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Under the Radar – Expatriate Children and Integration in Finland

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Abstract

In policies and research, migrant children tend to be seen as underprivileged and vulnerable. This discourse ignores the more privileged migrant children, those labelled expatriates or third culture kids. Finland wants to attract skilled professionals from abroad. They are often accompanied by their children. Although the families typically intend to sojourn in the country temporarily, Finnish society tends to see them as ‘permanent immigrants’ who need to be integrated. This is visible in international schools that follow the national curriculum, including extensive Finnish language studies and exposure to Finnish culture. This article is based on an ethnographic study among expatriate children in an international school in a Finnish town. I ask how the integration aims affect the expatriate children’s lives, and how they navigate those aims. Using empirical examples, I elaborate on the contradiction between being a ‘privileged’ temporary expatriate child and being defined as an ‘underprivileged’ permanent immigrant.

Keywords: *migration, integration, third culture kids, school, Finland*

Introduction

The labour migration of highly educated professionals is increasing in various parts of the world. These highly skilled experts, sometimes called career expatriates or transnational corporate elites (Amit, 2007; Fechter, 2007), are professionals whose sojourn abroad is career-driven and voluntary. They are relatively well-paid and, typically, they move on to other

locations after a few years (Korpela et al., 2017). Finland, like many countries, welcomes this phenomenon, since international experts offer skills that are necessary in competitive global markets and a foreign labour force is needed because the domestic population is ageing.

The phenomenon is, however, difficult to grasp. There are no useful statistics on temporary migration in Finland. During the past few years, between 7,000 and 9,000 first residence permits have been issued annually for work purposes (European Migration Network, 2020), but we do not know how many of these people stay in the country permanently, and the figures do not include EU citizens, who do not need such permits. It is, however, safe to say that there are thousands of such people in the country. Moreover, various programmes have been designed to attract skilled professionals to Finland (e.g. TalentHUB, Talent Boost, Recognizing International Talent). The most common nationalities among skilled professionals in Finland are Russian, Indian, Chinese, American, British, French, and German. Often, these experts are accompanied by their children, but very little is known about the children themselves. In fact, they seem to be ignored in both policies and research.

In this article, I describe and analyse the lives of children of highly skilled international professionals in a Finnish town. I ask how the integration aims of Finnish society affect their lives, and how they navigate the integration aims. In the following, I first elaborate on the concepts of migrant children and third culture kids (TCKs). I then outline my theoretical premise, namely immigrant integration. After clarifying my research setting and methodology, I present the schooling situation of international children in Finland and use my ethnographic data to describe some of the everyday realities for pupils in a Finnish international school. I argue that Finland tends to treat all foreigners as permanent migrants who need to be integrated. This can sometimes result in somewhat awkward practices and experiences for children residing in the country temporarily. Finally, I elaborate on the mismatch between migrant integration and the temporary stays of skilled professionals. I argue that the children of skilled professionals should be listened to and their experiences and situations acknowledged. The aim to increase labour immigration will succeed only if the situations of accompanying children (and spouses) are taken into account. This article is based on extensive ethnographic research among expatriate children in a Finnish town.

Migrant children and third culture kids

Numerous studies have been conducted in Finland and in other Nordic countries on immigrant children. These include research on asylum-seeker children and young people (e.g. Kaukko & Wernesjö, 2017; Kuusisto-Arponen & Korjonen-Kuusipuro, 2017; Svensson & Eastmond, 2013) and on refugee children (Bergnehr et al., 2020). Also, several studies have focused on immigrant children in daycare centres or schools (Kalkman et al., 2017; Lappalainen, 2006; Wiltgren, 2014; Åhlund & Jonsson, 2016; Åkerblom & Harju, 2019). Among other things, scholars have paid attention to children's experiences of racism (Rastas, 2007; Zacheus et al., 2019) and immigrant children's language skills (Tegunimataka, 2021) and peer relations (Rysst, 2015; Wiltgren, 2014). In all these studies, immigrant children are understood as somewhat underprivileged, indicating that they have special challenges

because of their immigrant backgrounds and/or they lack certain things in comparison to ‘native’ children and thus need special support.

Research on underprivileged immigrant children is definitely important. It should not, however, result in other groups of child migrants – those who appear to be more privileged – being overlooked. This article focuses on one of these more privileged groups: the children of highly skilled professionals. There is very little research on this topic in the Nordic context. A few studies have focused on children who leave their Nordic home countries to live elsewhere temporarily (for Finns, see Warinowski, 2012; for Norwegians, see Bjørnsen, 2021; for Swedes, see Suter, 2019; and for Danes, see Lauring & Selmer, 2009), but studies on skilled professionals’ children who come to the Nordic countries from elsewhere are rare.

International children of skilled professionals have, however, been studied elsewhere. Usually, they are conceptualised as TCKs, who are defined as individuals who, ‘having spent a significant proportion of their developmental years in a culture other than their parents’ home culture[s], develop a sense of relationship to all of these cultures, while not having full ownership of any’ (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999, pp. 26–31). TCKs are usually understood to be residing in the destination country temporarily (typically for between one and three years), their parent(s) tending to work as diplomats, missionaries, development aid workers, military personnel or business executives. Existing studies of these children have largely been conducted by psychologists or educationists, and only recently has there been qualitative social scientific research on the topic.

However, rather than studying children per se, most of the available research focuses on what TCKs say when they are (young) adults, instead of what they say and do when they are still children. Or, if children themselves are studied, the focus is usually on high school students rather than on younger children (see e.g. Tanu, 2018). Existing TCK literature is also problematic because of its essentialist notion of culture; it seems to assume that every individual neatly represents a homogeneous culture and that it is a problem for children to live away from their parents’ native cultures. This view not only essentialises cultures but also ignores children’s own agency (see Korpela, 2016). Therefore, although many people find TCK a useful descriptive identity label, it is problematic as an analytical term, and that is why I prefer ‘expatriate child’, although I am aware of the problems with this term too. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, an expatriate is a person who lives in a foreign country. In common usage, however, the term has connotations of elites and Whiteness; it is usually used to describe relatively well-off White people who live abroad.

In simple terms, immigrant and expatriate children are understood to have very different class positions and resources. Expatriate children are understood as privileged cosmopolitan global citizens who are well-equipped to succeed in the globalised labour markets of the future (Tanu, 2018). Their families are believed to be economically well-off, with rich and useful social networks and appropriate language skills. Immigrant children are understood as underprivileged victims of circumstance who suffer due to poor economic conditions, a lack of social and cultural capital, and insufficient language skills. Such a simplistic distinction is, however, inaccurate (see Fechter & Korpela, 2016). Not all those who

are defined as expatriates are significantly privileged, and not all those labelled immigrants lack skills and resources.

A significant difference between expatriates and immigrants is also related to time: immigrants are understood to be permanent residents whereas expatriates are understood, and often see themselves, as temporary residents. In reality, however, such a clear-cut difference is not accurate: some people labelled as immigrants move on to other countries, whereas some expatriates end up staying permanently.

Theoretical premise: immigrant integration

Integration is a common term in both immigration policy documents and the public discourse in Finland, just as it is elsewhere in Europe. There is, however, a great deal of fuzziness surrounding the concept (Penninx, 2019, p. 9), and it is not clear what is actually meant by it or how to measure it (Harder et al., 2018, p. 11483; Schinkel, 2018, p. 7). Sometimes, integration is defined as ‘the process of becoming an accepted part of society’ (Penninx, 2019, p. 5) or as attaining equal rights in society (Marucco, 2020, p. 91). Such definitions frame integration as a ‘two-way process of mutual accommodation’ on the part of both immigrants and residents (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 12). A more active role is given to immigrants when integration is seen as ‘the degree to which immigrants have the knowledge and capacity to build a successful, fulfilling life in the host society’ (Harder et al., 2018, p. 11484). Integration refers to economic and political inclusion, but, at the same time, it is about an individual’s commitment to the knowledge, norms and traditions that characterise the host country (Carrera, 2006). Integration is often seen to have three dimensions: the legal-political, the socio-economic and the socio-cultural (Schinkel, 2018, p. 5). However, in the new millennium, immigrant integration has become a predominantly labour-market issue (Eggebo & Brekke, 2019, p. 428; Lippert & Pyykkönen, 2012, p. 1; Marucco, 2020, p. 90; Schmauch & Nygren, 2020: 16). Above all, integration is considered important because immigrants need to become functional and contributing agents of society (Joppke, 2007), and this happens when they work and pay taxes.

In the Nordic context, migrant integration policies place a strong emphasis on children’s integration via daycare centres and schools. The particular ethos of Finnish integration policy is that learning the language and the country’s cultural norms and practices enables migrant children to later become integrated into the Finnish labour markets and, consequently, to be contributing members of society (see e.g. Zacheus et al., 2019). A similar ethos exists in other Nordic countries (for Norway, see Kalkman et al., 2017; for Sweden, see Svensson & Eastmond, 2013; Åkerblom & Harju, 2019; for Denmark, see Beuzamy & Feron, 2012).

In integration policies, the image that is presented of an immigrant is one of an underprivileged person coming from the Global South and lacking education, language skills and economic resources. Diversity among immigrants is not necessarily acknowledged. For example, Willem Schinkel, a sociologist who has studied immigrant integration, has pointed out that ‘Canadian or US immigrants are generally not included in immigrant integration

research reports' (Schinkel, 2018, p. 4). In other words, citizens of affluent countries – often skilled professionals – are not the kind of people who come to mind when integration measures are being formulated.

Also in Finland, immigrant integration programmes seem to be designed on the assumption that migrants are somewhat underprivileged. The Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment has a Centre of Expertise in Immigrant Integration (integration.fi). On the centre's website, the implicit understanding of immigrants is quite different from an image of them as skilled professionals. For example, the section targeted at teachers of immigrant children states: 'Many families with children are struggling to make ends meet. [...] Improving parental employment and language skills supports the integration of children' (Integration.fi, n.d.). Highly skilled experts are, however, highly educated, employed and relatively well-off and, consequently, they are not as underprivileged and in need of support as the text seems to assume. Moreover, these highly skilled migrants do not necessarily plan to stay permanently; some of them want to return to their home countries, whereas others use Finland as a stepping stone to moving elsewhere – often an English-speaking country – later on (see Korpela et al., 2017). The temporary nature of their sojourns makes integration measures somewhat irrelevant.

The case study and methodology

This article is based on an ethnographic study focusing on children and young people with international backgrounds who currently live in Finland because of their parent's/s' career/s. In this project, I conducted ethnographic research among third graders (nine-year-olds) in an international school in a Finnish town for nine months in 2019–2020 and among eighth graders (fourteen-year-olds) for eight months in 2021–2022.

My research methods included participant observation, interviews and participatory visual projects. I took part in everyday classroom activities, school events, excursions and after-school activities. I spent time with the pupils during breaks, at lunchtimes and also on occasion after school. When schools were closed during the COVID-19 lockdown, I took part in online lessons. I also interviewed almost 40 children and teenagers and equipped some of them with digital cameras for the task of taking photos of important things in their everyday lives. Afterwards, I talked about the photos with them. I visited the homes of some of the children, joining them on their way to or from school. In the classroom, I often assumed the role of teaching assistant, but outside of it I was more closely involved with the children, playing and chatting with them (see Korpela, 2022, for a detailed account of the fieldwork among nine-year-olds).

The interviews were transcribed and then organised and coded using Atlas.ti software. My field diaries were also thematically coded. The coding was data-driven: codes were not pre-determined but rather formulated during a careful reading of the data. The study was approved by the ethics board of my home university, and research permits were obtained from both the school principal and the municipal school administration. Information sheets were sent out to all the pupils and consent forms were collected from parents whose

children participated. In addition, I explained the research to the children and young people several times, and they asked me questions about it on a number of occasions. The participants also gave me their oral or written consent for their participation, typically several times during the project.

The pupils in this study have various nationalities. Some have roots in European countries or in other affluent industrialised countries such as the USA, Canada or Australia. Many come from India, China or other Asian countries, or from Africa or Latin America. Some of them had recently arrived in Finland – some even during my fieldwork – while others had been in the country for years. There were also many Finnish pupils in the school where I conducted my fieldwork; some of them had previously lived abroad, others had not. These Finnish children are, however, beyond the scope of this article.

International or Finnish school?

When the numbers of immigrants in Finland started to rise in the early 1990s, schools became front-line agents in the integration of immigrants into the country's system and values, a role they continue to fill today (see Zacheus et al., 2019). Various programmes and support mechanisms exist for integrating immigrant children into Finland's national schools, with extensive language training being the most important tool in this process (see e.g. Forsell et al., 2016; Naukkarinen & Tiermas, 2019; Sinkkonen & Kyttälä, 2014). Immigrant children are usually first sent to preparation classes, where they mainly study the Finnish language and then move into regular Finnish-speaking classes once they have achieved sufficient proficiency.

Families who intend to stay in Finland only temporarily are usually not interested in placing their children in Finnish-speaking schools. The country's school system is world-famous for its excellent results in the OECD's PISA tests (Programme for International Student Assessment) that measures 15-year-olds' abilities and skills worldwide,¹ and it could therefore be argued that international families should be happy that their children have the chance to attend a Finnish school. This good reputation does not, however, help those families who come to Finland for a temporary sojourn and whose children do not speak Finnish. In most cases, learning the language would take more time than the family intends to stay in the country.

Consequently, there has been an increasing demand for schools that offer education in English. In addition, many permanent residents and even native Finns want their children to be educated in English, with the expectation that fluency in the language will be useful to them in the future. Most of the world's international schools are private enterprises with high tuition fees. In Finland, however, it is not possible to provide basic education for financial gain or to charge compulsory fees.² Since private profit-making schools are not allowed, the solution to the demand for schooling in English has been free municipal international schools that provide education in English but follow the Finnish curriculum. Places in these schools are, however, scarce, as free schools are open to any child with sufficient English skills (including Finnish-speaking children):

We arrived in Finland two months ago. My son is fifteen years old but there was no space for him in the international school. He has been at home all this time. We do not know what to do. (A mother in an online meeting for international families)

In order to gain admission to an international school in Finland, a child has to pass an English language test. However, in the Helsinki area, the international schools are full, and not everyone who passes the language test obtains a place. The option then is to attend preparatory classes in Finnish-speaking schools, but, as the extract above illustrates, not everyone considers this a feasible option, believing that learning Finnish will be too difficult and take too long. This family seemed to be in limbo, waiting for a place in the English-speaking school. Some other families in the same situation, however, move away from the capital city area in order to secure a place for their child in an international school elsewhere; the parent(s) then commute long distances to work.

Those who do not pass the English language test or who do not speak English at all are also directed to the Finnish-speaking schools. This is not always what the families want though, especially if they do not plan to stay in the country permanently. Therefore, there is a conflict between family and state expectations. Many (temporary) immigrants want their children to receive an international education in English, whereas the state expects them to become integrated into Finnish society through Finnish-speaking schools. Some families end up in a difficult situation when their children do not obtain a place in an international school. The numbers are small, but for individual families and children the situation can be very frustrating and stressful.

The Finnish international school and integration

It is a cold and windy day, around 0° C, but at 10 o'clock all the pupils and teachers gather outside in the schoolyard. When we gather there, the hymn *Finlandia* is played through the loudspeakers. It is crowded and we stand with our own classes. Some of the youngest children have Finnish flags that they have drawn and coloured in themselves. We are not allowed to talk. Everyone looks cold. Two pupils stand next to the flagpole ready to raise the flag. The principal gives a short speech. When the flag-raising ceremony starts, we sing the national anthem together, and everyone has to take their hats off. When the flag is up and the anthem ends, we rush back inside to get warm. (Field diary, December 2021)

I conducted my fieldwork in a municipal Finnish international school that followed the national curriculum, even though the primary language of tuition was English. As the diary extract above illustrates, Finnish Independence Day was celebrated as in any other Finnish school in early December. Such celebrations are part of the national curriculum, and they reflect the aim that pupils – including international ones – become ‘familiar with a common culture, common language, common history and a joint sense of future’ (Gordon

et al., 2000, p. 19). For immigrant children, exposure to this kind of national practice also carries the expectation of integration.

Independence Day was not the only event in which Finnishness was celebrated in the school. *Kalevala* Day³ was another such occasion:

*Oli ennen onnimanni,
onnimannista matikka,
matikasta maitopyörä,
maitopyörästä pytikkä...*

(A traditional Finnish folk poem, Field diary, February 2019)

The nine-year-old Finnish-as-a-second-language pupils recited the above-mentioned poem in front of many classes in the sports hall during a *Kalevala* Day celebration. They had been practising the poem for a few weeks in their Finnish lessons, learning it by heart even though many of the words were untranslatable. Such activities were clearly aimed at making pupils familiar with not only the Finnish language, but also the country's history and culture.

Finnish language studies were a central part of the curriculum. All pupils had to study Finnish, and the weekly number of Finnish lessons was relatively high. Third graders had five hours a week (out of 22 hours in total), and eighth graders had four hours (out of a total of between 30 and 32 hours). The groups were divided up according to their degree of proficiency: some children went to the Finnish-mother-tongue lessons whereas others went to Finnish-as-a-second-language lessons and were, in turn, divided up into a number of skill levels, starting from beginners. It is notable that the textbook the eighth graders used in their Finnish-as-a-second-language lessons was aimed at adults – there is no elementary Finnish book for teenagers. Adult integration was clearly visible in the book's topics, which included vocabulary related to labour markets and welfare state institutions.

A peculiar and somewhat unfair practice was that, since this was a Finnish school, a pupil's Finnish-as-a-second-language grade was awarded according to their absolute knowledge of the language rather than their relative knowledge. In other words, the eighth graders who had only recently arrived in the country and consequently did not know Finnish well could get no more than a 5, 6 or 7 (on a scale of 4 to 10), even when they achieved much higher grades in tests that were targeted at their actual skill level. In other words, the grading system assumed that everyone had already been studying Finnish for eight years and newcomers were not awarded grades that acknowledged the fact that they were newcomers. It was as if the institutional system did not recognise them at all but defined all foreign children as immigrants who had arrived in Finland at a very young age.

This grading system not only caused confusion and disappointment (and at times a lack of motivation) but also had practical consequences: in many cases, a pupil's grade in Finnish lowered their overall average, which in turn affected their chances of getting into

their preferred upper secondary school. The implicit message of a poor grade in Finnish seemed to be that the pupil had failed to integrate, even though they had not had enough time to learn the language.

Sometimes in the lower grades, Finnish was used in teaching outside of the Finnish lessons themselves:

It is a science lesson, the topic of the day is weather. The teacher puts on an audio recording from the digital teaching materials that come with the science book. The recording is titled '*Suomen sää*' (Finnish weather) and it is in Finnish. The children who know Finnish listen to the recording attentively whereas those who do not know Finnish look lost. Afterwards, the teacher translates the key points into English – by this time, the Finnish-speaking pupils have already lost their patience and they giggle with their friends. (Field diary, January 2020)

As the above extract illustrates, the online audio materials for science lessons for nine-year-olds were in Finnish. Consequently, knowing the language was an advantage, even though the teachers always translated the materials, or at least the key points, into English. In the upper grades (seventh, eighth and ninth), pupils could also choose to study some of the subjects in Finnish. Pupils who intend to stay in the country temporarily and/or who have arrived recently take all their classes in English. This does not, however, mean that knowing Finnish would not be beneficial to them:

It is a history lesson. The topic is the Finnish Civil War. Last week, we went to a museum exhibition on the War. I was helping some pupils with translations because the exhibition information was written in Finnish. Today, the pupils get laptops; their task is to prepare PowerPoint presentations on the Civil War. The teacher remarks that those who know Finnish have a lot of material available to them on the Internet, but those who do not understand Finnish must rely on a few sources in English, which means they cannot cover the topic as widely as those who know Finnish, but this will not affect their grade. (Field diary, February 2022)

These examples illustrate that a municipal Finnish international school is, above all, a Finnish school and the aim of the curriculum is to familiarise pupils with Finnish culture, society and language. There is obviously nothing wrong with this approach; it is what national education systems are supposed to do. For expatriate children and young people, however, such an approach may at times feel inappropriate. While immigrant integration is embedded in both the national curriculum and schools' practices, those who reside in the country only temporarily are not officially taken into account. 'Immigrants' are seen as a homogeneous group within which variations, including the families of skilled professionals whose sojourns are temporary, are to a large extent ignored. However, even though the children of these professionals are invisible at the curriculum and policy levels, they are very visible in the everyday lives of international schools, and their teachers are well aware of the challenges they face with the curriculum.

Upper secondary education and integration

Basic education in Finland lasts for nine years. After this, at the age of sixteen, young people can choose whether to go to a high school or a vocational school. They apply for upper secondary education with their ninth-grade results and this can be a particularly tricky moment for those teens who have only come to Finland recently. There are a few International Baccalaureate (IB) high schools in the country, but relatively good grades are needed to get in. They are, however, the only high schools that operate in English. If one does not get into an IB school, one must either go to a Finnish-speaking high school or a vocational school. But again, there are very few study programmes available in English in the latter. Therefore, even though one can complete one's basic education in English in Finland, one's options for upper secondary education are very limited and this can cause problems for expatriate youth:

I am very stressed about school. I must study very hard. I must get good grades so that I can get into the IB school. (Linda,⁴ fifteen years old)

On several occasions, teenagers spoke to me about stress over their grades; they were very aware of their limited options in terms of upper secondary education. Most skilled professionals who move to Finland on a temporary basis with their families have relatively young children. Sometimes, however, teenagers come too, and the Finnish education system does not seem adequately prepared to accommodate them, or there is an implicit expectation that all of them will gain admission to IB schools, which is not true. In addition, this issue is easily intensified, because when parents are highly educated it is a given for them that their children will go to high school and eventually on to university. Without Finnish language skills, however, their options are very limited in Finland. The expatriate bubble thus bursts for those who are not admitted to IB schools: those who were supposed to be the future global elite are suddenly marginalised, and their lack of integration due to their poor Finnish skills becomes a genuine obstacle.

Expatriate children in Finland: privileged or not? Integration or not?

On a global scale, expatriate children are often understood as a separate elite, living in gated communities and going to expensive private international schools (see Tanu, 2018). As this article shows, the situation is different in Finland. Expatriate children do not live as a separate elite, but usually go to free municipal international schools. It is also important to acknowledge that not all skilled professionals receive generous funding and practical support from their employers, that is, there is a great deal of variation in how privileged the skilled professionals are; many of them could actually be described as middle class rather than elite.

Nevertheless, in many ways expatriate children in Finland do not fit into the definition of underprivileged 'immigrant' children who need help and support, and need to be integrated in order to become contributing members of Finnish society as adults. First of all, their families often intend to stay in Finland only temporarily and, since at least one parent

is employed as a highly skilled professional, the families have relatively good economic, and often also social, resources.

However, the seemingly privileged are not necessarily privileged in all aspects of life. For example, the teenage children of skilled international professionals in Finland are at risk of being somewhat marginalised when they apply for upper secondary education because, without fluency in Finnish, their options are limited. This shows the importance of bringing together the discussions on privileged and underprivileged immigrant children: privilege is always situational and real-life circumstances are complex.

This article shows the importance of being aware that ‘immigrant children’ is not a homogeneous category. Lumping all ‘immigrant’ children together as underprivileged permanent residents who need to be integrated into Finnish society in order to become contributing adults fails to acknowledge the diversity that exists among international children in Finland. The children of skilled professionals who sojourn in the country temporarily are currently invisible both on a policy level and in research. For such children, it is important to try to find a balance between integration and their temporary sojourn; not all integration measures are necessarily appropriate or feasible if a child is only staying in the country temporarily.

At the same time, it should also be acknowledged that some of those who plan to stay in the country temporarily end up staying permanently, or at least for much longer than initially envisaged. It may then become a problem later if they initially miss out on integration measures, for example, if children do not learn Finnish before they reach upper secondary school age. The small number of upper secondary education options in English is definitely a problem in Finland, but this is understandable when demand for such study programmes is limited and it is important at the same time to offer education in Finnish to Finnish people.

One option is for schools to accommodate for the temporary stays of some families and adjust their curricula accordingly. Taking into account each child’s personal situation would entail, however, a lot of extra work for teachers and school administrators. Implementing such personal curricula would require a level of resources that is not available in municipal schools at the moment.

Even if the system remained more or less as it is now, temporary migrants would surely welcome at the very least a change in the grading for Finnish as a second language. If the system acknowledged that some children had arrived in the country only recently, it would send a clear message that their situation was being taken into account, rather than being an invisible anomaly.

The Finnish state is actively trying to increase the migration of skilled professionals to the country. In these efforts, it should be acknowledged that some of the skilled migration is temporary in nature, and this has implications for the educational needs of accompanying children. It is, in fact, very likely that the number of international children who sojourn in the country temporarily will increase in the future. Consequently, it will be important for policy makers and researchers to listen to their voices, so that the potential challenges

they face in their lives in Finland can be addressed. We also ought to rethink what integration should entail for such children: what is feasible and what is relevant, considering their temporary stays? What would be in the children's best interests in their case?

Paying attention to the children eventually contributes to the well-being of their families and Finnish society as a whole. Moreover, paying attention to the differences among immigrant children helps not only the seemingly privileged but also the seemingly underprivileged; it is time to deconstruct the notion of a homogeneous immigrant child, as their backgrounds and situations vary greatly.

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Notes

1. Finland's PISA rankings have dropped in the past few years but the education system is nevertheless considered of high quality.
2. There are some private schools in Finland, mainly Waldorf or Christian ones, but although they do not follow the general Finnish curriculum they must provide children with the same academic skills and knowledge, that is, they are not free to design their curricula as they wish. They can only accept voluntary tuition fees and they receive most of their funding from the state.
3. *Kalevala* is the Finnish national epic.
4. The name is a pseudonym.

Author biography

Mari Korpela is an anthropologist who currently works as an academy research fellow at Tampere University. She has extensive experience in ethnographic research. She is presently studying expatriate children in Finland. Her postdoctoral project focused on lifestyle migrant children in Goa, India. Her research interests include anthropology of childhood, 'third culture kids', expatriates, lifestyle migration, transnational communities, temporary migration, ethnographic and visual research methods.