
Formal qualification, %	97	85 ^a	96	97
Work experience, years <i>M (SD)</i>	-	15 (10)	15 (9)	-
Work experience, categorized	19% 0–5 yrs 22% 6–15 yrs 58% 16– yrs	-	-	19% 0–5 yrs 22% 6–15 yrs 58% 16– yrs
Age, <i>M (SD)</i>	-	43 (9)	42 (9)	-
Male, %	8.0	7.1	4.0	8.0
Preschools, <i>n</i>	36	-	-	36
Teachers, <i>n</i>	63	-	-	-
Formal qualification, %	97	-	-	-
Work experience, categorized	13% 0–5 yrs 36% 6–15 yrs 51% 16– yrs	-	-	-
Male, %	0	-	-	-
Children, <i>n</i>	398	-	-	-
Age at preschool, March 1, 2007, months, <i>M (SD)</i>	80 (3)	-	-	-
Mother's education on three-point scale: vocational education or less, polytechnic, or university, <i>M (SD)</i>	1.90 (.83)	-	-	-

^a Data missing from 13%.

3.1.2 Studies II & III: The KiVa Antibullying Program

Data for the present studies II and III were drawn from the large-scale evaluation study of KiVa antibullying program in 2007–2009 (Salmivalli et al., 2010a,b). For more details on the recruitment and sampling process, see Kärnä et al. (2011b, 2012). In the present studies we used a subsample of Grade 1–3 teachers from volunteer schools randomly assigned to intervention and control conditions. Descriptive data on study II and III participants are presented in Table 1.

3.2 Measures

Overview of study measures is presented in Table 2.

3.2.1 Tests on Children's Academic Skills

In study I, children's academic skills were assessed by trained testers in the spring of preschool, and, again, in the spring of Grade 1. The emerging reading and writing skills were assessed with three tests, which were subtests of the ARMI (Lerikkanen, Poikkeus, & Ketonen, 2006). Mathematical skills were assessed with two tests, number sequence production (Hannula, Räsänen, & Lehtinen, 2007) and arithmetical problems (Räsänen & Aunola, 2007). In the spring of Grade 1, decoding and word reading were assessed with two tests (Lindeman, 2000; Nevala & Lyytinen, 2000), and two tests were used as measures of reading comprehension (Lindeman, 2000; Wagner, Torgesen, Rashotte, & Pearson, 2009). Spelling was assessed by asking children to write five words (Lerikkanen et al., 2006) and eight pseudowords (see Lyytinen et al., 2006; Puolakanaho et al., 2007; Seymour, Aro, & Erskine, 2003). Mathematical skills in Grade 1 were assessed with the same arithmetical problems as in preschool (Räsänen & Aunola, 2007). For more details, see Study I.

3.2.2 Teacher Questionnaires

Transition practices. For Studies I and IV, implementation and importance of and obstacles to transition practices were examined. Preschool teachers completed questionnaires in spring of 2007 when the children were in preschool. One year later, children's Grade 1 teachers responded to the questionnaires. The transition practices were as follows: (1) The preschool group familiarizes itself with the elementary school. (2) The preschool teacher and the elementary-school teacher cooperate. (3) The preschool teacher and the elementary-school teacher organize a joint event for school entrants' parents on starting school. (4) The child, the parents, and the Grade 1 teacher meet

Table 2. Study measures

	Study			
	I	II	III	IV
Measures				
Tests on children’s academic skills	x			
Teacher questionnaires				
Transition practices	x			x
Perceptions of bullying		x		
Principal support			x	
Monitoring booklets for KiVa student lesson implementation			x	
Curricula				x

personally before the start of elementary school. (5) The preschool teacher, the Grade 1 teacher, and the special workers (e.g., special education teachers, school psychologist) discuss the school entrants (e.g., skills, peer relations). (6) The child’s preschool education plan and/or “growth portfolio” (including, e.g., child’s output) is passed on to the elementary-school teacher. (7) The preschool teachers and the elementary-school teachers write and revise the preschool and Grades 1 and 2 curricula together. The implementation frequency of these practices was rated by teachers on a three-point scale: implemented never, 1–2 times a year, or more often/systematically. Preschool teachers’ reports on implementation frequency of the transition practices were summed over preschools to obtain a variable that stands for the number of transition practices between each preschool–elementary school pair in Study I, because we assume (see also Schulting et al., 2005) that concrete transition activities carried out by individual teachers usually take place within an organizational framework rather than being managed by each teacher on her own. What is more, the consistency among reports in each preschool was considered as adequate. In Study IV, individual elementary teacher reports were used. Grade 1 teachers also rated the importance of each transition practice on a three-point scale, as well as the significance of five potential obstacles to co-operation with the preschool, on a five-point-scale. The final set of obstacles emerged as follows: (1) I hesitate to contact the preschool teacher; (2) I feel that it is difficult to engage in professional dialogue with the preschool teacher; (3) Differing personal views on child upbringing and education; (4) I don’t have time for preschool–elementary school co-operation; (5) Administrative obstacles restrict natural co-operation between preschool and elementary school. For more details, see Studies I and IV.

Perceptions of bullying. For Study II, Grade 1–3 teacher perceptions of bullying were investigated with a web-based post-test questionnaire, filled in during during May and June 2009. (1) *Teacher competence to tackle bullying* was measured with two questions on a five-point Likert-scale (very little knowledge/skills—very much knowledge/skills): “How much, in your own opinion, do you know about school bullying?”; “How much, in your own opinion, do you have skills to reduce school bullying?” (2) *Teacher confidence on program effectiveness* was measured with three questions on a five-point Likert-scale; “How much do you believe that KiVa program will decrease bullying incidents?”; “How much do you believe that KiVa program will enhance the well-being of victimized students?”; “How much do you believe that KiVa program will enhance school satisfaction of students?” (3) *Teacher understanding of bullying as a malleable phenomenon* was measured by agreement with eight statements on a five-point Likert-scale, e.g., “Group dynamics are the reason for bullying, and school staff is able to influence”; “School staff cannot help it, some kids just bully others”. Four statements emphasized the intervention possibilities of the school staff, whereas four statements considered bullying as a phenomenon on which school staff can not influence. For more details, see Study II.

Principal support. For Study III, teacher perceptions of principal support were examined. The web-based questionnaire, filled in during September and October of 2008 in the beginning of the intervention year, mapped out teacher background information as well as several teacher, classroom, and school characteristics. (1) *Specific support* of the principal related to the anti-bullying work was measured by five statements, such as “According to the principal, antibullying work is a central mission in our school “The principal takes care of sufficient resources, e.g., time, for antibullying work”. (2) *General support* from the superior was measured by three questions asking how often the teacher receives help and support, feedback, and information about the work expectations from his/her superior. The questions of general support were adopted from the Healthy Organization Questionnaire (Lindström, Hottinen, & Bredenberg, 2001). In previous studies on program implementation, principal characteristics have usually been treated as school-level qualities; opinions of individual teachers have been aggregated to school level, and these aggregate variables have been used as predictors at the school level in multilevel analyses (Beets et al., 2008; Gingiss et al., 2006; Gregory et al., 2007; Payne 2009; Payne et al., 2006). However, for example Choi (2003) has suggested that aggregate variables should be modelled both at the level of teachers (within level), and at the level of schools (between level), to differentiate individual-level and group-level processes (see also, Shinn, 2003). Accordingly, in Study III, we modelled principal

support both at the teacher level and at the school level, school-level predictors for principal support were created by aggregating individual responses. For more details, see Study III.

3.2.3 Monitoring Booklets for Kiva Lesson Implementation

As we were interested in the structure of the program implementation, we decided to use detailed teacher reports on various aspects of implementation fidelity (see Mowbray, Holter, Teague, & Bybee, 2003) in Study III. At the beginning of the school year, teachers delivering the student lessons in their classrooms were given booklets for filling in details about program implementation throughout the school year from August to May. On the basis of the information provided in the booklets, three adherence measures of implementation fidelity were created: (1) *Frequency of implementation*, the sum of implemented lessons out of the total 10; (2) *Contents of implementation*, the total number of topics (2–7 topics per lesson, maximum of 50) implemented during the school year; (3) *Duration of implementation*, the total duration of the lessons in hours. For more details, see Study III.

3.2.4 Curricula

The national core curricula for preschool and elementary school (Core Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2000; National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2004), as well as the locally complemented curricula of Town 1 and Town 2, were available from the Internet for Study IV.

3.2.5 Semi-Structured Group Interviews

In order to examine various exosystem-level factors (see Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that may affect the implementation of transition practices in Study IV, a semi-structured group interview was carried out with three locally chosen administrators in each town. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain information about the local administration and curricula by covering the following six themes: (1) The prescription of the transitional co-operation in local curricula (preschool, basic education); (2) The history of co-operation in the municipality; (3) The aims and foci of transitional co-operation now and in the past; (4) The physical location of the preschool education: the history, the present, and the future aims; (5) Challenges in the transitional co-operation; (6) Future plans in the middle of the ongoing administrative reforms. The interviews were carried out in the spring of 2010 by the first and fourth author of Study IV. For more details, see Study IV.

3.3 Analysis Strategies

In Studies I, II and III, multilevel modelling was used. Multilevel modelling takes the nested structure of the data—individual students or teachers nested within schools—into account, and it enables the investigation of associations between variables both at the level of individual students or teachers and at the level of schools (see, e.g., Hox, 2010; Snijders & Bosker, 1999). All analyses were performed with the Mplus program (Muthén & Muthén, 1997–2007). In Study IV, due to the small database and non-normal distributions, numeric data were analyzed by nonparametric tests. In the analysis of the interview data in Study IV, we followed the principles of theory-driven qualitative content analysis (see, Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Patton, 2002). The transcriptions were analyzed individually by the first, second, and third author to obtain reliable results and investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1970, 1997; Patton, 2002), as one of the authors is a psychologist, and two are educationalists. The analysis proceeded in multiple stages, throughout which the data were repeatedly read through. The internal consistency between the three investigators was high, and the three analyses were mostly overlapping and partly complementary. No disagreement occurred when resolving discrepancies amongst the investigators.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Effects of Promotion and Prevention in Preschool and Elementary School

Study I

Ahtola, A., Silinskas, G., Poikonen, P.-L., Kontoniemi, M., Niemi, P. & Nurmi, J.-E. (2011). **Transition to formal schooling: Do transition practices matter for academic performance?** *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 26, 295–302.

This study examined whether the transition practices implemented in preschool–elementary school pairs contribute to children’s academic development during the first year of elementary school. Participants were 398 children who moved from 36 preschools to 22 elementary schools in two Finnish towns. Children’s reading, writing, and math skills were assessed in the spring of preschool and, again, in the spring of their first grade. First, we found that, on average, implementation of four different practices was reported by preschools. The most often implemented practice was discussions concerning the school beginners, which all preschools reported having with elementary schools. Moreover, familiarizing children with the grade 1 environment, and co-operation between the preschool and elementary school teacher were often implemented. Co-operation over curricula or passing on the child’s education plan were rare. All preschools that had implemented one of these most rare practices, had also implemented at least two other practices. This indicates that the total number of implemented practices represents not only the quantity but also the quality of transition activities. Second, children in different preschools did not differ in their academic skills in preschool spring (the ICC was .007), whereas a year later the ICC was .05, suggesting that children from different preschools showed different levels of academic skills in Grade 1. The change in children’s skills was predicted by transition practices in a multilevel latent growth model: the greater the variety of transition practices implemented by teachers, the more the children’s skills developed from preschool to the spring of grade 1. Number of transition practices predicted 67% of the variance in the development of skills at the preschool level (effect size). Co-operation over curricula and passing on written information about children between the preschool and the elementary school were the best individual predictors of the children’s skills, although they were the least commonly used practices, used only within 20–30% of the preschool–elementary school pairs. In contrast, an orientation event organized for all parents did not predict later school achievement. Unexpectedly, we also found that the activities that were intended to directly prepare

preschool children and individual parents for the upcoming elementary-school transition were not strong predictors of later achievement. We assume that this may be because only few, if any, preschool–elementary school pairs implemented these practices systematically.

Study II

Ahtola, A., Haataja, A., Kärnä, A., Poskiparta, E. & Salmivalli, C. (2012). For children only? Effects of the KiVa antibullying program on teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28, 851–859.

The effects of an antibullying program, KiVa, on Grade 1–3 teachers' perceptions on bullying were investigated. Three aspects of teacher perceptions were of interest: their self-evaluated competence to tackle bullying; their confidence in the effectiveness of the KiVa program; and their perception of bullying as a malleable phenomenon that school staff can influence. Data were gathered by web-based questionnaires from 128 teachers in 33 intervention schools and 110 teachers in 29 control schools. Two-level regression models showed that, at the end of the intervention year, self-evaluated competence was at a higher level in intervention schools than in control schools. The final model explained 28% of the school-level variation in self-evaluated competence. However, the confidence in KiVa program's effectiveness and understanding bullying as a malleable phenomenon did not differ significantly between intervention and control schools. There was a trend towards gender effects: male teachers reported having more competence than female teachers, whereas female teachers had more confidence in KiVa program's effectiveness. Further analysis in the intervention schools only revealed that membership in a school's KiVa team, which tackled acute bullying cases, was significantly associated with confidence in the effectiveness of the program. The number of KiVa student lessons implemented by teachers was significantly associated with their perceived competence, as well as with understanding the malleable nature of bullying. On average, 8% of the individual variation in teacher perceptions was explained by engagement in KiVa activities. A trend ($p < .10$) towards two age-related effects was also revealed. Older teachers evaluated their competence to be better, whereas younger teachers were more likely to perceive bullying as a malleable phenomenon.

4.2 Regulation of Implementation of Proactive and Preventive Activities in Schools

Study III

Ahtola, A., Haataja, A., Kärnä, A., Poskiparta, E. & Salmivalli, C. (2012). *Implementation of Antibullying Lessons in Primary Classrooms: Principal Support Matters*. Submitted for publication.

This study examined whether principal support has an effect on the implementation fidelity of student lessons included in the KiVa antibullying program. Written reports on implementation adherence (frequency, contents, and duration) were obtained from 93 Grade 1–3 teachers in 27 primary schools. Perceptions of two types of principal support were gathered with online surveys: general support and specific support for anti-bullying work. On average, the student lessons were implemented with fidelity; 66.7% of teachers reported having implemented all 10 lessons, and about 80% of the suggested topics were implemented. The average total duration of KiVa-lessons in the classes was 11 hours, which is somewhat less than the suggested 15 hours. Teachers in a same elementary school implemented the KiVa-lessons to a varying extent, as the intraclass correlations for implementation frequency, duration, and contents were about .25. We modelled the effects of principal support both at the teacher level and at the school level. Teacher's experience of specific support from the principal was positively related to implementation adherence, whereas, surprisingly, teacher's experience of general support did not enhance implementation and was even negatively related to it. Strongest effects were associated with implementation contents, whereas principal support did not significantly predict variation in duration (time used for delivery). For implementation frequency, the effects were significant at the level of teachers.

Study IV

Ahtola, A., Poikonen, P.-L., Kontoniemi, M., Niemi, P. & Nurmi, J.-E. (2012). *Successful handling of entrance to formal schooling: Transition practices as a local innovation*. *International Journal of Transitions in Childhood*, 5, 3–21.

This study examined at which system level—local school administration, school, or teacher—can factors be found that regulate the implementation of transition practices to formal schooling in Finland. Thirty-six teachers from 22 elementary schools in two towns filled in the questionnaire on the transition activities with the partner preschools. In addition, local school administration

professionals were interviewed. First, on average, teachers reported implementation of three different transition practices between preschools and elementary schools. Nearly every elementary-school teacher reported that both familiarizing with the school environment and discussions on school beginners take place. Less than one third of the elementary-school teachers reported a personal meeting with the family before school starts, getting the education plan or growth portfolio from the preschool, or co-operation over curriculum issues. In Town 1, more practices were implemented than in Town 2. Second, all practices were considered at least somewhat important by elementary school teachers. Discussions on school beginners were considered very important. Familiarizing with the school environment and passing on the education plan or growth portfolio to the elementary school, which, however, was only implemented by less than one third of the teachers, were also considered quite important. On average, no significant obstacles were reported. Extrinsic factors, lack of time and administrative barriers, were considered to be the biggest obstacles to co-operation. Elementary school teachers in Town 1 considered the practices more important than teachers in Town 2, but the potential obstacles were considered to be similar in the two towns. We found that the municipal-level activities and guidelines, along with the teacher-reported importance of the transition practices, were the only recognizable factors clearly connected to the implementation of transition practices. Neither the elementary school size nor the number of preschool partners were connected with the number of transition practices. Teacher reports on the general importance of practices correlated with the number of transition practices the elementary school implemented, but teacher reports on the significance of obstacles to transition practices did not correlate with the number of implemented transition practices. Nor were the elementary school teachers' work experience and reported number of transition practices connected.

5 DISCUSSION

Prerequisites and effects of proactive and preventive psycho-social student welfare activities in Finnish preschool and elementary school settings were the topics of the present thesis. School is one of the most important developmental contexts of children and adolescents, also in terms of psycho-social development and well-being. This is also stated in the legislation and core curricula of Finnish basic education. So far, student welfare work has mainly focused on interventions, and psychological skills and knowledge have mostly been used at the level of individual students and their families. The voluminous possibilities to enhance well-being of all students as a part of everyday school work have not been fully exploited. One obstacle to promotion and prevention activities may be that definition, implementation, and measurement of them are rather obscure (Adelman & Taylor, 2010a; Bower, 1965). In contrast, various forms of assessments (e.g., tests, psychological assessments, health examinations) and interventions (e.g., remedial teaching, psychological counselling) implemented by teachers as well as by student welfare professionals are easier to grasp.

Consequently, in this thesis three goals were set: (1) To present concrete examples of proactive and preventive psycho-social student welfare activities in Finnish basic education; (2) To investigate measurable positive effects of proactive and preventive activities; and (3) To investigate implementation of proactive and preventive activities in ecological contexts.

Two prominent phenomena in preschool and elementary school years, that is, transition to formal schooling and school bullying, were chosen as examples of critical situations that are appropriate targets for proactive and preventive psycho-social student welfare activities. Transitions and group dynamics are natural phenomena in educational system. That is why preparing oneself with a universal approach to enhance successful transitions and healthy social relations and to reduce failure in these should be obvious. However, until recently, the procedures concerning both school transitions and school bullying have been rather problem-focused and reactive in nature.

To summarize, we found that proactive and prevention activities had positive effects; transition practices were connected with better academic skills at the end of Grade 1, and the KiVa antibullying program influenced Grade 1–3 teachers' perceptions of bullying. We also found factors that regulate the implementation of proactive and preventive activities; principal support for the KiVa program enhances the delivery of the antibullying student lessons in Grades 1–3, and it is

possible to enhance implementation of transition practices systematically at the level of local administration.

5.1 Effects of Promotion and Prevention

5.1.1 Transition Practices and Academic Skills

In our longitudinal Study I on children's achievement, we found that the academic skills of children from preschool–elementary school pairs that implemented several supportive activities during the preschool year developed more quickly from preschool to Grade 1 compared with the skills of children from pairs that used fewer practices. This result is in line with the modern ecological view of school transition, which emphasizes how the contexts of the school entrants should connect and support the child during the period of discontinuity and change (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Generally, the frequency of transition practices was modest, leading us to conclude that, on average, implementation of transition practices in these preschool–elementary school pairs still represents more orientation to school than real transition programs (Dockett & Perry, 2001).

At the level of individual transition practices, the positive association was found clearly in case of two practices. First, co-operation on curriculum issues between preschool and elementary school teachers was important, highlighting the need for alignment and coordination in education (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005; Kagan & Kauerz, 2007). Second, passing on written information about the child from preschool to elementary school was helpful. Receiving information on future students is considered important by school teachers (Einarsdottir et al., 2008; Pianta et al., 1999; Study IV), but sometimes opposed by parents, because they fear a 'Pygmalion in the classroom' effect (see Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968/1992). Our results suggest that passing on information is beneficial, at least when the information is comprehensive and documented for repeated use.

These results challenge the earlier approach to school transition; while it is important and often necessary to consider preschoolers' individual skills and characteristics or, for example, familial history of learning difficulties (Kim & Suen, 2003; Niemi et al., 2011), and contrive individual support for Grade 1 to enhance successful school transition, a more proactive stance is also needed. A recent survey of Finnish psychologists involved in school transition phase suggests that psychologists are willing and able to change the outdated and one-sided methods and focus of their work (Ahtola & Kontturi, 2012). In addition to assessments and support for individual families (indicated actions), they could participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of a comprehensive transition program including both universal and targeted actions.

At the moment in Finland, at least some transition practices between preschools and elementary schools are widely used (see also, Ahtola & Kontturi, 2012). The current challenge, accordingly, is to enhance active and high-quality implementation of and commitment to these procedures in all Finnish schools. The ecological perspective on transitions could also be utilized in earlier and later educational transitions.

5.1.2 The KiVa Antibullying Program and Teachers' Perceptions of Bullying

Whole-school antibullying intervention programs are designed to prevent and decrease bullying among students. The KiVa antibullying program has succeeded in this (Kärnä et al., 2011a,b, 2012). In the present study, we focused on possible *effects on teachers* and found that participation in the KiVa intervention influenced teachers' self-evaluated competence to tackle bullying; thus reflecting better self-efficacy concerning bullying. Thus, teachers learn by teaching (see, e.g., Bargh & Schul, 1980; Grzega, 2005, 2006; Grzega & Schöner, 2008).

The effects of the KiVa program on teachers are interesting, because they show that even though the KiVa antibullying program is not aimed at changing teachers and it involves only a modest amount of face-to-face training, it may still have additional effects on teachers' competence to tackle bullying. These results corroborate earlier findings of intensive teacher training on anti-bullying work (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004; Sela-Shayovitz, 2009). Implementing the KiVa antibullying program can be seen, in fact, as teacher training in the problem of bullying. Educating students about issues related to bullying, as well as discussing and carrying out interactive activities with them, in turn, enhances teachers' knowledge and skills concerning bullying. These results confirm the feedback from intervention schools; teachers felt that only at the end of the school year, were they beginning to see what KiVa is really all about.

Closer investigation of the intervention schools showed that the level of engagement in the KiVa activities was positively associated with the perceptions of bullying at the end of the intervention year. First, membership in the school's KiVa team, which handles acute cases of bullying, was related to greater confidence in the effectiveness of the KiVa program. The school team members saw that their intervention really did work, as Garandeau, Little, Kärnä, Poskiparta and Salmivalli (2011) have shown that school teams actually managed to stop or decrease bullying in almost all cases. On the basis of this finding, we wonder whether schools should allow or even encourage a certain amount of turnover in the members of the school teams to enhance teacher commitment. The greater amount of training and support received by school team members, compared to non-members, are factors that may also have affected confidence in KiVa. Second, the number of KiVa

student lessons delivered by teachers was strongly related to self-evaluated competence, as well as to understanding bullying as a malleable phenomenon. Thus, the student lessons offer a learning experience not only for students but also for the teachers planning and delivering the lessons.

Teacher perceptions matter, because when teachers feel that they have the competence to intervene, they may also have more courage and willingness to observe and recognize bullying and victimization among their students. What is more, changes in teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and skills may mediate the program effects on students. For instance, it seems that students' perceptions of what teachers think and can do about bullying affect students' own readiness to defend victims of bullying (Pöyhönen, Juvonen, Peets, & Salmivalli, 2012).

5.2 Regulation of Implementation

Studies I and II suggested that school-based promotion and prevention activities are associated with and may even lead to positive outcomes both in children and teachers. In Studies III and IV, we investigated factors that affect implementation activity; the number of delivered KiVa antibullying student lessons, and the number of transition practices between preschool and elementary school. We were especially interested in different levels of factors; individual teachers, schools, and local administration. We wanted to investigate the position of principals and local administration in the implementation process, because we assumed that implementation is not a responsibility of teachers alone. Of course, the success of top-down process presupposes that the higher levels in organizational hierarchy do not only formally mandate things to be done but show real interest and facilitate the implementation in concrete ways.

5.2.1 Principal Support and the Implementation of the KiVa Student Lessons

In Study III we found that principal's commitment and support for antibullying work has a clear-cut positive effect on implementation adherence of student lessons of KiVa antibullying program. The more teachers experience support for and commitment to anti-bullying work from their principal, the more they report having covered KiVa student lessons and topics. This is in line with earlier research (Olweus & Limber, 2010; Payne, 2009; Payne et al., 2006; Ransford et al., 2009).

However, the results of general superior support were unexpected. Not only did we find that general superior support, such as help and feedback from the principal, is not enough to facilitate implementation of KiVa-lessons, but it also seems that general support perceived by teachers may even be negatively related to program implementation fidelity. In fact, some previous studies offer some support for this finding (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003; Klimes-Dougan et al., 2009; Payne &

Eckert, 2010). To understand these counterintuitive results we must analyze what organization capacity, collegial collaboration, and principal support mean within the setting of school. For example, school staffrooms with pleasant atmosphere are actually not ideal for development and change, and the good organizational capacity may actually lead to the expectation that implementation will originate automatically (Hargreaves; 1992; Payne & Eckert, 2010). Thus, it seems that the effects of organizational characteristics on program implementation are not straightforward and they clearly require more investigation.

Presently in Finland, more than 90% of the schools have adopted the KiVa antibullying program, financed by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The current challenges, accordingly, are to develop antibullying programs also for early childhood education and for upper secondary level, and to enhance active and high-quality implementation of and commitment to these procedures in all Finnish schools. On the basis of these results we are not ready to argue that general principal support is counterproductive for implementation. However, we do suggest that the principal's specific support for the program is more important. This leads us to ask how to enhance principals' commitment to prevention programs. At least in Finnish settings, the process of principal commitment may be affected by various factors. Direct information and motivation from the program representatives may convince principals to some extent. In the multi-level, concentric system of public schools, the policies and resources of the local administration are also crucial, as are the views and experiences of fellow principals. What is more, co-operation with the multiprofessional student welfare team may affect the principal. Last but not least, expectations of students' families are also likely to be important.

5.2.2 Transition Practices as a Local Innovation

In Study IV, we wanted to find out why some schools implement several useful and inexpensive transition practices, whereas other schools use only a few of them. We were interested in broadening the scope and looking at local-level (exosystem) qualities, whereas earlier studies have looked for explanations mostly at the level of individual teachers or schools (microsystems) (La Paro et al., 2000; Pianta et al., 1999; Rous et al., 2010). Our data stem from two Finnish towns, in which elementary schools reported considerably different numbers of transition practices during the school transition phase. Closer examination of the history and goals of the preschool–elementary school co-operation emphasized this difference. In Town 1, where schools implemented several transition practices, a process could be identified whereby intrinsic need and active individuals, "innovators", initiate a progressive development which results in versatile transition activities in most of the preschool–elementary school pairs. In Town 2, where fewer transition practices were

implemented, the motivation for developing the transition activities had been more externally guided from the national level, which seems to be an insufficient base for local innovation. The curriculum texts, as well as oral reports, were scarce, incoherent, and abstract. School transition was viewed primarily from the narrow perspective of children with special needs and passing on information about children.

In fact, the local-level activities and guidelines, along with teacher-reported importance of the transition practices, were the only factors significantly associated with the implementation rate of transition practices between elementary schools and partner preschools. Teacher- and school-level factors available in this study turned out to be mostly not significant. For example, the potential obstacles of transition practices were not connected with the implementation activity; reported obstacles seem to represent a general individual-level attitude with no connection to actions in practice, or to the real barriers of co-operation with preschool.

These results and possible explanations for different developmental paths in the two towns highlight the importance of both school- and teacher-level work and active administration in a successful change in schools: a reciprocal process is needed (Fullan, 2007; Kirk-Downey & Perry, 2006). Transition practices are implemented by preschool and elementary school teachers, but the local administration may have important effects on the aims and activities in schools. Local-level multiprofessional student welfare work, which links the administration of education, health and social services, is needed to coordinate and guide school-level activities.

In terms of transition to formal schooling, important changes have recently taken place in Finland. Many municipalities have transferred the administration of early childhood education to the basic education, and more and more preschools are now located in elementary school buildings. As the preschool will most likely become compulsory in the near future, the questions of preschool–elementary school co-operation and unification are crucial. Here, the level of local administration is fundamental, but at the same time it is important to understand that shared administration and physical environment as such are not a sufficient condition for successful co-operation (actually, they are not even necessary). At best, these conditions offer a fruitful ground for future success. However, it also is possible to carry on with parallel existence in the same building or in the same organizational niche while not knowing anything about each other. In future, the transition from daycare facilities to preschool will most likely become more prominent both physically, organizationally, pedagogically and functionally. This will bring along many new questions and challenges.

5.3 Strengths

Several strengths of the aims and methods of the studies of this thesis may be highlighted. Studies I and IV investigated school transition practices. Study I was one of the first to look into the effects of transition practices on children's school adaptation, and, to our knowledge, it was the first study to use longitudinal data on children's skills in this context. What is more, compared to earlier research on transition practices, which has often investigated quite general activities, such as flyers and open houses (see, e.g., Pianta et al., 1999; Schulting et al., 2005), the practices investigated in Studies I and IV were more intense and specific to the primary school transition. In Study II and Study III the implementation of the KiVa antibullying program was considered from the teachers' point of view. To our knowledge, Study II was the first study to investigate the antibullying program effects on teachers, and Study III was the second study to investigate regulation of an antibullying program implementation. In Study III, we were able to utilize detailed data on antibullying lesson implementation, compared to the earlier study of Kallestad and Olweus (2003), who used only one index of implementation.

In Studies I, II and III multilevel modelling was used. Multilevel modelling takes into account the nested data structure; students nested in classrooms (Study I), or teachers nested in schools (Studies II and III) (see, e.g., Hox, 2010; Snijders & Bosker, 1999). If the nested structure of the data is ignored, the standard errors tend to be underestimated, leading to inflation of the Type I error rate. Multilevel modeling also enables the investigation of associations between variables both at the level of individual students or teachers and at the level of classrooms or schools. In Study III we actually modelled the same variables at two levels, according to the suggestions in literature (Choi, 2003; Shinn, 2003). In Study IV, the small dataset did not allow the multilevel method to be used. However, we had an interesting opportunity to utilize a multi-method approach in this study; both statistical methods and qualitative content analysis were used.

5.4 Limitations

The main limitations of the studies in this thesis are related to study design issues. In Study I and Study II, effects of promotion and prevention activities were investigated. However, Study I was not experimental in nature; natural variation in the number of transition practices was measured. Thus, the relation between transition practices and school achievement may also be due to a third factor, such as high overall quality of school and teachers. The data for Study II investigating antibullying program effects on teachers was experimental, but, because of practical difficulties,

there were no pre-test measurements for teachers. This is problematic especially in terms of the results within the intervention schools; the possibility of self-selection and the Matthew effect must be taken into the consideration. The comparison between intervention and control school teachers is on a stronger base because the schools were randomized to these conditions.

Studies II and III utilized data from the evaluation study of the KiVa antibullying program. Many general threats to the validity of an evaluation study (see, Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002) can be excluded due to random assignment design. However, the effects of reactivity to the experimental situation and novelty effects cannot be ruled out. Obviously, being a teacher in a KiVa intervention school brought along not only the KiVa materials and ideas but also, for example, special attention and feeling of taking part in an important innovation.

The study designs also resulted in rather small number of targeted participants. The original datasets for both longitudinal research projects from which the data for this thesis were drawn were impressive with about 2,000 children in the First Steps project and more than 30,000 students in the KiVa study. However, the datasets of the present studies were much smaller, as the focus of this thesis was mostly on Grade 1–3 teachers (Study II, Study III) or even on municipalities (Study IV). Moreover, even though the response rate in the KiVa evaluation study internet-based questionnaires and implementation booklets was rather good, there was a considerable amount of missing data in Study II and Study III. When investigating program effects on deliverers and implementation activity, it is problematic to miss those participants who might not have been the most active in the implementation process.

Finally, the measures of implementation of transition practices and antibullying student lessons can be criticized. Most of our measures were structure measures; only quantity of implementation, not quality, was measured. However, when programs are initially being evaluated and fidelity criteria are first developed, an emphasis on structure over process items may be appropriate (Mowbray et al., 2003). What is more, in Study IV we also utilized qualitative data and methods by interviewing the members of local administration.

5.5 Implications

5.5.1 Implications to Finnish School Context

Comprehensive proactive and preventive student welfare system in Finnish preschool and basic education necessitates that the value of this approach in the educational contexts is fully acknowledged. The need for reform is obvious; concurrently with the excellent success in OECD's

PISA surveys (OECD, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010), recent international comparisons have revealed alarming news on school experiences of Finnish students. It seems that Finnish students do not like school (Samdal, Dür, & Freeman, 2004), and they report the least calm classrooms (OECD, 2011). Gender differences in reading and science achievement, favoring girls, are very wide (OECD, 2010), and after compulsory basic education, which reaches practically all children and adolescents, too many students drop out of school and are in danger of being marginalized (OECD, 2012). Finally, tragic bombing and (school) shooting incidents in 2000s have raised questions about the quality of the Finnish school system. There is evidence that victimization among peers is one of the risk factors of school shootings (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003), and this seems also to be true in the Finnish incidents (Oikeusministeriö, 2009, 2010).

However, the scope of the recent public discussion on how to enhance well-being of all Finnish children and youth has been somewhat limited. Even though the concept of prevention is usually appropriately mentioned, the discussion is actually more or less about responding to the existing problems rather than about promoting well-being. Except for the development of the KiVa antibullying program, which was launched by the Finnish ministry of Education after the unsettling news on Finnish students not liking school, the importance of early developmental contexts, daycare centers and elementary schools, has not been considered to a sufficient extent. What is more, it seems that, in the Finnish society at large, the role of psycho-social well-being has primarily been to serve as an instrument for enhancing good learning and achievement, rather than having a value of its own (Ahtola & Niemi, 2012).

The themes of school well-being and student welfare have been discussed in recent Finnish dissertations and other publications in the fields of education (Koskela, 2009; Lairio, Heikkinen, & Penttilä, 2008; Lappalainen, Kuittinen, & Meriläinen, 2008; Piispanen, 2008; Vesikansa, 2009), social policy (Ellonen, 2008; Kurki, Nivala, & Sipilä-Lähdekorpi, 2006; Nurmi, 2009; Sipilä-Lähdekorpi, 2004), and psychology (Alatupa, Karppinen, Keltikangas-Järvinen, & Savioja, 2007; Heikkilä, 2011; Pesonen & Heinonen, 2005, 2007; Raninen & Takalo, 2007). From the standpoint of child mental health services and child psychiatry, the recent direction has also been to strengthen the everyday environments of children instead of referring families to centralized special services (e.g., 2008–2011 Kaste-ohjelma, Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health). Specialized professional help is brought, for instance, to school, and the “client” may not be (only) the child but primarily those adults who meet him or her daily. Generally speaking, however, Finland has not followed the international interest in the possibilities and responsibilities of school communities to advance the well-being of children and youth, and systematic research effort, literature, and general

terminology on welfare and health promotion in schools in Finland are still conspicuous by their absence (Jauhiainen, 1993; Rimpelä et al., 2010). Future research efforts in student welfare and school psychology, as well as focused training for psychologists and other student welfare professionals in educational contexts should be encouraged in Finnish universities. Moreover, a specific research centre for school health and well-being should be established.

In terms of highly-valued academic achievement, Finnish basic education already relies heavily on promotion and prevention. Special education needs of students are attended to early on, and reactive procedures, such as class retention, are rarely used. Also in terms of healthy development and well-being, legislation and core curricula highlight the idea of promotion as well as prevention of problems, but this perspective and the intrinsic value of inter- and intrapersonal skills need to be strengthened in the Finnish educational systems. For one, a more analytic approach is needed in preschools and elementary schools to put these aims into practice. More time and effort should be used to analyze, plan, and evaluate the activities of the multiprofessional group, and the allocation of professional resources. In this, the efforts of school psychologists and physicians are central (Ahtola & Kiiski-Mäki, 2012; Guvå & Hylander, 2012). The activities of student welfare teams and professionals should be structured according to the concepts of the public health approach; into universal, targeted, and indicated actions. Actually, the recent revision of the core curriculum of Finnish basic education provides an adequate parallel; support for learning and schooling consists of three levels; general, intensified and special support. General support builds for the notion that every student has a right to high-quality education as well as to guidance and support for learning and schooling. This is in many ways similar to the universal proactive and preventive student welfare discussed above. Second, it is essential that various proactive and preventive activities are perceived and implemented in a comprehensive fashion, instead of fragmentary, perhaps overlapping and thus inefficient efforts (Adelman & Taylor, 2010b). In fact, hopefully, in the future, we will talk less about marginalized ‘programs’ and ‘projects’, because the aims of student psycho-social well-being are pursued by similar means as any other skills; various helpful procedures are an integral part of everyday life of schools, and facts and skills about psycho-social well-being are taught as regular subjects, such as Finnish, maths, or physical education. This means, among other things, reforms in teacher training programs.

In questions of psycho-social well-being and learning, the role of psychology and psychologists is crucial, not only in consultation and co-operation with individual teachers but also in planning and developing various promotion and prevention activities at the level of the whole school and the local administration (e.g., Hoagwood & Johnson, 2003; Hunter, 2003; Merrell & Buchanan, 2006;

Strein, Hoagwood, & Cohn, 2003). Accordingly, the focus of practising school psychologists should not only be on individual-level assessments and therapeutic contacts but also on the indirect work with school professionals and administration (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Meyers, 1995; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). However, although this recommendation has repeatedly been made in the literature for a long time, it has, so far, been actualized to a lesser extent. The present thesis offers some concrete examples of new ways to utilize psychological knowledge in the contexts of education.

5.5.2 Future Directions in Research

The importance of organizational capacity is often acknowledged when various school-based promotion and prevention programs are discussed (see, e.g., Keshavarz, Nutbeam, Rowling, & Khavarpour, 2010; Rowling & Samdal, 2010; Samdal & Rowling, 2010). However, surprisingly, the actual change in teachers and organizations has been mostly disregarded when the program effects have been studied. Throughout the years, students are replaced, but teachers, more or less, remain. Their commitment, activity, knowledge, attitudes, and skills are crucial when the school's position in the promotion of well-being and the prevention of problems is negotiated. In future studies on school-based promotion and prevention activities, the teacher and organization perspectives should be considered more comprehensively. The multi-level nature of school data should be taken into account even more carefully in the planning of data gathering, if the teacher-, school- and regional-level factors are to be examined with complex and reliable multi-level models. Future research should focus on answering three essential questions. What regulates implementation at concentric levels of school organization? How can we enhance the implementation process and engagement of school staff? How might teachers and organizations change as a result of implementation activities? At the school level, more detailed information on, for instance, school climate or ethos, teacher turnover, and leadership, are also needed (see Hargreaves, Halás, & Pont, 2007; Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer, 1992; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979; Smolkin, 1999).

Before designing programs to enhance successful transitions, experimental studies on transition practices are also needed to test the hypothesis that transition activities cause unique positive effects on children, and to rule out alternative interpretations of correlational evidence (e.g., greater adjustment of children in schools that implement a greater number of transition practices is a result of higher quality school and teachers). Moreover, the parents' experiences regarding the school transition and transition practices should be examined, as well as those of the children themselves

(see, e.g., Dockett & Perry, 2012). In future, longitudinal studies, such as First Steps, provide interesting possibilities for investigating later educational transitions in the Finnish system.

We also need to know more about the effective components of both transition practices and the KiVa antibullying program in various contexts. What is essential in implementation? The ongoing nationwide dissemination and follow-up study of the KiVa program offer opportunities to understand what happens when a school-level preventive program is implemented in a non-experimental natural setting, in a wide scale, and in a long-term fashion.

6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, the prerequisites and effects of proactive and preventive student welfare activities in preschool and elementary school were investigated. Smoothing the transition to formal schooling and tackling and preventing school bullying were chosen as examples of these activities. The answers to our questions were as follows:

1. Do promotion and prevention activities have measurable effects?

Study I: Co-operation between preschool, elementary school, and parents predicts better school achievement in Grade 1. A comprehensive school transition program, including universal, targeted, and indicated actions, should be pursued.

Study II: The KiVa antibullying program has effects, not only on students, but also on teachers. The intervention affected teachers' competence to tackle bullying. Involvement in KiVa activities was associated with teachers' perceptions of bullying and antibullying work.

2. Which factors regulate the implementation of promotion and prevention programs? To what extent should we consider implementation an individual level activity, or is an ecological view more fruitful?

Study III: Principal support for antibullying work enhances teachers' program implementation. Principal engagement and concrete support, such as resources, affect teachers' activity to deliver preventive antibullying student lessons.

Study IV: Engagement at the level of local administration enhances co-operative activities between preschools and elementary schools. Teacher perceptions and characteristics were of lesser importance. These results highlight the need for multiprofessional co-operation at every level of the educational system.

In conclusion, our results suggest that school-based promotion and prevention activities have beneficial effects not only for students but also for teachers. Various top-down processes, such as engagement at the level of elementary school principals or local administration, may enhance implementation of these beneficial activities.

The main message of the results is that when aiming to support the lives of children, primary attention should be on adults (see, Conoley & Gutkin, 1995). School adults implement and support the universal promotion and intervention activities, which concern all students. Focusing on their resources and attitudes is a worthwhile investment in terms of children's well-being.

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