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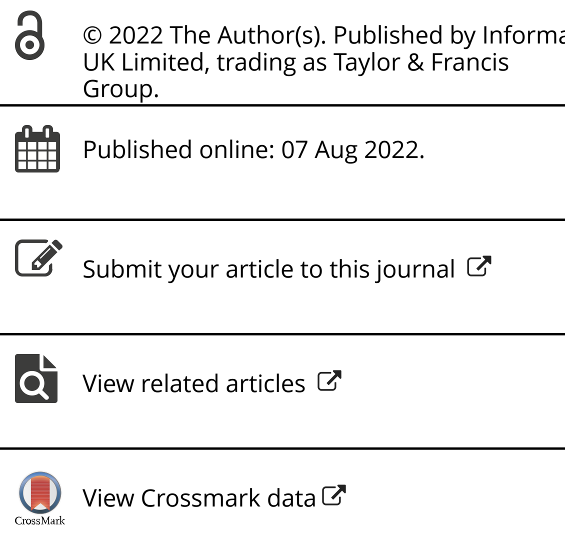

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'I'm a foreign teacher': legitimate positionings in the stories of a migrant teacher

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines one migrant teacher's identity positions in the context of a peer mentoring group setting in Finland. Combining theories of legitimacy and teacher narratives, this study asked which positions were available and legitimate for a migrant teacher. The analysis of three of the stories the teacher ('Ji Yoo') shared was inspired by Barkhuizen's three-step framework for examining positioning in teacher narratives. Findings showed that Ji Yoo's most legitimate positions were being 'foreign', novice teacher, cultural broker, and expert teacher, the latter two being the least frequent and least explicit ones. The authors suggest that migrant teachers' struggles of having their expertise and experience recognised and shed their 'foreign' label persist even in contexts that are intended to support and empower practitioners.

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Migrant teacher; language teacher; legitimacy; positioning; peer mentoring

Introduction

What can we learn from a migrant teacher's stories? Although the importance of narratives in language education has been recognised, and there is a growing body of research on language teachers' narratives (Benson, 2014; Kalaja & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2019; Kubanyiova 2012; Ruohotie-Lyhty & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2022), stories of migrant teachers are still underresearched (Elbaz-Luwisch 2004, 389). This is surprising, given that the potentially disorienting and taxing experiences of migration can affect the processes of professional development and professional identity narratives (Block, 2017a; 2017b). Lately, the increasing importance of migrant teacher narratives has been recognised (Ennser-Kananen & Wang, 2016; Barkhuizen, 2009; Schmidt & Schneider, 2016), yet more research is needed to build effective support systems and tap their assets for schools and educational systems. This article contributes to such needed work by paying attention to migrant teachers' lived experience as it surfaces in their stories in a professional development context (Ruohotie-Lyhty, Aragão, Pitkänen-Huhta, 2021).

This study understands teachers' professional identities as conceptualisations of themselves as professional actors (Eteläpelto and Vähäsantanen 2006) and approaches teacher identity (re)construction through an analysis of one teacher's storytelling in a professional community. Our participant Ji Yoo (a pseudonym) is an English teacher of East-Asian origin who has recently moved to Finland and participates in the activities of this

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voluntary professional development group. In order to understand her legitimate positions in the contexts of her stories and her peer group, we analyse her stories with the ultimate goal of identifying and challenging underlying well-documented (e.g. Habel 2012) oppressive dynamics in migrant teachers' professional environments. More specifically, we seek answers to the following research questions: 1. Which positions does the migrant teacher adopt in the stories she tells to the peer group? 2. In which ways is the story-teller positioned or positioning herself as professionally legitimate in this peer group mentoring (PGM) setting?

We, the two authors of this paper, are two white European women who work as teacher educators and researchers at a Finnish university. We acted as the facilitators of the mentoring group. By analysing narratives from the monthly group meetings, we critically consider our own work as teacher educators and provide new perspectives on questions of identity and legitimacy in the context of migrant teacher education. Our article opens with a review of prior work that has been done in the areas of migrant teachers, teacher identity narratives, and professional legitimacy. After laying out our context and methodological approach, we present three of Ji Yoo's stories and discuss them through a lens of legitimate professional identities. Finally, we synthesise our findings in the context of current theory and practice of teacher education and call for a power-sensitive conceptualisation of professional legitimacy that recognises its intertwinedness with social factors such as class, race, and gender.

Migrant teachers

The term 'migrant teachers' has commonly been used for teachers who were born and educated in a different country than the one they currently work in (e.g. Bense 2014; Ennerberg and Economou 2020). We use the term to describe a teacher who has recently migrated to Finland and identifies as a member of a group ('Asian') that is commonly racialised in this context. In our literature review, we draw on research that has focused on migrant teachers more largely and summarise relevant perspectives that speak to their experiences.

Moving to a new country often comes with changes in professional and social status as well as a changed sense of belonging (Block, 2017). Several studies have illustrated migrant teachers' struggles with recertification of degrees and rebuilding of teacher identities (Beynon, Ilieva, and Dichupa 2004; Marom 2019). Besides obstacles in retrieving official credentials and status, migrant teachers face structural as well as individual oppression, which is well documented in existing literature from various contexts. For instance, Bartlett's (2014) work in Californian schools illustrated the precariousness of migrant teachers who work in urban hard-to-staff schools. Related evidence exists for the Canadian (Schmidt 2010) and New Zealand (Nayar 2009) contexts. Subedi's (2008) study with four Asian migrant teachers in the US examined the processes of racialisation of migrant teachers. For instance, he showed how teachers' legitimacy was undermined by students' racist perceptions of their cultural, religious, and gender affiliations, their colleagues' deficit view of their cultural backgrounds or their discipline (e.g. ESL, English as a second language), and their persistent being-positioned as migrants and less qualified teachers.

We contend that challenging such oppressive structures is part of supporting teachers in building positive professional identities, which, in turn, is central for their sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy in teaching (Day 2004). Positive professional identities may not only increase teachers' well-being but benefit the whole school community. For example, their ways of (re)constructing and enacting their professional and cultural identities can create spaces for cultural negotiation and learning (Sun 2012) and enhance curriculum and instruction in important ways (Ennser-Kananen & Wang, 2016; Seah, 2002). Many migrant-receiving countries have started to discuss or pursue a diversification of the teacher workforce, not only to reflect diversity among students, but also because migrant teachers' international qualifications and experiences have been discovered as a valuable resource (Schmidt and Schneider 2016). It requires structures and resources to bring together the schools' needs with migrant teachers' existing and developing skills. Peeler and Jane (2005) have noted that simple knowledge transfer does not suffice or work to integrate migrant teachers into the workforce in productive ways. Mentoring programmes can be useful in supporting a process of mutual learning as well as migrant teachers' identity building, which is also the context for the present study.

Teacher identity narratives and professional legitimacy

A large body of narrative studies has documented the deeply personal nature of teacher identity and highlighted individuals' 'desire for recognition, affiliation, security, and safety', as a key dimension of professional identity development (Kalaja et al. 2016, 18). Importantly, these narratives do not emerge in a vacuum, but are formed in interaction with the professional environment. In order to renarrate themselves as legitimate professionals in a new context, migrant teachers 'bring together experiences in the past and present, as well as those anticipated in the future' (Block, 2017, p. 31). In this process, isolated events and experiences are connected to larger professional self-stories and societal discourses (Crossley 2000). As a consequence, an individual's internalised and evolving life story, in other words, narrative identity is being formed (McAdams and McLean 2013). Our study examines one migrant teacher's opportunities for (re)establishing her professional legitimacy, which refers to a sense of 'acceptance and validation' (Ennser-Kananen, 2018, 19) for one's work-related ways of being, including one's positions, decisions, actions, and beliefs. Previous studies on legitimacy have used the concept in connection with language practices (Ennser-Kananen, 2014; 2018) as 'linguistic legitimacy', a line of work that owes itself to Bourdieu's (1977) notion of a 'legitimate language' (p. 650), more specifically to his concept of linguistic (and relatedly social, cultural, and symbolic) capital (Bourdieu, 1986), and the scholarship that has built on it, such as Norton's (2013) theory of investment. Although linguistic legitimacy has been described as dynamic (Heller, 2006) and fleeting (Ennser-Kananen, 2014), it is not a politically innocent but rather a power-sensitive concept. For example, work in the area of raciolinguistics has shown that the ability to negotiate linguistic legitimacy is closely tied to racialisation of language users (Flores and Rosa, 2015). We apply legitimacy to the professional sphere, thus examining the discursive processes that grant or deny validation for someone's professional expertise and competence. These aspects of professional life have to be constantly negotiated, particularly when professional legitimacy is sought in a sociocultural context that is different from one's place of prior education. By conducting

a three-level narrative analysis as suggested by Barkhuizen (2009), we examine the positions that a teacher assumes and the legitimacy options they are granted in interaction with a particular group.

Methodology

Our approach aligns with what Barkhuizen (2014) has called 'storytelling' and defined as 'the discursive construction of narrative in interaction' (p. 451). Like Barkhuizen, we draw on Bamberg (2006), who understands positioning as simultaneous negotiation of content and social relationships in interaction. In his words, 'speakers position themselves vis-à-vis the world out there and the social world here and now. It is in this attempt of relating aboutness/content to the social interactants [. . .] through which a position, from where these two "worlds" are drawn together, becomes visible' (pp. 144–145). Thus, in our analysis, we examine how our main participant negotiates both the content of her stories and her relationships to her peers, and how in this interaction her positions emerge (or not) and become legitimate (or not).

The peer mentoring context

In Finland, in-service English teachers have generally a right to three annual development days (18 hours) (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2021). In addition to this obligatory training, a large variety of in-service training courses is offered to teachers by the municipalities, universities and teacher organisations. This study is situated in a peer mentoring group that is part of the voluntary in-service training of teachers in Finland. Its purpose is to provide collegial support for the participants, who typically consist of teachers from all career stages. Peer group mentoring (PGM) allows for sharing and discussing the participants' accounts of teaching as part of group meetings (Estola, Heikkinen, and Syrjälä 2014). Although the monthly meetings are facilitated by trained educators, all group members share the responsibility for negotiating the topics, methods, and policies that drive the meetings. In the fall of 2017, both authors initiated an English-medium group for teachers who were willing or hoping to use English, including some recently immigrated teachers.

Participant

This qualitative study has one focal participant who we call Ji Yoo. She is of East Asian origin and speaks the language of her birth country as her first language. She holds a master's degree in English pedagogy from that country and, in addition to her English skills, reported having basic Finnish proficiency at the time of data collection. Already before moving to Finland, Ji Yoo was an experienced English teacher who had worked with a variety of age groups for about 10 years. In Finland, she had completed further coursework in so-called 'foreign' language (FL) pedagogy and was studying full-time in a PhD programme in addition to teaching part-time at a local school, where she was responsible for an extra-curricular English language course. These experiences as an English teacher in Finland were discussed in the mentoring group. Ji Yoo also started teaching courses in her first language in a private institution during the period of data

collection. In addition to the authors Johanna and Maria, the mentoring group consisted of six group members (see Appendix 1). In the first meeting, the group members were informed, orally and in writing, about the research study the facilitators were planning and consent to participate was given in writing by all group members.

Data collection

The larger data set from which the data for this study stems consists of audio-recordings of 5 PGM-meetings, which were described verbatim, preserving the voice of the participants as much as possible. In order to ensure informed consent, the group members were continuously informed about the potential risks of participating in the study. The discussion topics of the meetings included cooperation with peers, relationships to pupils' parents, discipline in class, and ethical questions related to the values of schools and of individual teachers. Teachers oftentimes approached these topics by sharing experiences from their classroom, which all group members were invited to comment on. To analyse the narrative construction of Ji Yoo's identities we chose three stories from this large data set for detailed analysis based on the amount of detail, coherence, completeness, and take-up by group members. The topics of the selected stories represent the overall content of the meetings in that they relate to ethical questions, personal values, and societal expectations. The stories presented here were the longest, and most detailed narrative accounts Ji Yoo offered in the course of the peer group meetings that also triggered most responses from other group members. Based on the aforementioned qualities these particular narratives provided the richest available data for an analysis of the narrative construction of Ji Yoo's narrative identity in this context (cf. Barkhuizen 2016).

Data analysis

As stated above, our data analysis draws on the analytical framework of small story positioning analysis introduced by Bamberg (2006) and further developed by Barkhuizen (2009). In our adaptation of Barkhuizen's (2009) framework, we followed his three suggested steps of analysing (1) the stories from within, (2) their situated performance and negotiation in the group, and (3) the positioning of the storyteller (Ji Yoo) in a larger societal context. First, we focused on the characters that appeared in each of Ji Yoo's stories and the roles they assumed in them. Next, we examined the narratives and characters within the context of the mentoring group, uncovering the ways in which Ji Yoo's stories and characters were co-constructed through group interaction and how Ji Yoo's positions were maintained or challenged by the other group members. Third, we considered the ways in which Ji Yoo's stories and negotiated positions served to (de)construct her teacher identity and legitimacy within the context of Finnish schooling. As a result of these analyses, we identified four key identity positions, which we present in the following section.

Findings

After offering three short stories told by Ji Yoo, we outline the main identity positions that Ji Yoo adopted within and through these stories. Then, we look into the ways in which these positions were given or denied legitimacy in the peer group interaction.

Three short stories told by Ji Yoo

The story of saying no

Ji Yoo's first story came in response to a Finnish teacher's story of about a girl who had cried because she didn't want to play the bass as suggested by her teacher but didn't know how to articulate that. As a response to this story, Ji Yoo started to talk about her own daughter:

> I don't know like what's the difference between, I mean, [East-Asian country's] and Chinese culture but the thing is that in general in Asian countries, we don't, we like, especially in the classroom situation, it's so hard I mean to kinda, to like to, I mean, not obey to what the teacher says and they know that in educational situations we are educated, we have been educated, we really have to follow everything the teacher says.

(Mentoring session, January 2018)

After prefacing her story like that, Ji Yoo proceeded to describe her daughter's conflict:

> [I]n my daughter's case, like for example, she hates to dance. I mean it's her DNA so she hated dancing, but I mean, they were preparing for the independency, Suomi sata vuotta [Finland one hundred years], and, you know, there was uh dancing, and she's been talking, talking and she really didn't want to do it, but she didn't never told me about this problem, but she like, she had to do it. She didn't know how to say no.

(Mentoring session, January 2018)

After that, the following exchange occurred in the group:

R: I always try to tell her [the Chinese-heritage student] that you can say no if you don't want to try something and you don't have to do it, you can say no, but she never says no.

J: She knows, I mean she knows, she can understand how you, I mean, she knows, but she's not, like, she's not used to it. So, she can't do it.

R: It's like too difficult.

J: Too difficult, it's like very challenging, but she has to, I mean, I don't know, I'm talking about my daughter situation.

R: Yeah but I get the point now, because now I understood better that it's difficult to say no.

M: Especially maybe, this it's also kind of a new situation for the parents that the school is asking like what is wrong?

R: Yeah

A2: like I think, even for some Finnish parents I think, may have this kind of idea, why is the teacher asking me, like many of them can say something like, but like it might be also something that it's difficult for teachers uh parents to say something. They are expecting from the teacher to say and be the expert.

R: [. . .] I didn't understand that that might be the problem that it's difficult for her to say no, because the Finnish kids are like 'No! I'm not doing that! I won't be trying that!', but then usually they are pushed to do it, because it's like [unintel.]

J: Cause, I mean like education, I mean, we, like China [. . .] I never tried not to push her, but she always, I always I mean encourage 'You're in Finland, so you can just say to the teacher, please say to the teacher you don't want to do it', and she's 'ok, I will do it'. And then the next day I ask her again 'did you do it?' 'no I can't' (laughs), like you know, this happens, seriously, so (laughs).

(Mentoring session, January 2018)

This part of Ji Yoo's story was evaluated with an appreciative comment from one of her peers (Raili): 'That's really good, thank you for telling this. Now I can really understand better the situation, yeah'. After that, the role of parents in dilemma situations was discussed. Interestingly, Maria's comment, which attempted to challenge the positioning of Finnish versus Asian parents vis-à-vis the teacher was not taken up by any of the group members. Instead, Ji Yoo continued to position Finnish kids in opposition to her daughter by characterising them as likely no-sayers and her daughter as being unable to say no.

B. The sofa story

During a meeting in February, Ji Yoo told a story in response to Maria's question about how the teachers in the mentoring group had experienced classroom management when using English as the medium of instruction. After the question was raised, whether using Finnish might be helpful, particularly when students who study English as a foreign language don't seem to understand English instructions, Ji Yoo reacted by describing her lacking Finnish skills and her insecurity about whether and how to manage student behaviour.

> I don't speak Finnish, I can't speak Finnish, cause I mean whenever this kind of situation happens like, you know, I went blank, cause I mean this, I mean they're Finnish kids this why, I mean and at the end of last semester I've spent like one semester with the kids and then there has been some curious stuff, I mean how I should react to their uh like you know sometimes bad behavior or something from my perspective. I didn't know so I asked Maria, how can I, I mean I wasn't even sure if I can uh discipline them I was not sure if I can do it or not, I mean, then and I also not sure how I mean and what is best way I mean to do it, cause that was my very first expression with Finnish kids, so I finally after spending one semester I asked her and she said yeah you can and okay, then I should discipline. But still I'm not sure.

(Mentoring session, February 2018)

After Ji Yoo's had finished, Maria commented that Ji Yoo had experienced 'complete immersion as a teacher', acknowledging her work getting acquainted with both teaching in Finland and learning Finnish at the same time. Expanding on her approach towards classroom management, Ji Yoo continued by pointing to her position as

'foreign teacher' and its implications. Specifically, she referred to her 'foreignness' as a reason why she might foreground relationship building and 'positive stuff' in her classroom:

> I'm kind of, you know, I'm like, I'm foreign teacher, and they must be feeling foreign to me, new to me and what if I mean I just started disciplining you know and I don't give them you know very close feeling (unintel.) first, so I have to kinda, I'm still hesitating, so what about me just giving the positive stuff first then building, you know some good atmosphere together then maybe later, I don't know. So, to me I want to build the trust first but it's hard I know but something funny happened the other day, cause I mean, they were like, you know. They were like all like, you know, they were all running around and (laugh) and –

Irina: It wasn't like this today.

(Mentoring session, February 2018)

After Irina challenged Ji Yoo's perception of herself as a teacher whose students are 'all running around' with a simple 'It wasn't like this today', Ji Yoo shared what had happened that day:

> They kept going to the sofa in the back of the classroom and then. So, they were like not sitting I mean at their tables and I didn't know what to do, so I decided, I used, I tried to use this strategy like, cause we are teaching some feelings like happy, sad, angry, bla bla, and okay so firstly I taught each feeling, so like happy and sad (laugh) like this. Okay, so I said to the kids like if you, three girls kept going to the sofa and playing there so like if you go to the sofa then I'm sad and you come back then I'm happy and you know, so, oh, and they understood. I was really glad that now they would be (unclear) everyone was going there 'Hey teacher look at me!' 'Oh, I'm sad' and they just come back again and 'I'm happy' and they were playing with me (laugh) we had fun, so I don't know like you said sometimes I feel confused but still you know, I don't know if they would be in the right mood if I have to discipline them or, you know, like in more fun with them sometimes I'm confused but sometimes I feel good sometimes I mean it's hard (laughs).

(Mentoring session, February 2018)

Ji Yoo's story triggered several comments from the group, including reassurances, explanations, and advice. In essence, the mentoring group members were legitimising Ji Yoo's actions and encouraging her to address classroom management issues more directly with the students, for instance:

> Raili: But then again, I think that Finnish children are may be more confused if an adult doesn't discipline them in those kind of group situations that they might just be really running around, and they are just waiting for the adult to like set the borders and say that stop, you need to stop and be quiet and sit.

(Mentoring session, February 2018)

Finally, at the end of this part of the session, Ji Yoo was prompted to reflect on differences between Finnish and East-Asian school discipline

A: Is it different from [East-Asian] then?

J: Very much (laugh), very much. So, this is why I feel kinda honestly I feel very confused.

R: Do you mean that the kids don't run around (laugh)

J: They don't run around cause they've been so educated long, for long, for long time and they never climb on the ladder. (loud laugh) So, it's like, so this is why I feel like completely confused like you know.

Lena: This is too easy though, they are just waiting quietly and nicely.

(Mentoring session, February 2018)

In this exchange, the difference between East Asian and Finnish children is reinforced. Lena's humoristic comment may have been intended to elicit laughter and express comfort and reassurance.

Story of touching

The 'story of touching' unfolded during a discussion about the appropriateness of touching students (e.g. putting a hand on their shoulder to calm them down) in Finnish schooling contexts. Against this backdrop, Ji Yoo took the floor and shared what had happened in her classroom earlier that day.

> About this touching. That's my difficulty actually I had just today (laughs). I was hesitating if I wanted to share this or, cause, I really, I was curious like how I have to react actually, cause I (unclear) what are the Finnish teachers doing cause today we are learning about action verbs like swim and run and blah blah blah okay, so I was doing some activities with the kids. They were all like allowed to stand up and you know follow my action, run run run run and I say swim [. . .] they just started they happened to touch my armpit and but I felt, I didn't feel so positive about that action [. . .] but I was hesitating if I have to kind of discipline them or you know. What would you do in this situation like? I didn't feel good about this cause it's not the situation where they are allowed to touch my body, so they were just following the activity, I mean just moving their bodies but you know, then they were like hey and one boy kinda challenged me, the other, I didn't do anything, then the other boy kinda touched me same I mean part.

(Mentoring session, March 2018)

After confirming that the 'second boy' definitely touched her on purpose, Ji Yoo repeated her question to the group about whether and how to react, to which she received Leo's reply: '[Y]ou should teach kids that they are not allowed to touch anybody if they didn't have permission for that, kind of basic things'. Ji Yoo then continued her story by sharing how she addressed the issue

> I did my best to stay calm like hey, and I just like made like a complete pause I mean like for like 30 seconds maybe. Just pause I mean I didn't do anything and the other kids kinda started to feel something. Then these two were like aaah and the other girl she was trying to calm them I mean calm them down hey, stop it, stop it, look at the teacher, look at the teacher. I said nothing, and I said 'hey I think we need a private talk' and then there is one girl whose English is really good. So, she's translated this (laugh) [. . .] so I, after the class, after all the other students left I wanted to have private talk and I said (unclear) and one of the boy was very, I think I mean he was very sensitive in general, so he felt like why miksi, but he felt (unclear) about this private talk after class. [. . .] I like please no, respect, but they did understand, please respect then 'can you promise?' then we just did this promise I said okay now you touch my finger, you can do it, but I mostly used the body language (laugh) but last part was very funny. [. . .] Do you think it's okay? I mean, cause I have no idea how the Finnish teacher can discipline the students.

(Mentoring session, March 2018)

Ji Yoo's request for a response from the group triggered a couple of answers, including explicit legitimations of her actions and conversations about how to teach students of different ages what kind of physical contact is appropriate in school settings.

Jo: I think you did great! I think to me it sounds like you got the message across, and you kind of. There was even a little lesson there like there is some touching that is okay like you can pinky swear and there is touching if the teacher allows you to do it. But if that's not okay you use body language with the student to make sure that there is understanding. It sounds really good to me.

J: Okay. Then I'm relieved (laughs). This is a bit of confusion that I have. [. . .]

M: When I was in daycare I think there was also this kind of touching, so little children might not be aware where you can touch and how. So, I think it's about teaching since they are first and second graders, I think it's good to teach them, I think you did the right thing. [. . .]

(Mentoring session, March 2018)

After giving some feedback, this episode concluded with some group members explaining the Finnish concept of 'swimming suit area':

M: In Finland also, the children they are in a way they are taught I think in many schools and often that you are not allowed to touch the somebody's, the swimming suit area. So, that's also kind of. Yeah, it's called swimming suit area, that you should not touch that. I think it's kind of, kind of quite kind of big. [. . .]

J: Thank you for letting me share this, cause I mean I was really preoccupied by this.

(Mentoring session, March 2018)

As this extract shows, after telling her story and receiving several comments, Ji Yoo wraps up this part of the meeting by expressing her gratitude to the members of the group.

Ji Yoo's teacher positions and their legitimacy

In this part we will summarise the positionings that are illustrated in the three short stories before reflecting on them in the light of previous literature and our theoretical frame in the Discussion section. These stories reveal two main interrelated positions Ji Yoo assumed in the process of narrating: the position she referred to as 'foreign' (her wording) and the one of a novice teacher. Both of these were juxtaposed with counter-positions, the one of a cultural broker and the one of an expert teacher, which were, however, less dominant and not sustained by the group discourse.

Being 'foreign' (and a cultural broker)

What Ji Yoo described as position of being 'foreign', specifically her self-perceived unfamiliarity with the Finnish language, culture, and education, surfaced in all three of Ji Yoo's stories and was mentioned as the basis for how she related to students and managed her classroom (story of touching, ST; sofa story, SS), but also for how she acted as a mother (story of saying no, SSN) and as a member of the mentoring

group (ST, SSN). It was usually accompanied by expressions of insecurity, inadequacy, and feeling out of place ('my Finnish is so bad' (ST); 'they (pupils in the class) must be feeling foreign to me', (SS). Although we hope to disrupt rather than perpetuate this process of othering, we use Ji Yoo's term 'foreign' to foreground her experience and words. Ji Yoo's position as foreign was emphasised by the other members of the group on several different occasions in seemingly encouraging or well-meaning ways, for instance as an acknowledgement of her situation because of her 'complete immersion as a teacher' (Maria, SS). However, Ji Yoo's position as foreign overruled the acknowledgement of her professional expertise as an English teacher. Only insofar as the position as foreign allowed Ji Yoo to be a cultural broker did it, for a brief moment, become a position of professional legitimacy. This happened in the SSN, where she spoke from a position of a mother and cultural translator between the 'Asian' and the 'Finnish' world. The positive reactions from her peer group confirmed Ji Yoo's cultural broker position. Particularly Raili appreciated the SSN as she found it helpful for making sense of a difficult conversation she had had with an Asian student. None of the group members linked Ji Yoo's experience to a teaching context, where understanding of students' diverse backgrounds and ways of participating would add to a teacher's pedagogical repertoire. In all, Ji Yoo's position as foreign kept being reaffirmed and continued to undermine the fact that Ji Yoo was the most experienced language teacher of the group.

Novice (and experienced) teacher

Novice teacher was the other common position that Ji Yoo adopted in her stories and the mentoring group setting. Instead of putting emphasis on her vast experience as a language teacher, she highlighted her lack of experience of what she described as the 'Finnish way'. Although her peers sometimes challenged her position as a teacher who lacks skill and experience ('It wasn't like this today', Irina, SS), they frequently confirmed Ji Yoo's positioning by offering advice, encouragement, and praise. In addition, Ji Yoo's novice position was strengthened by her ways of explaining her willingness to learn the 'Finnish way' of teaching, and her ways in which she reacted to her peers' advice. For example, in the story of touching, some group members explained to Ji Yoo how appropriate touching is commonly talked about in Finnish schools ('swimming suit area'). She accepted their advice willingly, even though it did not fully apply to her situation and her actual reaction was a lot more complex than issuing to a rule or policy.

In rare cases, Ji Yoo's position as an experienced teacher subtly disrupted her novice teacher position. For instance, the SS and the ST both positioned her as someone who is able to redirect pupils' disruptive behaviour and turn it into a learning experience. In both stories, she seized the moment to illustrate the effects of the students' behaviour on others (e.g. herself), used familiar concepts (e.g. feelings) and a variety of modes (body language, words, facial expressions), and made her expectations clear. Even though the position of an experienced teacher was present in the data, it was not explicitly raised by Ji Yoo or other members of the group. Rather, the supportive feedback Ji Yoo received reinscribed her position as novice teacher who is dependent on external legitimation.

In all, the novice position was consistent throughout the group interaction and sustained by both Ji Yoo and other members of the group. Thus, instead of building her professional legitimacy around her experience and expertise, Ji Yoo's legitimacy was tied to the ability of demonstrating Finnishness and 'teaching in a Finnish way', which set her up for an (eternal) novice position.

Discussion

Ji Yoo's position of cultural broker stands in contrast to studies that have documented how migrant teachers use their cultural resources for their own (Ennser-Kananen & Wang, 2016) and their students' (Sun, 2012) learning. While Ji Yoo assumed and was legitimised in her position as cultural broker by her peers, this position occurred rarely and neither served to challenge cultural stereotypes or binaries, nor did it add reflective depth to episodes of multicultural encounters. Rather, cultural knowledge (of 'Asian' schooling as place of teachers' authority and students' obedience) was presented as an unambiguous fact that served the purpose of Finnish teachers to understand their Asian students. This illustrates the urgency of professional communities becoming spaces where cultural knowledge is discussed in ways that invite cultural self-reflection, and acknowledge the complexity of multicultural education.

Ji Yoo's dominant positioning as foreign confirms several studies (e.g. Schmidt 2010; Subedi 2008) that have illustrated migrant teachers' challenges in establishing professional legitimacy. Her position as 'foreign' (her wording) prevailed over her expertise, so that in the context of her mentoring group she was usually legitimised in her position as a migrant rather than as a teacher. For example, classroom management issues were discussed from a binary cultural rather than a pedagogical perspective, in almost complete disregard of the high level of expertise Ji Yoo showed in handling difficult situations in her classroom. Such repeated positioning as foreign highlights the vulnerability of Ji Yoo's legitimacy as a teacher in this environment and points to the fact that she shouldered a large part of the responsibility of overcoming cultural barriers between her and the Finnish pupils and colleagues.

Seen through Bhabha's (1994) framework of colonial discourse, Ji Yoo's positioning as foreign can be understood as an instance of othering through the creation of a cultural stereotype that produces and maintains difference for the benefit of dominant groups. The difference is asserted with the required 'fixity' (rigidity and repeatedness of difference) in and beyond the peer mentoring group, for instance when Ji Yoo's professional legitimacy remains immune to her demonstrated expertise. As Bhabha (1994) has noted, such stereotyping works through cultural, and racial othering and is based on ideology, not proof. In Ji Yoo's case, the othering pertains to her positioning as 'foreign' in opposition to Finnishness (e.g. as whiteness, Finnish language mastery, and educational excellence) on the social (mentoring group) as well as the society (education system) level. It speaks to the pervasiveness of her racialisation that undergirds her being-othered and bars her from adopting legitimate positive professional positions.

Another problematic aspect of her position as foreign was its juxtaposition with her students, who were presented as a culturally and linguistically homogeneous group ('Finnish kids'), with a shared understanding of the Finnish schooling context that ignored the existing heterogeneity in Ji Yoo's classroom. As our study shows, the process of

constructing professional legitimacy was intertwined with processes of othering and racialisation that not only erased the expertise of an individual teacher but also reinforced cultural hegemonies ('Asian' schooling, 'Finnish kids').

Related to Ji Yoo's position as foreign was her positioning as a novice teacher. Although her experience aligns with prior studies that have illustrated the challenge of rebuilding professional expertise and legitimacy post-migration (e.g. Schmidt 2010; Subedi 2008), Ji Yoo's case shows how this erasure happens, often unnoticed, even in peer-directed spaces that intend to offer mutual support and friendly exchange.

Despite the weight of these restrictive positions, Ji Yoo also displayed agency in her position as expert teacher, similarly to migrant teachers in other studies (e.g. Seah 2002; Sun 2012). However, this agency was generally not recognised in our mentoring group. Although in many contexts the identity and legitimacy work migrant teachers do has been discovered as an asset for the school community (Schmidt and Schneider 2016; Seah 2002; Sun 2012), in this study Ji Yoo's stories were not interpreted as evidence of expertise or skill, but rather as her attempts to overcome her 'foreignness' and learn the 'Finnish way' of teaching that is expected by the 'Finnish pupils'.

Conclusions

In all, the interaction between Ji Yoo and other members of the group revolved tightly around ways of teaching that they considered typical of a particular culture and the legitimacy of such pedagogies in the Finnish context. Legitimate actions were considered not mainly from legal or ethical perspectives, but evaluated from the perspective of adapting to Finnish cultural norms. To us, this critical analysis of one particular case shows the need within (teacher) education, a (self-)critical analysis of which expertise is (not) recognised and how these processes of legitimation interact with socially constructed categories such as race, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation, religion, etc. should be part of institutional and personal evaluations. We hope our study will trigger conversations around the nature of professional expertise and legitimacy. Rather than viewing expertise as something that, once acquired, is fixed and stable, it is crucial to understand the contextuality of expertise (e.g. Agnew, Ford, and Hayes 1994) and thus also its contingency and dependence on being socially legitimate.

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Appendix 1. The professional and cultural backgrounds of the mentoring group members.

Pseudonym, gender	Origin	Teaching or teacher education experience at the time of data collection
Ji Yoo, f	East-Asian, recently moved to Finland	PhD student, about 10 years of FL teaching in basic education, teaching English part-time in basic education[1]
Maria, f	Finnish	3 years of FL teaching in basic and secondary education, 10 years of teacher education
Johanna, f	Central European, moved to Finland several years ago	6 years of FL and L2 teaching in basic and secondary education, 10 years of teacher education
Irina, f	Eastern European, recently moved to Finland	career in translation before moving to Finland, currently teaching English part-time in basic education
Raili, f	Finnish	1,5 years of teaching in basic education
Lena, f	Finnish	several years of teaching in adult higher education
Lisa, f	Finnish	4th year student in basic education (class teacher[2])
Leo, m	Finnish	5th year student in basic education (class teacher), 1 year of daycare teaching

[1]In Finland, "basic education" refers to the nine years of comprehensive education for students aged between 7 and 16
[2]In Finland, a "class teacher" teaches most subjects of a class of students in grades 1 through