

## Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

# Sweden case study report 4 The Nightingale: University students tutoring 9-12 year olds for social and cultural diversity

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October 2007

The EPASI project is a programme of analysis of educational programmes in fourteen European countries, designed to address various forms of social inequality. The project analysis was conducted in the period 2007 – 2009. This report is part of the overall project, details of which are at <http://www.epasi.eu>.

The analysis is intended to be used within the overall framework of the EPASI programme.

The project has been funded with support from the European Commission. Each report within the overall project is the responsibility of the named authors.

The EPASI project was conducted by the following institutions:

- The Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London
- Metropolitan University (UK) (Coordinator)
- Katholieke Hogeschool Zuid-West-Vlaanderen (Belgium)
- Univerzita Hradec Králové (Czech Republic)
- Montpellier III - Université Paul Valéry (France)
- Panepistimio Patron ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΠΑΤΡΩΝ (Greece)
- Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona (Spain)
- Malmö högskola (Sweden)

## **The Nightingale: University students tutoring 9-12 year olds for social and cultural diversity**

### **Summary**

*The Nightingale* is a project where students from Malmö University individually and regularly meet children between eight and 12 for one year. The students act as the children's adult tutors. The children and their tutors meet once a week doing all sorts of activities together. The project started as a pilot project in 1997 funded by the Wallenberg Foundation. The aim of the project is to promote integration and social and ethnic diversity. Another aim is to encourage the participating children to study at Malmö University after they finished upper secondary school (Lönroth 2007). From 2005 *The Nightingale* is a permanent project funded by Malmö University in cooperation with Malmö city. In all 900 children and 900 students have participated in the project. The official name of the project is *Näktergalens mentorsverksamhet*. <http://www.mah.se/naktergalen>

### **Background**

The tutor project *The Nightingale* started at the Teacher Training School in Malmö in 1996. One of the initiators was Lena Rubinstein-Reich, who was, and still is, a teacher at Malmö University. The aim with the project was to create a tutor project with similar content and organisation as Perach in Israel. Perach, the Hebrew word for flower, started in 1974 within the University system in Israel. The aim of Perach is to promote integration and social and ethnic diversity. Another aim is to give insight in and understanding of the life conditions of other people (*ibid*, p13).

Malmö is one of the most segregated and multicultural cities in Sweden. 57 percent of the children in Malmö have a foreign background and the economical conditions for a great amount of the immigrant families are very poor. In 2004, 32 percent of the children in Malmö were considered to be poor (the average for Sweden is little more than 10 percent). In spite of a number of important political decisions, such as the building of the bridge across Öresund and the establishment of Malmö University, the segregation in Malmö has increased over the last years ([www.malmo.se](http://www.malmo.se), "Strategisk utveckling, Malmö stad").

It is considered necessary to initiate a great number of efforts in order to eliminate the negative consequences of segregation and *The Nightingale* is to be regarded as one of those efforts.

### **Aims**

The fundamental idea with *The Nightingale* is that its activities shall be of mutual use for everyone involved. Another ambition is that networks will be created between the participating children, their families, their schools, the students and the university. For both the children and the tutors, *The Nightingale* means new friendship, new knowledge and new experiences. The interplay between tutors and children can be regarded as the first step in creating increased understanding and tolerance between different ethnic groups. This can, in the long run, contribute to increased integration in the society.

#### *Purpose*

The children will be given:

- increased possibilities to strengthen their self-esteem
- a positive adult model, a student at Malmö university

- new experiences and knowledge.

The students will be given:

- the opportunity to be an adult model with a close relation with a child
- a deeper insight in the life of children and thus increased knowledge, understanding and empathy for individuals' diverse life conditions
- a complement to the university education.

### *Goals*

- The goal is that the friendship between tutors and children will lead to an increased understanding, respect and tolerance of each other's different social and cultural backgrounds.
- The goal is that the children will be more successful both in school and in their private surroundings and that more young people will apply for university studies.
- The goal is that the project will contribute to the equalisation of social and educational differences.

### **Funding**

During the first three years, 1997-2000 (the pilot project period) the project was funded by The Wallenberg Foundation. The total financial support during this period was little more than 9,000,000 SEK. From 2000 *The Nightingale* is funded by Malmö University (1,700,000 SEK) and Malmö city (700,000 SEK).

### **Description**

As mentioned above the project started as a pilot project in 1997 initiated by Dr Lena Rubinstein – Reich. The name *The Nightingale* has its background in the poet Hjalmar Gullberg (1898-1961) who lived in Malmö and wrote poems about nightingales. The name also has its background in the symbol given to the bird: "The nightingale is a small bird that sings beautifully when it feels safe".

When the project started only teacher students were involved as tutors. The first year, pupils from two schools in Malmö were involved in the project. In 1999 it was decided that students from all Malmö University should be recruited as tutors. The same year it was also decided that *The Nightingale* could continue on condition that the activities were to be increased with one more school every year.

In 2006/2007, six compulsory schools in Malmö were connected to *The Nightingale*. Five of these schools are situated in Fosie, a mixed district in terms of its population and of their life conditions. 15-20 children from each school participate. The teachers at the involved schools inform children and parents about *The Nightingale* and encourage them to apply for participating in its activities. All children at these schools get a "children brochure" translated into many different languages in order to reach all children and parents. The brochure contains brief information about the activities offered in *The Nightingale* and an interest application. The teachers and the headmasters at the schools decide what children will be offered to join *The Nightingale*.

*The Nightingale* has a flat organisation with coordinators and one head manager. The office is located to Orkanen (*The Hurricane*, our translation), the building where teacher education is carried out. The coordinators, among other things, recruit new tutors, inform student groups, interview students and decide which students should be the tutors. The coordinators also interview pupils who have applied for a tutor. Each coordinator gives both individual and group supervision to 40 students. The coordinators are also responsible for common activities for pupils and tutors. Another

task for the coordinators is to give both internal and external information about the activities of *The Nightingale*. The head manager of *The Nightingale* is responsible for the planning and the evaluation of the activities. The head manager is also responsible for the budget.

*The Nightingale* directs to multi-cultural schools situated in districts with mixed socio-economic environments. At least 20 percent of the pupils must apply for a tutor. It is also of great importance that the school is genuinely interested in the activities of *The Nightingale* and that it has good knowledge about the project. There is one contact person at each school involved in the project. The contact person distributes information brochures, letters and forms. He or she conducts the contact with the pupil and its family if problems arise between the pupil and the tutor. The contact person must have good knowledge about the pupils at his or her school. The contact person at the involved schools very often is the school nurse or the school welfare officer.

All students at Malmö University can apply for becoming a tutor in *The Nightingale*. All students who are interested in becoming a tutor are interviewed. The aim of the interview is to find out each student's interests, experiences and qualifications. The interviewed students are asked to tell about themselves, their leisure time interests, former employments and experiences. What finally determines whether a student will become a tutor are the interview, the student's references and whether there is a pupil whose profile matches that of the student. The students who are picked out are educated on three different compulsory occasions (two times in September and on one occasion in March). The aim with the education is to give the tutors a common framework for their mission and fundamental knowledge about the aims of *The Nightingale*. All students, irrespective of education, receive the same education with the same content. In connection with the first educational occasion each student gets a folder containing:

- Agreement
- Form for eventual tax paying
- Monthly reports to be filled in every week when the student meets the pupil
- A guide for tutors.

On the second education day, which is arranged one week before the tutor activities start, each student visits the school of her or his pupil. The student is given information about the school and its immediate surroundings.

The contact person at each school in cooperation with the teachers and the headmaster decides which pupils will be offered a tutor. Priority is given to newly arrived children, children who need to improve their Swedish, children with many sisters and brothers, lonely children, children in need of a male or female model or children in need of meeting new grown-ups. Priority is not given to children from families with important social problems or other difficulties.

The tutors and children meet two to three hours a week, from October to May. They can meet both in the tutor's home and at the home of the child. They can also visit museums, go in for sports or investigate what leisure activities are available in the child's neighbourhood. The tutors' task is to create a personal relationship with the child, to be supportive and to be a positive model. The tutor should do things together with the child that he or she has not experienced before. Most tutors and children make everyday activities together such as cooking, baking and play games. Sometimes they also visit libraries, museums, art galleries or the university. Many tutors and children also are engaged in sport activities such as badminton, bowling and skating.

For newly arrived children, the meetings with his or her tutor also mean an opportunity to practice Swedish. Thus the meetings with the tutors can be compared with private language lessons, which in many cases have had a positive influence on the children's language development (Lönroth 2007).

Each tutor documents the activities that he or she carries out together with the children in a monthly report.

In May each year, a breaking-up day is arranged. All children, parents and tutors are invited. During the breaking-up day a large number of activities are arranged.

Each tutor is given:

- Education/Guidance
- 5,000 SEK
- Working certificate
- New and valuable experiences.

### **Other comments and information**

Similar projects have been initiated in Kristianstad (Näktergalen Kristianstad) and Helsingborg (Näktergalen Helsingborg).

The current project leader, Carina Sild Lönroth, is also the project coordinator for the EU-project “MentorMigration” and she will during a period of three years coordinate the efforts to implement vital parts of the “Nightingale model” in seven different European cities (Ljubljana in Slovenia, Girona in Spain, Linz in Austria, Zug in Switzerland, Berlin and Freiburg in Germany and Stavanger in Norway).

Lönroth will also be project leader for the one year project “Nightingale Senior”, which started in autumn 2007.

In 2000, *the Nightingale* was pointed out as “a good example” by The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (Högskoleverlets rapportserie 2000: 9 R).

In 2002, *The Nightingale* got the integration prize from Malmö city.

The European network URBACT has identified *The Nightingale* as a “good example”, “from exclusion to inclusion” (<http://www.urbact.org>).

### **References**

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