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INCLUSION AND TECHNOLOGY – EXPERIENCES FROM FINLAND

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Vamlas today

- Promoting equal opportunities, participation and human rights of children and youth with disabilities

- Today Vamlas provides expert services, training and projects (employment, education, hobbies)

- Inclusive housing services for students in Helsinki, Lauttasaari (Hoas)

- Staff total of 30 people

- Our goal:
  - Accessible services and right for participation
  - Education and paid work for all
  - 'The way I want' living and assistance

- www.vamlas.fi

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Inclusion = Article 24

- a) <u>Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education</u> system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;
- b) Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an _<u>equal basis with others in the communities in which they live</u>_;
- c) Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;
- d) Persons with disabilities <u>receive the support required, within the general education system,</u> to facilitate their effective education;
- e) Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

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Finnish School System

- Pre-school at the age of 6
- Compulsory education at age 7-16
  - Free, public and responsibility of the municipalities
  - No national exams, right for support
  - Teacher's have a master's degree from University
  - Special education teachers have master's degree + qualification for special education
  - [Compulsory education in Finland](#) (link for detailed info)
- Secondary Education; General or Vocational
- Higher Education; Universities or Uni. of Applied Sciences -> Bachelor's Degree
- Higher Education, Universities Master's Degree and Doctoral Thesis

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Technology as a tool for inclusion?

- Presentation based on research, interviews (4) of special teachers, school principal, student and presentations from a national forum for special education
- Common understanding:
  - YES, technology and digitalisation is common, every day practise and used in all schools
  - YES, technology evidentially offers vast possibilities to implement inclusion in all education
  - BUT technology has not been implemented in education in order to promote inclusion
  - Very little if any research on how technology is used as a tool for inclusion
  - Lot of research on how technology can help learning, writing, hearing, seeing, sharing and how it is used by teachers.
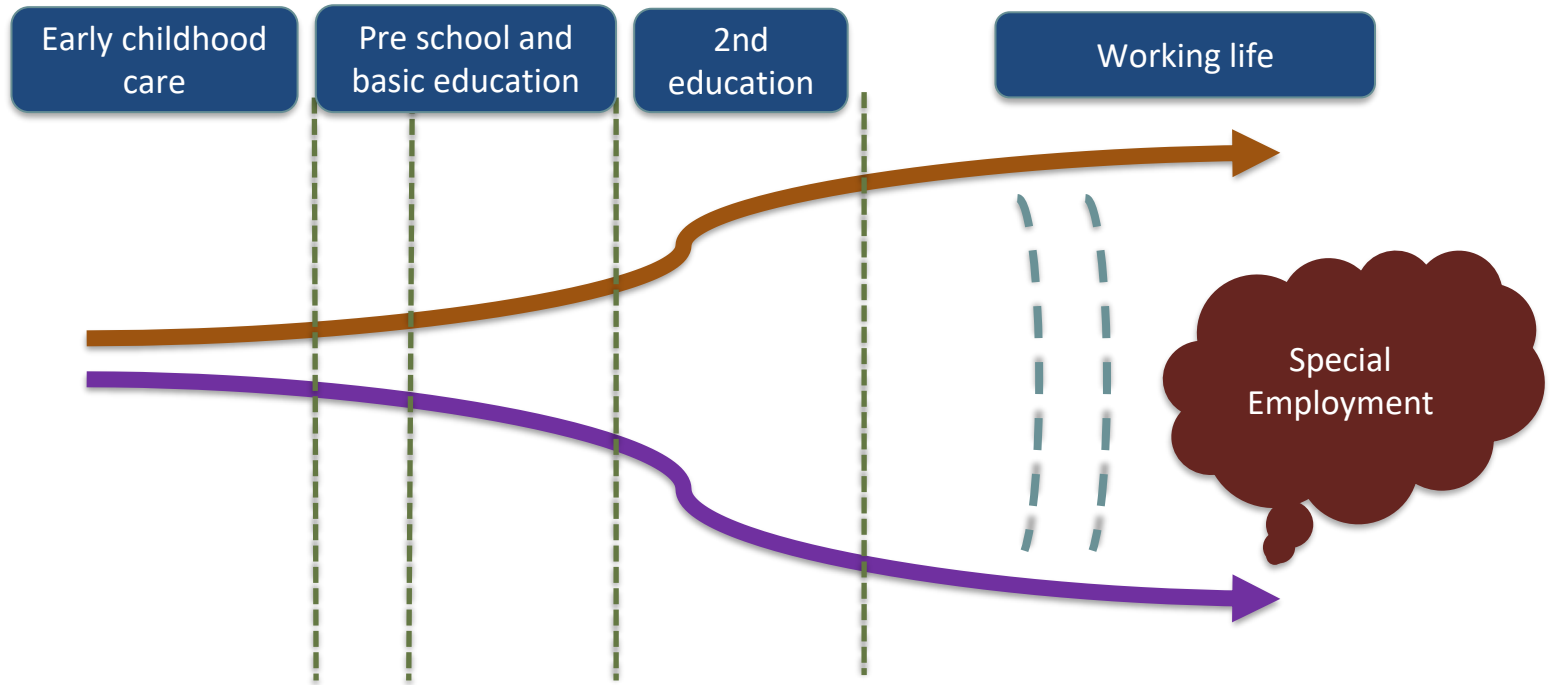
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Technology definetely helps in accessing information

- All interviewed felt technology helps accessibility
- Different tools help to plan learning and follow personal curriculum
  - Pupils can choose together with teachers tasks and excercises that are suitable for their goals
  - Children with writing or other language difficulties can make their learning visible for others in many other ways (spelling help, no problems with handwriting, pictures, links etc.)
  - Teachers felt planning and differentiation of teaching is easier with the help of new tools and programmes
  - Students felt they were able to participate in teaching and classwork, when they could use assistive technology

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Technology does not work on its own

- Not everybody has good self-management skills, which are very often required when using technology
- Guidance and support from teachers is still necessary, even more so now, when technology is in constant change
- Smaller children ask for books, paper and pens. Working with devices and screens is tireing. Also older students complain about this.
- Quality of applications and programmes is sometimes poor
- Skills of teachers on how to use and implement technology based learning vary a lot
- Even though the learning of children with special needs becomes easier with technology, the practises to move to and from special classroom seem to change slowly if at all

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Why inclusion is important?

Early childhood care

Pre school and basic education

2nd education

Working life

Special Employment

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Experiences of students

- Technology and accessibility still a big problem
  - Different applications and programmes don't communicate with each other (visual assistive technology and common learning/planning tools)
  - More costs and constant learning required to keep up with technology's rapid change
- More innovation needed
  - Especially in sports education, music and arts (not only in reading and writing)
- Distant learning opportunities and on-line learning
  - Students with disability also like to leave home, go to campus and see other young people in person. Digitalisations should not mean exclusion

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What promotes inclusion?

- Both research and interviews press the importance of other organisational factors than pupils support needs or use of technology
  - School culture, diversity management practises, teacher co-operation
  - Skills, professionalism and well-being of teachers
  - Sharing information in multi-professional teams, working with social sector, special health services and other stake holders
  - Accessibility

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