

## Teacher in the spotlight – Solveig Jungner

**Name:** Solveig Jungner

**School:** Vasa övningskola – practise school for the Faculty of Education of Åbo Akademi University in Vasa /Vaasa, Finland. The school comprises all levels from pre-school to upper secondary education. We train teachers for all the Swedish schools in Finland, both class teachers and subject teachers. The language of instruction in the school is Swedish. In our International Baccalaureate section the language of instruction is English.

**Minority language:** Our language situation, in contrast to most other schools in the Network of Schools is different. Finland has a Swedish speaking minority of 6% of the population (roughly 300,000 people) and the Swedish language is the second official language of the country.



The bilingual situation means we have our own schools, newspapers, radio channels, and a Swedish TV channel etc. The Swedish population is mostly concentrated on the west and south coasts of Finland. The common history with Sweden until 1809 is the reason for the status of the Swedish language here.

**How long have you been a teacher?** After graduation from Åbo Akademi University, the Swedish university in Finland, my teacher husband and I moved to Tampere in 1970 to teach at the Swedish school. It was a good school, but we both felt that we needed to move on, and so we headed for Vasa on the west coast. During that time all of the Swedish teacher training had been concentrated to Vasa, so we have been part of it almost from the start.

**Which subject(s) do you teach?**

Swedish mother tongue and English .

When the school introduced the International Baccalaureate programme in 1992 I became the first coordinator, which was quite a challenge. Of course there had been internationalization projects at the school before that, but teaching subjects in a foreign language in a very demanding programme meant finding teachers qualified in their subjects and in English. It was like setting up a new school, quite a task but also rewarding. I remained on that post until 2000 when I went back to full time teaching, now mostly mother tongue Swedish. In the last fifteen years I have only been teaching the 16-18 year-olds and preparing them for their exams both the IB exam in mother tongue Swedish and the national matriculation exam. At the same time I have been guiding the teacher trainees in their teaching at our school.

Now that I am about to retire after this term I ask myself what the most interesting aspect of my career has been? The answer is manifold, but it is being there with the students and for the students, be it pupils or trainees. All the encounters when we have done things together, often something with literature and when we have felt the joy of learning, found something and grown as human beings at the same time.

I think that one of the best rewards from the teaching profession is when meeting students years and years after they have left school and they come up to you and say:

“Hello, do you remember me?” The same applies to former trainees that I have met later on at conferences and in-service. I feel I know who most of the mother tongue teachers in the Swedish schools are.

The whole school has about 800 students, the upper sec. Roughly 350, so I am not the only teacher or trainer in my subject. The comradeship with my colleagues has been a source of joy, too , both in my own school or with Finnish colleagues in different associations related to work.

**What aspect of your job do you find most interesting?**

When teaching English I find that television and the internet are great assets which support the teaching of a foreign language. On the other hand when teaching mother tongue I find that these sometimes constitute an obstacle. To actually make the students aware of finding things in the text, which cannot be found in a filmed version of the novel is a thing most mother tongue teachers are confronted with nowadays.

The challenge of guiding the trainees is perhaps to make them aware of their own strengths and for them to find their own style of teaching and not become copies of myself.

***Can you briefly describe a school/class project or activity, involving your minority language that you are working on at the moment/have worked on this year?***

This does not really apply to our situation in the same way as to minority groups in other countries. We do have Finnish speaking students in the IB section and they are taught their mother tongue by a teacher from a Finnish partner school. But through the IB our students have become more aware of the possibilities of co-operation with the Finnish upper secondary on the opposite side of the street, so nowadays the student councils of both schools have regular meetings and arrange workshops and fun for both language groups. But it is quite remarkable that it was through the IB programme that the co-operation started.

Teachers on the other hand have always co-operated with the Finnish teacher training institutions in Finland regarding in-service training.

***How do you deal with the different mother tongues of the pupils in your classroom (if applicable)?***

This is not an issue in the upper secondary since the foreign students we have, usually have become competent enough in Swedish. In the IB the students with other mother tongues than the two official languages of our country, or English can study their mother tongue self taught. In our junior school though this is not always so easy to cope with, since the number of immigrant children is growing and not enough funding is given to teach them Swedish. Not to speak of their own mother tongue, which is often neglected in our country, either due to funding or lack of teachers. Through co-operation with the city of Vasa these students are brought together in bigger groups to have mother tongue lessons.

In conclusion I would like to say that I have seen a lot of changes in the Finnish school system during my career of 38 years. New teaching methods have come and gone, globalization has made its impact, but still the core of it all is the same; to light the spark in the student.