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RUSSIAN-SPEAKING IMMIGRANT TEACHERS IN FINNISH CLASSROOMS:

Views and lived experiences in Finnish education

Abstract

Success of integration depends, amongst other things, on immigrants' involvement in the host country's education. Educational differences between home and host countries can either promote or hinder academic progress of immigrants and, consequently, overall process of their integration. The goal of this study is to investigate what effect differences between educational systems of Finland and neighbouring Russia may have on professional induction of Russian-speaking immigrant teachers in Finland. This is done through researching experiences of Russian-speaking teachers in Finnish education. Their views and interpretations of their own eligibility and Finnish schooling practices lay foundation of this research.

Keywords

Russian speaking • immigrant teachers • integration • schooling • educational practices

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Introduction

General aspects of connection between immigrant integration and education have been so far researched from different angles: cultural, social, psychological and economic ones (see Algan *et al.* 2010; Bratsberg, Raaum & Røed 2011; Holdaway & Alba 2013). These efforts have demonstrated that as long as acculturation is the key process in societal inclusion of immigrants (see, e.g., Esser 2004), formalised education is probably the most important mode of immigrants' socialisation for several reasons. First of all, institutionalised education unlike other modes of immigrants' socialisation has explicit goals, defined policies and established practices. But more importantly, educational system of any country is built around cultural and social values of the nation. In this sense, when immigrants get engaged in the host country's educational process, they eventually learn about what societal habits and personal qualities most members of the hosting society consider to be important for being its eligible member. This does not necessarily mean that they immediately understand and accept them but they are, at least, granted access to cultural practices and social ideals the host society is based upon.

By interpreting meanings immigrant teachers attribute to schooling practices and classroom habits, we strive to demonstrate areas of conflict between immigrants' views on pedagogy and the host country's educational customs and traditions. The role of education in cultural and social adaptation of migrants may depend on what value and meaning they attribute to this process of social and cultural exchange. Depending on their understanding of educational goals and practices, immigrants' experience in the host country's education can be both an integrative advantage and an obstacle in the path to integration. To identify challenges that immigrants may face in host country education, we chose a group of immigrants who approach schooling as both lay persons and professionals. Qualified teachers with immigrant background not only go through the process as learners but simultaneously attest their professional eligibility in the host country's educational system, revealing stumbling blocks and advantages for their inclusion and integration.

The aim of this article is to research immigrant teachers from Russia living in Finland and their views on Finnish education. Their interpretations of Finnish educational goals, curricular ideologies and pedagogies help us evaluate academic eligibility and overall integration progress of Russian-speaking immigrants in the host country. The fact that Russian speakers are Finland's largest immigrant group was not the only decisive factor in our choice. The other important reason for choosing this particular group of immigrants is Russian teachers' homogeneity in training, similar views on pedagogy and comparable teaching experience. Our preliminary assumption was also that immigrant teachers from Russia view themselves being in a similar position within the area of integration and professional inclusion. Research questions of this study are as follows: What is the Russian-speaking immigrant teachers' attitude towards the Finnish school and the instruction it offers? How are the norms and values of the Russian school and the specific features of national culture reflected in their views on the Finnish school?

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Internationally educated teachers now practice in different regions of the world and it is no surprise that they have been a focus for a number of studies. Immigrant teachers' professional induction in Canada has been extensively studied by Mawhinney and Xu (1997); Myles, Cheng and Wang (2006); and Deters (2011). Remennick (2002) and Elbaz-Luwisch (2004) investigated narratives of teachers from the Soviet Union and Russia working in Israel. Immigrant teachers in Australia have also become the main topic for studies conducted by Phan (2007), Sharplin (2009) and Smith (2009). Similar in essence and focus, studies of Amin (2001) and Nemchinova (2005) investigated immigrant teachers in the United States. In Finland, adaptation to Finnish educational system of teachers with immigrant background practically has not yet been amongst the topics of full-scale academic research, only being a subject of separate MA-level theses (see, e.g., Järvenpää 2008; Takatalo 2003).

Difficulties and advantages identified by immigrant educators in schooling practices, pedagogies, educational goals and curricular design may be applicable to educational experience of other immigrant groups because educational professionals and lay communities of one nation usually have common views of what is eligible and what is not. Some of these differences were successfully identified and investigated by comparative studies of national educational systems (see, e.g., Alexander 2000; Ofsted 2003). "*The education of six-year olds in England, Denmark and Finland: an international comparative study*" (2003), although not teacher focused, revealed sheer contrasts in practices and attitudes originating from educational policies and prevailing pedagogies. On this basis, we suggest that immigrant teachers, unlike other immigrants, are deemed to be more capable of identifying differences in educational systems and effects they might have on immigrant students because of their closer familiarity with educational process and its elements. This exhaustively explains why this professional group has been preferred over other immigrant communities as the main source of data for investigating interdependence of integrational success and immigrant educational progress.

Russian-speaking migrants in Finland

Out of the total number of foreign language speakers who resided in Finland in 2015, around 73,000 persons (around 22% of all foreign language speakers) declared Russian as their mother tongue (Statistics Finland 2016). Speakers of Russian form a fairly heterogeneous group in respect to their cultural and ethnic identity. In addition to the so-called old Russians who had moved to Finland from the 18th century on, the group consists of ethnic Russians emigrating after the Finnish independence, Ingrian-Finnish returnees and immigrants from the former Soviet Union whose main language remains to be Russian. As they moved to Finland at different times and for different reasons, they construct their lives in Finland from different premises (Liebkind *et al.* 2004; Shenshin 2008; Rynkänen & Pöyhönen 2010; Rynkänen 2011).

Previously conducted studies (Laihiala-Kankainen 1999; Talib *et al.* 2004) indicate that Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland commonly recognise the value and importance of schools and their significance for integration. Although unfamiliar practices in Finnish schools and other educational institutions can hinder the general process of learning because of attitudinal motives, the appearing negativity is readily compensated by the fact that most Russian-speaking children and youths possess adequate learning skills being capable of adapting to the new pedagogical environment because of the universal character of the educational systems and similar curricular contents. In this respect, Russian-speaking immigrants advantageously differ from other immigrant groups, who, at times, have no basic literacy skills (Alitolppa-Niitamo 2004). The analysis of values and life's priorities of Russian people indicate that schooling remains a central element of societal life in modern Russia (Andreev 2002; Kiselev 2003; Sobkin 2006). For this or other reasons, Russian-speaking immigrants reportedly have a higher level of education compared to other immigrant groups (Liebkind *et al.* 2004; Sutela 2005; VTS 2010). Statistically, the number of those with secondary level professional qualifications amongst Russian speakers living in Finland is higher than the Finnish average. More than one-third of the Russian immigrants have a university degree (VTS 2010). Despite their higher educational level, Russian speakers are not always capable of using their knowledge and skills professionally. One reason for this could be that Finnish employers are not always familiar with the contents of Russian professional education (EK 2014; VN 2009).

Amongst those who immigrated to Finland from Russia and the former Soviet Union countries, there are a considerable number of teachers. The officially regulated requirements of teaching profession in Finland force immigrants with teaching qualifications seek official recognition of their diplomas, in case they decide to pursue their career in the new country. In addition to language learning, the newly arrived teachers are often required to obtain additional study credits to complete their pedagogical education. In the case of Finland, Finnish National Educational Board normally recognises foreign teacher education for subject teachers requiring teacher candidates to obtain additional credits for student teaching or what is commonly referred to in Finland as internship or 'teaching practice'. Finnish educational authorities and some Finnish educational institutions also initiated a series of bridging programmes targeting immigrants with a university degree (Huttunen & Kupari 2007; Pelkonen, Palonkangas & Estola 2010).

Schooling process in Finland and Russia

A brief overview of research literature on Russian and Finnish education readily reveals a number of differences between the two countries. These dissimilarities can be seen in three areas of schooling: educational goals, curricular design and classroom practices.

Whilst the official law on education states that general school focuses on individual development, it simultaneously announces that it is done solely in interests of society and the state (Russian Federal Law 2012). The state-controlled educational policies are thus implemented via a centralised conglomerate of municipal, regional and federal educational administrations, federal ministerial bodies. The Russian educational system is still based on the mass school, preserving its industrialist character, 'that is planned and financed exclusively from the center and from above' (Pinskii 2004: 26-27). The Ministry and its subsidiaries in Russian regions have designed and prescribed syllabi and school textbooks for use in every school of the country. The national, regional and local boards of education in Russia continuously test, review and supervise schools and teachers. This considerable concentration of administrational control shows that individual character of education is not the main priority. Neither is curricular independence nor is teacher autonomy.

The goal of Finnish education is stated to be holistic personal development (e.g., Tirri 2012). In contrast to the Russian stance, the

Finnish public discourse on education claims that Finnish schooling is based on pedagogical freedom resulting in independence of teachers and schools, which are mainly governed by local authorities and general curricular guidelines drawn by National Core Curricula (NCC 2003; NCC 2004). In Finland, the state control over schools until the 1990s was manifested in centralised teacher preparation, design of national curriculum and control over school textbooks. In 1991, the Finnish National Board of Education lost its right to review and approve school textbooks (Simola 1998: 354), preserving the right to recommend only strategic tendencies of curricular design.

Curricular design policies in the two countries (Russia and Finland) also appear to be considerably different. Russian secondary education, for almost a century, has been an advocate of encyclopaedic curriculum (Holmes *et al.* 1995), which, 'intended originally for the minority of pupils preparing for university entrance, was required for all students except for those suffering severe brain damage' (Holmes *et al.* 1995: 177). In other words, the demands for universal compliance were mandatory. In Finland, school curriculum is designed to balance requirements of knowledge transfer, local specificity and individual abilities of students, including their linguistic and cognitive skills, thus making welfare of students and their progress to be the most important elements of curricular development (NCC 2004: 8). In Finland, curriculum is not forced on but rather built around students' needs and abilities.

To accommodate the requirements of the extensive curriculum, the average Russian school syllabus presupposes not only lengthier classroom time but also more hours spent on learning, reading and practicing in the given subjects (Holmes *et al.* 1995; Laihiala-Kankainen 2000; 2001). The stress factor of Soviet and Russian educational practices was and still is manifested in a larger amount of daily homework, regular assessment with the help of oral recitation and written homework, discipline and control (Holmes *et al.* 1995: 180; Kozulin 1998: 54; Shapoval & Mitrofanov 2008). The necessity to enact the adopted curriculum gave birth to a system of evaluation that was designed to deal with the 'maximum level of acquisition of the curriculum by the pupil' (Holmes *et al.* 1995: 179).

In opposition to frequent external census-based testing in Russian schools, Finnish teachers do not consider high-stake testing beneficial for students' progress (Sahlberg 2012: 23). This tendency combined with 'a very small amount of homework and lesson hours and extremely light education evaluation' (Reinikainen 2012: 3) has increasingly improved learning outcomes and supported equity and equality at school narrowing the gap between low and high achievers (Sahlberg 2012: 24).

Whilst schooling process in Russia is officially based on the duality of upbringing and teaching, that is, separating practices of character development from those of knowledge transfer (Raschetina & Zaichenko 2003: 28, 115), Finnish education is considered to be founded exclusively on didactics, that is, a theory of instruction that emphasises individualised and personalised mode of learning (Simola, Kivinen & Rinne 1997: 887). Unlike Finnish teachers, teachers in Russian schools are required to lecture and moralise their pupils, setting the moral agenda without trying to involve students in the process.

Despite some drawbacks and the absence of energetic reforms that many researchers are sceptical about (Kasprzhak 2013; Minina 2014; Shalin 2012; Silova 2009; 2010), the report of Finnish Ministry of Defence (Haasteiden Venäjä 2008: 13–14), nevertheless, claims that Russia is still competitive in international comparative studies on literacy and education: Russians are one of the most educated nations in the world. At the same time, the report points out that Russian secondary school provides a high level of classical education but does not guarantee practical use of the knowledge obtained. Russian school leavers possess good knowledge in many school subjects but have difficulties in using the knowledge. According to the report, Russia needs reforms at every educational level, from preschool to higher education.

Data and methods

The article is based on two different studies – the project 'Transforming Professional Integration' (2011–2014) funded by the Academy of Finland and the ongoing doctoral study 'Immigrant teachers in Finland: pedagogies, ideologies and identities'[1]. Both research projects have pursued goals that are different in range but similar in content: focusing on immigrants' views on the topics of integration, language learning, professional induction and social inclusion. In relation to issues of education, both studies also paid special attention to pedagogy, professional induction and professional identity of teachers with immigrant background. The main purpose of the project 'Transforming Professional Integration' was to track migrants' integration trajectories regarding language proficiency, multicultural practices and educational paths. The main goal of the ongoing doctoral research is to identify substantial differences in pedagogies and pedagogical ideologies of teachers with immigrant background via their interpretations of the local and their own practices and teaching philosophies.

Our data originate from interviews with immigrant teachers (N = 23), 19 women and 4 men, which were conducted in 2012–2014. The interviews were conducted in Russian, audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The cited interview excerpts were translated into English for readers' convenience. The average interview length was 60 min. The participants' age ranged from 24–64, the years of immigration were between 1985 and 2012. The participants were selected based on the following criteria: pedagogical education and teacher qualifications from Russia or the former Soviet Union and teaching experience in Russia or the former Soviet Union prior to immigration. The interviewees were qualified teachers of Finnish, Russian, mathematics, history, music, classical dance and ballet, visual arts and theatre. Their working experience ranged from 1 to 20 years. At the moment of the interviews, they resided in different regions of Finland, working in primary, secondary and vocational schools and in institutions of higher education. The interviewees were asked questions on education, teaching, pedagogy, their professional position, educational culture and differences in schooling practices.

The analytical framework of the present study is based on content analysis. In selecting and justifying the content analysis techniques, we draw mainly on Holsti, Kripendorff, Marshall and Rossman (Holsti 1968; Marshall & Rossman 1995; Krippendorff 1989; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2006). Texts produced in the thematic interviews were initially filtered to select responses or self-instigated discourse on the topics of schooling and education. These segments were further distributed into contextual pools with general references to educational goals, curriculum contents and design and classroom practices. Segments within these categories were further split into sets of references to happenings, actors and practices in the host country as juxtaposed to corresponding phenomena in the interviewees' home country. Emotional and evaluative constituents of responses were also included into analysis and marked as manifestations of acceptance, rejection or acknowledgement. During the interviews, the participants were asked to share their impressions of Finnish schools

and their educational practices. The interviewers did not direct their attention to any specific aspects of Finnish education or ask them any specific questions on the themes outlined below. Topics, range and depth of the narratives were defined solely by the interviewees. In the course of analysis, we have singled out the following most frequently occurring themes that, in our opinion, outline the essence of immigrant teachers' views on Finnish schools, grouped around educational goals, curricular differences, autonomy and authority. For ethical reasons, the interviewees' names have been changed and their age at the moment the interviews were conducted is indicated.

Teachers' interpretations of educational goals

Immigrant teachers are familiar with public discourses on education and its goals in the host country: in order to have their teaching qualifications officially recognised in Finland, foreign educators have to obtain additional student credits from a Finnish teacher education institution. We suggest that they further make use of this knowledge when they formulate their own understanding of educational goals in subjective evaluative slogans such as

> Not to leave children or a single child alone (Marina, 46).

> Here a child should be healthy, well-fed, should spend enough time outdoors, he should breathe, move around and knowledge is in the second place (Galina, 52).

> Everything is for children (Tamara, 49).

These verbalised views on goals of the contemporary Finnish school system demonstrate adequate understanding of individualised and student-centred character of education in Finland. Simola's claims that Finnish pedagogy has freed itself (at least, in state educational discourse) from mass institutionalised schooling (Simola 1998:349) have found a definite confirmation in these self-made formulas of the foreign pedagogues. By emphasising the importance of children's well-being over knowledge ('knowledge is in the second place'), the interviewee is cautiously pleased with the difference either because of the fact that most of the institutional pressure and personal stress that Russian teachers experience in their home country are being built around knowledge transfer and learning outcomes or because students' comfort and diet are hardly a priority in Russian schools.

As long as Russian educational system is based on duality of teaching and upbringing, the latter is manifested via specialised practices, meta-social and meta-behavioural discourse as a tool for setting and enforcing rules and regulations. Russian-speaking teachers in Finland, sensing the prevailing focus on instruction and the meaningful absence of openly imposed rules and limitations, interpret these situations as examples of either neglect or failure. The reason for overlooking the importance of upbringing is attributed to modern pedagogical traditions in Finland. At the same time, this claim appears to be contradictory to the reported ability of Finnish students to cope with their assignments without additional supervision, coercion or control from the teacher. Russian immigrants are puzzled by the unaccountable (in their opinion) permissiveness in the Finnish classroom, attributing it to the lack of either professionalism or school policies (cf. Rynkänen 2013). The interviewees generally criticise Finnish teachers for neglecting the 'upbringing' procedures:

> They do not bring them up here, they only teach (Galina, 52).

> I think this is upbringing, but not because of the school, [it exists at the] genetic level (Andrei, 48).

The other teacher, demonstrating her familiarity with history of education in Finland, positively evaluates the new Finnish approach but by stating that 'they [teachers and parents] let them [children] flow with the current', she definitely assesses the mode of upbringing as insufficient:

> Actually, while earlier they used to bring them [children] up too harshly [in Finland] but now they do not bring them up at all. That is, they let them flow with the current, and it bears certain fruits, probably, in secondary school (Inna, 50).

The data also confirm that emotionally charged social comments and related interpretations of social realities are often ambivalent. Whilst criticising the absence of 'upbringing' in-service teachers and teacher assistants readily endorse Finnish inclusive education practices complementing the claim that 'no child is left alone' with their approval of comprehensive pedagogical support:

> If you are supported, if you are always helped, if you are told, they encourage you... Easy, in the sense that you are being accepted and supported (Marina, 46).

The interviewees' understanding of educational goals in the host country is also reflected in their interpretations of curriculum enactment in Finnish schools. Whilst in Russia academic success is measured by how much of the extensive curriculum is enacted, learned and assessed, Russian immigrant teachers appear to be satisfied with fewer curricular demands and less intensive syllabi. The goal of both the educational systems is declared to be applicable to all, but Russian teachers in Finland, nevertheless, tend to see certain contrasted tendencies:

> …in the Russian system, in addition, there is this competition, it ostracizes students who cannot learn and they are on their own. Here, by contrast, they care more about… those who do not cope... cannot manage because of their abilities. A primary school teacher is there for them, and an assistant is there for them, a pathologist… a special needs teacher, they are all there for them. And students, who are so called gifted… they have nothing (Galina, 52).

The concern for the gifted expressed here demonstrates the aims of schooling as understood and assumed by Russian teachers: students should demonstrate maximum performance and best results. The meritocratic principle of Russian education comes into contradiction with comprehensive and inclusive nature of Finnish schools: the inclusive education tactics may be considered to be an obstacle to general learning progress and, especially, for those students whose abilities are considered above the average. Our interviewees express their discontent in the following manner:

> Because after all, that is what I have been most annoyed with [in Finland] … in Russian schools, in general, in teaching, the focus is on results. The most important thing here is - a process… The main thing there [in Russia] was to get some result at any price, a certificate, for example, or to win a competition (Alina, 42).

> …there is no concept of competition in the Finnish [teaching culture]. In Russia if a child is a good student, we consistently make him an example to others… the rationale is that now the others learn by his example. And here [in Finland] it does not work (Galina, 52).

Both interviewees seem to regret that competition and ranking cannot be used as a tool for improving motivation for all students. These teachers apparently believe that setting one maximum goal will eventually allow them to encourage high achievers and create a competitive classroom, where they think they will also be able to stimulate less diligent students. In the nature-nurture dilemma, the Soviet school of pedagogy has long chosen external social influence as the main factor in learning and socialization. The pedagogy where "the environmental always dominated the hereditary' (Grigorenko & Kornilova 1997: 401) allows no excuses for poor performance in the classroom. In this logic, educational failures are attributed to students' laziness and lack of motivation, whilst pedagogical fiascos are generally ascribed to teachers' negligence or lack of professionalism rather than inherent deficiencies in cognitive or emotional development of failing students. Whilst inclusive education embraces differences and adapt curricula according to student abilities, meritocratic schooling insists on one universal curriculum and demands the impossible from the teacher: 'maximum level of acquisition for all students' (Holmes *et al.* 1995: 179). The presence of these views and accompanying practices is confirmed by findings of previous research on Russian immigrant teachers conducted in Israel and the United States (Remennick, 2002, Abramova 2005), where Russian teachers reportedly claim that they need to 'go an extra mile' to help their students (Abramova 2005:35).

Teachers' perceptions of curricular differences

Whilst educational goals of educational institutions in the host country do not always come into conflict with ideals that immigrants harbour, because of their abstract and remote character, daily interaction and classroom practices that represent immediate challenges for newcomers. Content knowledge differences come into view immediately after immigrants enter the educational process in Finland. Russian teachers' understanding of what is supposed to be taught and learned at any particular educational level is challenged by new curricular requirements. The following reaction may be substantiated by real curricular differences, the traditional Russian encyclopaedic curriculum has always been challenging for the majority of Soviet and Russian students, so the immigrant teachers view the content knowledge in subject teaching as insufficient and inadequate:

> …the level of knowledge that is being transferred, the norm, it is so primitive, for real, well, in Russian standards, the 9th grade [in Finland] is the level of the, I don't know, of the 7th grade of the Russian school (Andrei, 48).

> In Russia, mathematics is, of course, more difficult. Here [in Finland] they are only doing ABCs… In my opinion the [math] problems are easy (Maria, 33).

> When they [Russian children] see all these funny math textbooks, they say: we have covered it all already (Raisa, 49).

The interviewees commonly claim that Russian-speaking immigrant children joining their Finnish counterparts in the classroom often appear to have a higher level of learning skills and more advanced knowledge than Finnish students of the same age group. This topical trend has both objective justification and subjective motivation: (1) the traditional encyclopaedic curriculum of Soviet and post-Soviet schools includes a considerable volume of materials related to advanced mathematics, physics and chemistry; (2) the corresponding Russian and Finnish curricula differ in both ideology and distribution of specific materials; (3) these differences in the curricula are interpreted by immigrants with a particular bias against the host country out of self-representational motivation. Remembering stress and anxiety the encyclopaedic curriculum creates in everyday Russian schooling routines, they readily agree that Finnish curricula are less demanding but rewarding:

> ...knowledge is not given in the same amount, if you compare it to Russia, Russia gives a lot of knowledge, a huge amount of knowledge and nobody remembers anything, let it be less but better, according to this principle, measured advancement and gradual complexity, like that (Marina, 46).

> The curriculum is less complicated… it seems to be easier… but at the same time it seems that children, well, they know more (Marina, 46).

Daily classroom routines and accompanying schooling practices if they are considered acceptable, eligible and efficient for educational purposes create a positive momentum for integration and adaptation of the newly arrived professionals. The data show that immigrant teachers find many schooling practices favourable for immigrants from Russia:

> I like the program at school. I like also that, children, when they revise things they manage to do things well… I like, I like it very much how things are managed at school (Tamara, 49).

> Here, it is easy for children to study and at the same time it is easier for teachers to teach them (Marina, 46).

This theme, as we see, generates ambivalent claims: according to Russian immigrants, the range and depth of the Russian school curriculum surpasses those of the Finnish National Curriculum but they cannot help admitting that the flexibility and the absence of ever-present administrative control allow teachers and students to achieve similar, if not better, results with less stress and lower degrees of interpersonal tension.

Teachers' views on their autonomy and authority

Teachers with immigrant background also invariably appreciate freedom and independence of pedagogues in curriculum enacting and institutional governance, comparing them to the stressful situation in Russian schools:

> I keep my private life and work apart. That is what I like in Finland. All the connections with parents via internet or Wilma (Svetlana, 33).

> [In Russia] …the teacher is pressurized by the principal, the principal is pressurized by the District Department [of Education] … it is all a constant pressure. It turns out that, in fact, the real picture is hidden away under this pressure (Galina, 52).

Although their own professional identity is boosted by trust and autonomy, they seem to regret that school administrators and teacher colleagues are not interested in learning from and sharing with them:

> …nobody ever came to me to see what I am doing, neither the administration, nor my colleagues, never. Maybe I sing songs the whole day (Raisa, 49).

> Now, I do not remember that during all these years… that somebody would come to my class to check on me… Nobody will help you in anything, on one hand it is very good, it gives you a lot freedom (Galina, 52).

Teachers from Russia also recognise considerable differences Finnish schools have in teacher–student interaction. Comparing their home country experience, they identify local teaching practices as being based on equity and partnership:

> …the relations are more like partnership, …that is, the teacher is not an authority, … the teacher has a right to make mistakes, children may ask me about some word, I can easily tell them that I cannot answer this question now, … that is, nobody will point fingers at me, my authority will not be damaged because of it (Svetlana, 33).

> …in Russia these things are mostly based on authority, really on teacher authority and here it is mostly [based on] conscience. And [in Finland] children are trained to study (Galina, 52).

Verbalising their positive attitude towards curriculum enactment practices in Finnish schools, our participants nonetheless express concern about universal teacher autonomy and independence. They emphasise the significance of authority within organisational contexts in education and claim that the absence of societal and organisational control in schooling can lead to malpractices:

> There are some teachers who do not prepare anything ahead, they come before the class and look through some pages [in the textbook] … for me it was shocking (Svetlana, 33).

> You understand how difficult it is to fire a person who has got *virka* [lifetime contract]… in any school, they would fire half of the teachers or even more for professional unsuitability (Andrei, 48).

Difficulties and potential advantages in successful professional induction of immigrant teachers that originate from differences in educational practices cannot be easily identified unless they become a source of emotional or cognitive conflicts. Encountering unfamiliar practices and having difficulties in justifying or recognising them, immigrants tend to assess them as illegible and inefficient. At the same time, obligations imposed by new rules and regulations at times trigger emotionally charged reactions, demonstrating frustration, discomfort or anxiety:

> Children in Russia are well aware … a teacher, even if she scolds them, it is because she wants them to be better. Here I already learned that… they already warned me that you can only praise children… (Irina, 43).

> …the child does what he wants, and she cannot tell him, in Russia they would have told him: Shut up! Keep your mouth shut or else we continue talking in some other place! (Oksana, 45)

Russian teachers in Finland experience similar emotions when their assumed authority and significance are not immediately recognised by students:

> I used to come to school [while in Russia] and everybody would notice that I had come! Here [in Finnish school] I am nobody (Galina, 52).

Whilst teacher authority appears to be essential for Russian pedagogues, coming into a new classroom, they feel the need for establishing it by familiarising with students, demonstrating academic skills and knowledge or by intimidation. Being unconditionally granted the right to control the classroom is perplexing:

> I came in, everybody sat down, I said: "Let's do exercise number", they all sat doing exercises, in absolute silence, I was shocked… "Tehtävä yksi" [exercise number one], and they all did it. I was shocked. I was a wizard! I was simply a magician! A wizard! I could manipulate children, people… Then I say: "Tehtävä kaksi!" [exercise number two] And they all got down to work (Andrei, 48).

Galina is utterly surprised to see that local students manage to cope with given tasks without any external control, whilst children from Russia obviously needed to be supervised, whilst Alina readily explains this phenomenon as autonomy:

> As a result when the teacher came, the Finnish teacher, the Finn, all the Finns were ready, ours [Russians] were not (Galina, 52).

> Itseohjaus [self-organization], like self-[instruction] maybe I cannot translate it correctly… the meaning is that a person tunes oneself, motivates oneself (Alina, 37).

The proximity of teacher–student relations is another important factor that seems to be related not only to an attempt to soften the accepted symbolic violence of traditional schooling but also a form of violence itself, for the lack of proximity in the schooling context is interpreted not as independence and autonomy but as dissent, non-compliance, defiance and rejection of authority. The 'touching' discourse in reality seems to be a discourse about compliance and symbolic violence that implies 'inclusion for control'. Insisting on the importance of especially close relations between authority figures and children, teachers and parents seem to believe that the proximity of interaction may improve learning outcomes, obviously, implying better control, discipline and reinforced reciprocity:

> …you cannot touch children… I sometimes pull them by the sleeve, hug them when they cry… but it is against the [Finnish] law (Lydia, 46).

> …here [in Finland], a child addresses a teacher by her first name but this child will never visit the teacher at home.… in Russia we

> are addressed by the polite "you" but relationships with children are warmer, children can come to see you at home… (Galina, 52).

At the same time, the interviewees find it important to avoid direct involvement and full responsibility for educational outcomes through social and spatial proximity:

> …nobody will be calling me on my work phone number at 7 in the evening to find out something… (Svetlana, 33).

The absence of proximity and lack of availability are likely to create discontent amongst immigrant teachers from Russia who, whilst working in Russia, were used to regular face-to-face contacts with the parents of their students in off-school time creating extended social networks in areas around schools they worked at (Lonkila 1999). It is clear that immigrants from Russia and the former Soviet republics expect local teachers to be more involved in their lives and the life of the immediate social environment outside the school (cf. Rynkänen 2013). Teachers are viewed as the most important actors of cultural exchange; they are expected to always play a role of authority for both students and their parents.

Conclusions

In this article, we have analysed views on Finnish education expressed by Russian-speaking immigrant teachers living in Finland. The immigrant teachers readily expressed their vision of valid educational goals, they compared their pedagogical skills and expertise with those of local teachers assessing and evaluating local competences and their overall efficiency in the process of cultural exchange.

The immigrants' views on ideal educational practices and eligible educational goals reflect, at times, ambivalent attitudes to their experience in local schooling. Whilst immigration from the Soviet Union and later Russia in part was motivated by the desire to escape from the totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, authority-based practices are, nevertheless, seen by them as eligible in educational contexts. Hierarchy and competition that dominate pedagogical and academic interaction in Russian secondary and higher education provide Russian-speaking immigrants with a considerable operational advantage but one may expect that it can generate some discontent amongst local Finnish teachers and educators who obviously sees competition and hierarchy as a threat to equity and individualisation in the Finnish classroom (Tirri et al. 2000; Harjunen 2011).

The main source of discontent for all Russian-speaking immigrants involved in Finnish educational practices is their reliance on authority: for them, agency in education always appears to be overshadowed by the 'other': a teacher, a parent or a group of peers. Direct and immediate evaluation and assessment by the 'other' create a necessary base for motivation and reciprocity. Authority and control, which seem to be overwhelming and troubling in the country of origin, appear to be desirable and welcome in the new educational environment that Russian-speaking immigrants come across in Finland. Lack of authority and control in local classroom practices, as our data show, represents a definite constraint for immigrant teachers' professional inclusion. These incidents are interpreted by the Russian-educated teachers as signs of professional incompetence or professional misconduct. In contrast to that, other local schooling practices, such as non-aggressive ways of student identity development, comprehensive and inclusive character of Finnish education, teacher autonomy and non-authoritarian methods of governance create a positive momentum for integration.

Our findings support previous research outcomes. Earlier studies demonstrate that adaptive strategies of immigrants may change due to issues such as discrimination, lower socioeconomic status and inability to find a job in accordance with their qualifications (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind 2007). Studies conducted in Israel and the United States show that immigrant teachers from former Soviet Union and Russia experience similar problems related to differences in pedagogy, curriculum design and teaching practices (Remennick 2002; Elbaz-Luwisch 2004; Abramova 2005). Adaptive strategies of immigrant teachers may thus vary from accepting the host country's school system to establishing separate educational institutions based on educational and cultural principles familiar to them, for example, Mofet schools for immigrant students in Israel (Epstein & Kheimets 2000). In Finland, Finnish–Russian schools in Eastern and Southern Finland, although quite different from the Israeli example in curriculum and practices, provide an attractive alternative for Russian immigrant teachers, at least because of their extensive Russian language programme. Apart from that, these schools are regular Finnish secondary education institutions; therefore, they represent the same integrative challenges for our subjects as we described earlier.

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Notes

1. The ongoing doctoral study 'Immigrant teachers in Finland: pedagogies, ideologies and identities' is being conducted by A. Stikhin at the Department of Teacher Education, University of Jyväskylä.

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