

SPECIAL ISSUE

Immigrant Teachers in Iceland and Finland: Successes and Contributions

Samúel Lefever¹, Heini Paavola, Robert Berman, Hafþís Guðjónsdóttir, Mirja-Tytti Talib, Karen Rut Gísladóttir

*Lefever, Berman, Guðjónsdóttir, Gísladóttir: School of Education, University of Iceland
Paavola & Talib: Department of Teacher Education, University of Helsinki, Finland
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Following increased immigration, a growing number of teachers with immigrant backgrounds have begun teaching in both Finnish and Icelandic schools. To understand how these teachers use their resources and experience to become teachers in a new community, our research questions were: Who are these teachers? What have been the important factors behind their work/teaching? How do they contribute to their schools? Twelve teachers participated, six from each of Finland and Iceland, at both compulsory and secondary school levels. We gathered data by inviting the teachers to tell their professional stories and reflect on opportunities and challenges they had faced as teachers through interviews or written narratives. Our findings indicate that these teachers have strong professional identities, clear visions for teaching and personal strengths that have helped them to successfully negotiate their place as professionals within their schools. On the other hand, some teachers reported encountering discrimination when applying for positions or when working as teachers. This cross-national study increases our understanding of how immigrant teachers succeed in, and contribute towards, schools in their adopted societies. It also has important implications for teacher education and supporting teachers with diverse backgrounds.

Keywords: immigrant teachers, compulsory schools, secondary schools, equality, identity, discrimination

Í kjölfar aukins fjölda innflytjenda hefur kennurum af erlendum uppruna fjölgað í bæði finnskum og íslenskum skólum. Til að skilja hvernig þessir kennarar nota auðlindir sínar og reynslu til að verða kennarar í nýju samfélagi spyrjum við eftirfarandi rannsóknarspurninga: Hverjir eru þessir kennarar? Hvaða þættir hafa

¹ Email: samuel@hi.is

verið mikilvægir í þeirra vinnu/kennslu? Hvernig leggja þeir af mörkum til skólasamfélagsins? Tólf kennarar á grunn- og framhaldsskólastigi, sex í Finnlandi og sex á Íslandi, tóku þátt í rannsókninni. Við öfluðum gagna með því að biðja kennara um að segja sögur úr þeirra faglega starfi, draga fram tækifæri og áskorarnir sem þar leynast, út frá nokkrum þeim. Viðtöl voru tekin við þátttakendur á Íslandi en þátttakendur á Finlandi skrifuðu frásagnir. Slík frásagnarrýni gefur tækifæri til að skilja túlkun kennara á eigin skólasamfélagi og athöfnum þeirra og samskiptum innan þess. Niðurstöður gefa til kynna að þessir kennarar hafa sterka fagímynd, skýra sýn í kennslu og persónulega styrkleika sem hafa hjálpað þeim að koma sér fyrir í starfi þar sem fagmennska þeirra fær sín notið. Sumar sögurnar bera þess þó vitni að kennarar upplifa mismunun í starfi vegna bakgrunnar síns. Þessi rannsókn sem gerð var í Finnlandi og á Íslandi eykur skilning á hvernig kennarar af erlendum uppruna ná árangri og gefa til skólasamfélagsins í nýju heimalandi. Hún hefur ennfrekar mikilvægar upplýsingar fyrir kennaramenntun og til að styðja kennara af ólíkum bakgrunni í kennslu.

Introduction

Immigration, migration and academic mobility have intensified globally (Byram & Dervin, 2008). Like most European countries, Finland and Iceland have also witnessed increased immigration in the past decades. Even though Finland and Iceland are separated by 1750 kilometres, the countries have a number of similarities: both are Nordic democracies, their populations are small compared to other European immigration destination countries, and both countries' languages are spoken by a very small minority of the world population.

There has been a rapid growth in immigration in Finland since the 1980s. In 1990, out of the 5.5 million inhabitants of Finland, only 26,000 were foreign citizens. However, by the end of 2012 foreign citizens had increased to 280,000 and this trend is expected to continue. (Official Statistics of Finland, 2012.) The main motives for migration to Finland are family, study or work (Finnish Ministry of the Interior, 2012). The largest foreign citizen groups in Finland by nation are from Estonia, Russia, Sweden, Somalia, Thailand, China, and Iraq. Considering language, 4.9% (270,000) of the population in Finland speaks a first language other than Finland's official languages Finnish or Swedish. This group is almost as big as the portion of Swedish speakers in Finland. The biggest foreign language mother tongue groups are Russian, Estonian, Somali, English, and Arabic.

Similarly, large numbers of immigrants began moving to Iceland in the late 1990s. Garðarsdóttir, Hauksson and Tryggvadóttir (2009) note that between 1996 and 2008, the number of immigrants who became residents in Iceland jumped from 5,357 to 25,265, meaning that in a little over a decade, the immigrant population of Iceland grew from 2% to over 8% of the island's population. The largest group of immigrants came from Poland, followed by Lithuania and the Philippines, but in fact included a great many countries of origin. The most current statistics from 2014 place the number of immigrant residents in Iceland at 23,080, which is just under 8% of the total population (Statistics Iceland, 2014).

The immigrant population in Finland is very heterogeneous, from lowly-educated to highly-educated individuals. In the case of Iceland, immigrants tended to be drawn by employment possibilities in the building and related trades that had been created in the thriving economy, including largely tradesmen and often their spouses and children. Following Iceland's 2008 financial collapse, many single tradesmen left the country although a vast majority of the newly arrived families remained (Skaptadóttir, 2010).

As Kuukka (2013) has found in Finland, it is true of both countries that unemployment remains more common within the immigrant population than in the general population overall. The immigrants' competitiveness in the labour market is not only dependent on their personal skills and human capital but, at least in the Finnish context, on such factors as age, language, religion, race, gender, sexual orientation and nationality (Kuukka, 2013). A number of studies have shown that even highly-educated professionals who have mastered the language of the host country encounter more challenges in finding appropriate positions than the equally educated majority group. They feel they have to be much better than the majority to become employed (Cho, 2010; George, Ghaze, Brennenstuhl & Fuller-Thomson, 2012; Hahl & Paavola, forthcoming; Van Doorn, Scheepers & Davegos, 2012). They also encounter discrimination in university and school settings (see e.g. Cho, 2010).

Demographic changes and their effects are seen in kindergartens and schools, adding new challenges in teacher education. In this relatively new situation, many teachers have considered themselves helpless and incompetent when working with immigrant children (Jokikokko, 2010; Paavola, 2007). According to Sleeter and Milner (2011), schools are in need of immigrant background teachers in order for the school staff to mirror the demographics of society. Many scholars argue that immigrant background teachers representing diversity bring different worldviews, languages and understanding of diversity into day care centres and schools (Adair, Tobin & Arzubiaga, 2012; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Gay, 2000; Gomez & White, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Merryfield, 2000; Roose, 2001; Sleeter, 2001), but the risk is that culturally diverse teachers are positioned through their supposed culture, and they are left alone to deal with multicultural matters. They are positioned as "ethnic" teachers or spokespersons, rather than teachers and well-educated persons with expertise (Adair et al., 2012; Santoro, 2013).

Attempts to diversify teacher education have taken place, based on the assumption that teachers who themselves are from ethnic minorities are better role models for minority students, and understand them (Santoro, 2007). Therefore, following increased student diversity in Finnish schools there have been efforts to diversify the teaching profession as well. Programmes for kindergarten and elementary school teachers which focused on multicultural teacher education were launched during the years 2008–2011 at the University of Helsinki. The above-mentioned programmes did not continue after 2011 due to a lack of external funding.

On the other hand, having ethnic minority teachers has not been seen as the only solution for teaching immigrant and culturally diverse students. As Santoro (2013) has argued, teaching minority students concerns all teachers, meaning that all teacher education programmes need to incorporate new skills and content to deal with culturally diverse contexts. In Finland's case, courses in social justice and multicultural education were added to the new curricula for all students after programmes in multicultural teacher

education were stopped. The idea was to promote all students' preparedness to work in diverse classrooms, with diversity interpreted as "diverse diversities" (Dervin, 2012), i.e. not focusing on ethnic or linguistic diversity alone but considering all sorts of diversity.

We emphasize that social justice is a necessity in education, which means that teachers should have sufficient awareness, knowledge and skill to understand and teach the diverse students in their classroom and provide an inclusive learning environment, encouraging every child in her or his learning. According to Gay (2000), culturally responsive and caring teaching is manifested in teachers' attitudes, values, and their high expectations of their students' academic achievement.

In this article we discuss how immigrant teachers who have either graduated in their home country and/or from teacher education programs in Finland or Iceland have succeeded as teachers in those countries. We will further explore how immigrant teachers cope with challenges they have met in Finnish and Icelandic schools and how they draw upon their linguistic and cultural resources in their teaching.

This study is part of a group project carried out by members of the Diverse Teachers for Diverse Learners network, a research network funded by Nordforsk, an organisation under the Nordic Council of Ministers that provides funding for Nordic research cooperation as well as advice and input on Nordic research policy.

Theoretical Background

Teachers' Personal And Professional Identity

It has been observed that teachers' identities play an important role in their professional practices (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006; Nias, 1989). Identity can be defined as who or what someone is, the various meanings people attach to themselves or the meanings attributed by others (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000). Identity affects the self, as identity is also the publicly presented self. Therefore, the concepts of identity and self are often used interchangeably in the literature on teacher education (Day et al., 2006). Rogers and Scott (2008) define contemporary assumptions about identity as being unstable and multiple and dependent upon social, cultural, political and historical contexts, formed in relationships with others, and involving emotions and continuous construction.

It is also widely acknowledged that identity is a central element in teacher development (Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Stenberg, 2010). Critical intercultural theorists insist that teachers need intercultural competence in order to broaden their cultural and global awareness and take a critical perspective to global issues and power questions (Andreotti, 2011; Giroux, 2009; Giroux & McLaren, 2001). Identity also plays an important part in teacher commitment, satisfaction and motivation for changing educational, political and social environments at work (Day et al., 2006; Geijsel & Meijers, 2005; see also Stenberg, 2010).

Teachers' meaningful actions reflect both moral judgment and emotional involvement. Due to ethical relationships in which teachers engage as persons, teachers' self and context, emotion and cognition are intertwined in the complex reality of teaching (Kelchtermans 2005). Kelchtermans (2005) and Hargreaves (1998) discuss the emotional practice of teaching and teachers' vulnerability at work. According to

Kelchtermans (2005), teachers feel vulnerable when their professional identity and moral integrity are being questioned. When teachers encounter challenges (e.g. a new job, diversity) in their work, they feel threatened, which in turn, according to Nias (1989, 1996), may affect their self-concept and personal and professional identity. Teachers' sense of professionalism contributes to self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation and job satisfaction (Flores & Day, 2006). Teachers experience positive self-esteem when they feel they are acting according to their values and can manage challenging situations (Talib, 2005; 2006).

Teachers' Professional Socialization

Teachers' socialization refers to the process by which an individual becomes an active member of a school community and teaching staff (Zeichner & Gore, 1989). Lortie (1975), who studied teachers' socialization, argues that the experience of the 'anticipatory socialization' during teacher education has a strong influence in the process of becoming a teacher. He stresses the fact that one's predispositions are at the heart of self-socialization. Brunton (2007) calls this professional development process organizational assimilation, where teachers acquire the norms, values, knowledge and skills of the school and local community.

Teachers do not enter schools as empty vessels; rather, they bring with them resources that shape their practice (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Rodriguez (2007) defines resources as personal qualities and strengths emerging from and shaping life experiences and actions drawn upon in practice. In so doing Rodriguez draws on the work of Wertch (1998), who sees cultural resources as the tools teachers use to make meaning and act in the world, as well as on Connelly and Clandinin's (1999) discussion of personal practical knowledge to describe how teachers use past experience to inform practice. Rodriguez also refers to Monzo and Rueda (2003), who discuss how teachers' practices are shaped in response to different contexts and mediated by their personal values, beliefs and cultural orientations. Thus, in the socialization process, teachers need to negotiate the school culture and their knowledge, understanding and practices.

Teachers who do not fit in the mainstream school culture may experience conflicts in their socialization process. Achinstein, Ogawa & Spiegelman (2004) identified three factors which shape the socialization process: teacher background, local context, and governmental policy. Identity markers such as ethnicity, language, gender, race, religion, worldview, sexual orientation or social class may influence teacher socialization with colleagues and students because they are often combined in complex and sometimes contradictory ways in constructing and expressing the self (Anthias, 2011; Santoro, 2009). This intersectionality framework recognizes that individuals may simultaneously hold numerous identities, and has now become more common in educational research (Núñez, 2014).

According to Cho (2010), immigrant teachers encounter the abovementioned barriers when seeking employment or in the workplace. In her study Cho found that immigrant teacher candidates' suitability to teach in elementary and secondary schools in Canada was repeatedly questioned because of their non-Anglo Canadian accent and their perceived lack of knowledge about Canada (Cho, 2010). This gatekeeping role of

language has been noticed elsewhere (Hahl & Paavola, forthcoming; Van Doorn et al., 2012; George et al., 2012).

The above example may be seen as a form of institutional discrimination, which is the collective failure of an organization (such as a public body, business or university) to implement the principle of equal treatment of people due to their race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, language etc. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes, and behaviour (Makkonen, 2010).

Interculturally Competent Teachers

Traditionally the term intercultural competence is associated with global, international or multicultural education and culturally responsive education (Banks, 2009; Gay, 2000). Intercultural competences are understood as a combination of attitudes, awareness, knowledge and skills applied through action that requires mindfulness of and fairness towards other people (Hosoya & Talib, 2010; Jokikokko, 2005; Jokikokko, 2010; Nieto, 2004; Räsänen, 2009). Giroux (2009) stresses the importance of democratic and ethically based educational practices that facilitate learning. Intercultural competence also entails criticality towards identification strategies – e.g. how people use discourses on culture (“theirs” and “others”) to manipulate each other. For teachers this calls for the recognition, experience and awareness of self and other (Abdallah-Preteille, 2006; Paavola & Talib, 2010).

Research Methods

This cross-national study gathers information on how immigrant teachers succeed in, and contribute towards, schools in their adopted societies. The goal was to understand how they use their resources and experiences to become teachers in a new community.

Qualitative research methods were used in this study. Research participants were asked to share their experiences through in-depth interviews or narrative writing. Qualitative methods allow participants to gain understanding and give meaning to their situations with increased clarity (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012; Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner & Steinmetz, 1991). By gathering the participants’ stories and focusing on the meanings that they ascribe to their experiences, their stories become both the method and the phenomena of the study. Issues are examined in depth through exploratory, open-ended oral or written conversations, and holistic understanding is situated in lived experience (Merriam, 2009; Wolcott, 1999).

Participants

The participants in the study were twelve immigrant teachers, ten females and two males, half of whom live in Finland and half in Iceland. The sampling population differed slightly between the two countries. In Finland the participants were class teachers who had studied education, pedagogy or other subjects in their home countries before immigrating to Finland and had subsequently completed a Master’s degree in teacher education from universities in Finland. In Iceland the participants had all studied at

university in their home countries prior to moving to Iceland. Four of them had completed teacher degrees in their home countries which were subsequently accepted by the Icelandic Ministry of Education. One participant completed a teacher-training program in Iceland and the remaining participant has a university degree but does not have teacher certification. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. Participants had to meet two criteria: having immigrated to Iceland or Finland and currently working as a teacher. Researchers' personal contacts and the snowball method were used to locate possible participants, who were then contacted and agreed to participate in the study. Pseudonyms are used in this article to protect the identities of the participants.

The participants in Finland - five females and one male - are all class teachers at the compulsory school level and immigrated to Finland for various reasons. Ariel, Caroline, and Lilly came to study and are married to Finns, whereas Kerstin moved to Finland with her husband for work and Gunilla immigrated to Finland because of cultural ties to the country. Marie moved to Finland with her Finnish spouse. Kerstin, Lilly and Gunilla all belong to minority groups from the former Soviet Union. Caroline and Marie are from western European countries and Ariel is from Africa, the only participant of colour in the study.

Four of the participants in Iceland teach at compulsory school and two at upper-secondary school. Like in Finland, five of the teachers are female and one is male and they immigrated to the country from different places and for different reasons. Nina, Frida, Tekla and Elin are from Europe, Stephan is from South America and Jan is from North America. Nina and Frida are married to Icelanders and moved to the country with their husbands. Tekla came to Iceland as an au-pair and Jan and Stephan came on adventures. Elin immigrated with her husband; both had been hired by an Icelandic company as experts in their field but after some years Elin decided to switch careers and entered teaching.

Data Generation

Data were gathered by inviting the teachers to tell their professional stories and reflect on opportunities and challenges they had faced as teachers with immigrant backgrounds. A set of guiding questions were used to stimulate and guide the teachers in "telling their stories". Teachers were asked to discuss their reasons for choosing the teaching profession and to elaborate on the challenges and successes they had experienced during their studies and work situations in the new country. Data collection was carried out in the spring of 2013.

In Iceland data were collected through oral interviews with the teachers. Each interview, which took from sixty to ninety minutes, was recorded and transcribed. In Finland, on the other hand, the teachers were asked to respond to the guiding questions in writing. We used the stories emerging from the data to explore the cultural resources teachers bring into their practice and how these intersect with their actions and interactions in their school settings.

Data Analysis

Analysis was based on exploring teachers' realities through their emerging stories. We looked closely at the experiences and backgrounds these teachers brought into the

settings and deconstructed their responses to reveal discourses they drew upon in practice. The analytical lens was directed towards teachers' voices and choices as well as the ways the teachers felt constrained by social circumstances (Merriam, 2009; Wolcott, 1999). Each of the teacher's stories was analysed to draw out themes and subthemes which informed the research questions. Subsequently the data were collectively analysed for shared experiences, repeated themes or variations.

In the next section on findings, quotes from the interviews and written narratives in Icelandic and Finnish have been translated into English by the authors.

Findings

In this section, we present findings that are illustrative of the resources and experiences contributing to the success of the immigrant teachers participating in this study in becoming teachers in a new community. For the purpose of this article, we focus on three themes that characterized the development of these teachers' personal and professional identities and are evident in the words of our participants. These are the ways in which language, culture and being different influenced this process; their vision of teaching; and their professional development.

Language Learning

One of the major challenges that immigrants face is learning the language of the adopted society. In both countries, being able to speak the language of the majority is seen as crucial for employment, acceptance and participation in society:

When people arrive in Iceland they have all kinds of education. Some even have a degree from the university, but in Iceland you need to speak good Icelandic to get a good job. (Tekla – I)²

For many of the teachers the process of adapting to a new culture and learning a new language was extremely challenging. Here is how Nina describes her experience:

When I moved to Iceland I felt prepared to adapt to a new country ... I was ready to experience misunderstandings between cultural worlds ... Once in Iceland, it was really hard to learn Icelandic. To tell the truth, the first two years in this country were very sad... I could not put my thoughts into words, and because of that I did not feel as being myself ... All the communications I had were very fragile and not good ... But this is just the way it is. I needed to go through this experience in order to develop my life here in Iceland. (Nina - I)

Gunilla wanted to learn Finnish as quickly as possible. She was very keen to study, and she knew it would take time. She had had good experiences from previous studies in her home country, but she wasn't afraid of hard work:

² Pseudonyms are used and participants' background is noted with "I" for Iceland and "F" for Finland.

I started Finnish courses and used my old strategy in studying. Eighteen hours a day reading, listening and writing for two months. I started as a school aide, and two months after that I could start studies in pedagogy. I studied and worked in a school, first as a school aide and then as a teacher. (Gunilla - F)

Elin also worked very hard to learn the language so that she could get a job as a secondary school teacher. She was determined to teach her subject in Icelandic from the very beginning:

I told the principal, "You should hire me and you will see I can [teach] in Icelandic." And I did it in Icelandic, from the first year. But the thing was that I was learning by heart, the words, at home... every evening! It was a very, very, very, busy year for me! (Elin - I)

The teachers in the study sought out different opportunities for learning the majority language, and their circumstances varied. Many of the teachers had spouses, family or friends that spoke the language. Some had begun to learn the language prior to moving to the country; others started learning the language after immigrating. The teachers utilized different ways of learning the language; some took language courses or studied on their own, while others learned it primarily 'on the job' or during their studies.

Several of the teachers had their first teaching experiences at the preschool or primary school levels. Positive interaction with, and encouragement from, school staff and students played a large role in their language learning process and also in the integration process (Zeichner & Gore, 1989):

Like many foreigners, I began to work in a preschool setting ... There, I began to learn the language. To begin with, I worked with the youngest children. They were two years old and could not distinguish between whether something was pronounced correctly or not. The preschool set the policy of not speaking English to me. In that way I was given time to stay in the setting and learn Icelandic. After two years in Iceland, I had the feeling that I could finally express myself properly to other people. (Nina - I)

This experience was shared by participants in both countries. In Gunilla's case, the principal and colleagues, who had been supportive of Gunilla, played an important role in her integration and in learning Finnish, which may account for their centrality in Gunilla's experiences (see Jokikokko, 2010):

The principal and teachers encouraged me to speak. I had agreed with my colleagues that they could correct my language if I said something wrong. I felt I was one of the staff. Finnish speaking students and their parents were smiling at me because of my incoherent Finnish. Sometimes they correct my Finnish. (Gunilla - F)

Discrimination Due To Language And Background

Despite the teachers' successes in learning the majority language, they were very aware of the gatekeeping role of language. Many of them had heard of or experienced cases of

discrimination due to a lack of proficiency in the majority language or their immigrant background. They felt that educational qualifications and skills do not guarantee access to the employment market.

Kerstin encountered discrimination at her workplace because of her foreign background, even though she is a qualified class teacher and physical education teacher and has high skills in Finnish:

It was about the teaching hours and dividing lessons. I was the only one on the staff who was qualified to teach health education. One teacher said at our staff meeting that she at least could speak the language (Finnish) so regardless of who is qualified, she had the right to teach it as well. It was quite something... I still cannot forgive her! (Kerstin - F)

This “racism without races” (Balibar, 1991) involves discrimination where “culture” has substituted “race”. A person is not seen as an individual but as a representative of a culture.

Some of the teachers fear that this type of discrimination is inherent within the system in Finland, and that immigrant and native Finnish teachers will never be treated as equals. They see their diverse backgrounds as a handicap rather than an asset:

In spite of [having three different teacher qualifications] every year I worry, “Will my work continue?” It is not enough to have qualifications. A [Finnish teacher] will always win! It has been seen so many times. (Kerstin – F)

I have learned by experience that there are no benefits from my diverse background, actually the reverse. In the back of my mind there is always the fear that parents will complain about my non-Finnish background. ... That is why I must be a bit better teacher to compensate for this shortcoming of mine. There is also a fear that a native Finn wants my job. (Marie - F)

Other types of discrimination were related to cultural background or skin colour. Lilly felt discriminated against in a job interview and believed it was because of her foreign name which drew attention to her Russian background.

Once a regional principal, a female, said in a rude way at the end of the interview: “I only wanted to see what you look like.” I don’t know what she meant by these words but I didn’t get the job in that school. (Lilly - F)

Lilly also had a negative experience with some parents, which she felt was due to her not being a native Finn, despite her excellent skills in Finnish.

Some of the parents blamed me because their child did not perform or behave as expected. They tried to blame me for their child’s difficulties especially because I am not a native Finn. Some parents have also questioned my evaluation of their child. (Lilly - F)

Another teacher questioned whether the difficulties he experienced at work were due to his colour.

In the beginning, I had problems with some students. I am not sure if they were resisting my position as a new teacher or as a black teacher. (Ariel - F)

Other examples of discrimination experienced by teachers had to do with stereotyping, as exemplified by the experience of Elin:

At the beginning [students] were afraid of me because... I was coming from [Eastern Europe] and they were expecting... like an army general, or something... very strict, which I'm not. (Elin – I)

According to Gay (2005) stereotypical images of cultures affect our understanding and how we categorize people, preventing our seeing a person as an individual. Similarly, Jan didn't like being labelled as an American and felt pressured by people's stereotypical view of Americans. Sometimes she felt that her ideas were dismissed because of her different background.

It comes up with different perceived differences and attitudes. It's kind of this underlying kind of... Maybe it has something to do with...you put forward ideas and they are kind of dismissed as being *foreign*. (Jan – I)

On the other hand, the teachers were aware that immigrants often experience cases of prejudice and discrimination in the new country and it is important to find ways to cope with those negative occurrences.

There is some prejudice, of course. Now the problem is you have to have a hard skin and not think about it when you move to another country, because you will get in to some prejudice, of course. (Elin – I)

Professional Identity And Vision Of Teaching

Teachers' identities play an important role in their professional practices. The process of negotiating their professional identity in a new context requires great effort. They have to negotiate their linguistic and cultural resources within the context of a school culture that may be quite different from what they are used to.

The teachers who participated in this study were all actively developing their professional identities and had formed a vision for their teaching. In some cases the teachers' visions were in part shaped by their teaching contexts. Nina and Frida are general classroom teachers. They talk about the importance of students "learning to learn", and establishing learning habits that enable them to succeed in school. Frida says:

I want the students to learn and that they learn to learn and [my role] is to support them. I can't learn for them. (Frida - I)

Tekla and Stefan teach Icelandic to students with foreign backgrounds. Their vision of teaching is to help these students take responsibility for their lives, and to be happy individuals in the future. These teachers think that learning Icelandic in itself is not enough to succeed. It is also important that students with immigrant backgrounds develop a strong self-concept and a clear vision of their future:

In working with students, I want them to be happy individuals who know Icelandic and who can do what they want in the future, instead of being forced to do something because they don't have the language or education to do what they would really like to do. (Tekla – I)

Kerstin works in a Finnish–Russian class as a classroom teacher. She believes in the value of giving time to students, listening to them and learning from them (see Jokikokko, 2010):

It is always nice to work with students. If you give time for them and guide them they are very excited. By giving you get a lot in return. I am in different projects: living library and acting club. Students love it. (Kerstin -F)

Likewise, Jan wants to help students reach their full potential. For her, “getting people to do the best and Elin strive to establish good relationships with their students. They base their interaction they can” is important.

Both Jan with students on mutual respect, high expectations and caring (see Gay, 2005 and Nieto, 2004). Jan makes a point of discussing this fundamental rule of mutual respect with her students:

I just make it clear... I respect you, you respect me and we respect each other. ... That's the number one rule and it's very important to me. (Jan - I)

Both teachers work hard to create good rapport with their students. Jan uses a lot of humour in her classroom and active teaching methods, Elin has consistently looked for new ways to motivate the students and reward them for their efforts:

This is a great challenge ...how to make them work in the classroom. I tried every year to improve this. (Elin - I)

A part of Ariel's vision is to help students recognize a common goal, in spite of different backgrounds:

I learnt to make the students understand that we may look different, have different backgrounds, but we all want the same things – knowledge. (Ariel - F)

Some of the teachers want to impact at the community level, not only in schools. They want to fight for social justice and a better life for the children:

A teacher could be a force in society! I got tired hearing that you are not allowed to demand changes all the time. That's why I decided to take part in local elections

and now I am a substitute member in the city council and a member of the education committee. (Lilly - F)

For many of the teachers, their background and diverse experiences were important components of their professional identity. They valued their cultural and linguistic knowledge and viewed them as resources that they could use in their teaching (see Rodriguez, 2007). Their experiences gave them a broader knowledge base and greater empathy and intercultural awareness.

But is also experience, I know what it is to be an immigrant, I know how it is to begin to learn Icelandic, I know what it is to enter University with Icelandic as the second language. (Tekla - I)

Because I have the experience of both worlds... It adds perspective. I can use my experience... to kind of bring teaching material to life. (Jan - I)

It has been beneficiary to represent a minority. Students often accuse you of racism, but it usually end when they realize that I represent minority as well. (Kerstin - F)

Professional Development

Professional ambition was a characteristic shared by many of the teachers in the study. Professional development was taken seriously and they actively used opportunities to learn and develop their practice.

There is so much developing going on and teachers need to stay on top of what's happening in the field, talk to other teachers, share their experience, go to conferences to get new ideas and learn about new technology, teaching strategies, and now we have a new National curriculum... I love trying out new things and I find myself having the freedom to do so. (Nina - I)

I try to use all the opportunities I get to add to my education, I go to workshops, conferences and participate in developmental work. (Frida - I)

Some teachers sought out additional opportunities to expand their knowledge:

I use my education, my interest, my experience... I seek out information, read on the Internet and look through books when something new is published. (Tekla - I)

At the moment I am taking part in an advanced course at the university. ... The knowledge I'm going to get is my knowledge, and no one can take it away from me. (Caroline - F)

If the teaching setting doesn't give space for development and collaboration, teachers look beyond their school.

I find myself alone in my setting but I have worked my way around it. I have connected with other English teachers, teachers that are interested in working together. I am also working with different European projects, Comenius, where I got

a student teacher to work in my classroom and e-twinning where we work on different projects in collaboration with other classrooms in Europe. (Nina - I)

Another common characteristic of the teachers is their commitment to their profession. Some of them have taken on extra responsibilities and leadership roles in their schools, such as serving as department heads, and Jan (I) is the chair of the teacher's association in her field. The teachers have been able to make changes within their departments and introduce new teaching ideas.

The teachers in the study all realize the importance of forming good working relationships with colleagues and the positive benefit that can have on teaching.

We [the subject teachers] are developing a thematic unit in 8th and 9th grade where we integrate social studies, biology and life skills. This is a collaboration where we try to use each other strengths. (Frida - I)

In general the Finnish teachers have also had good experiences of collaboration with colleagues. They emphasized the fact that staff cooperation is a very important factor of job satisfaction. As mentioned earlier, the role of "significant others" (Jokikokko, 2010) – here meaning encouraging colleagues – has positively affected the teachers' integration:

My experiences with my colleagues have been great. They accepted me and welcomed me into their circle. I have a few close colleagues whom I can go to for assistance whenever I am in need. (Ariel - F)

I am positively surprised how welcoming the Finnish teachers have been and how they accepted me in their profession circle. Among them I felt as good as a Finnish teacher! (Lilly - F)

Discussion

Teachers' Personal And Professional Identity

Findings from this study on teachers of immigrant background draw attention to successes and challenges in their professional lives. All of the teachers felt they had successfully negotiated their place as professionals within their schools. They had shaped their professional identity, teaching vision and practice through experiences and the linguistic and cultural resources they brought with them.

The teachers had all formed a strong vision of what constitutes good teaching and valid educational goals for their students. As Gay (2005) and Nieto (2004) point out, teachers' high expectations help students succeed. The teachers in the study indeed had high expectations for their students and wanted them to become successful learners and happy individuals. Similarly, the teachers recognized the importance of forming good relationships with their students. According to Cummins (2001), teacher-student interaction is the most important factor affecting learning. It is perhaps even more pertinent for immigrant students. An effective learning environment requires a safe atmosphere in the classroom and a respectful attitude from the teacher, who takes into account students' backgrounds.

To implement their vision into practice the teachers in the study actively sought opportunities to further their professional development. Some of them wanted to make contributions to their profession beyond the classroom and were active participants in professional organizations. Others aimed at increasing social justice by taking part in social or political movements. Such voluntary work outside school and societal participation can be recognized as a part of teachers' intercultural competence (Jokikokko, 2005; 2010).

Despite their contributions to their schools and the wider society, the teachers encountered challenges in finding their way into the workplace and society. They felt vulnerable when faced with difficulties having to do with weak language skills, different perspectives, or in some cases, prejudice and discrimination. But, as discussed by Talib (2005; 2006), by overcoming these challenges, the teachers were able to strengthen their identity, self-concept and self-efficacy.

Teachers' Socialization

An important part of becoming a successful professional is gaining the acceptance of others in the workplace and in society. Learning the language of the majority culture was seen as crucial for acceptance and participation in society, and all of the participants in the study worked very hard at gaining the necessary proficiency. All the teachers learned the language of the host country sufficiently well – and in some cases within a couple of years. But in some cases, the teachers feared for their continued employment due to their perceived lack of proficiency in the majority language. This gatekeeping role of language was especially evident in the Finnish context.

At least some of the immigrant teachers were seen as representatives of a culture, and cultures are seen as constitutive of a nation and as mutually exclusive, solid and incompatible. In other words, national cultures are to be protected from alien elements. In Finland, due to historical and political circumstances, prejudices towards Russians or people from the former Soviet Union living in Finland are still extremely strong and affect peoples' mind-sets (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind & Vesala, 2002). In the Finnish context, teachers encountered discrimination due to their nationality, language background and skin colour. Remembering that stereotypical images may hinder people from being seen as individuals (Gay, 2005), participants in Finland claimed that their diverse background was often more a disadvantage than an advantage. In fact, some of the teachers from Finland felt that they were victims of institutional discrimination (Makkonen, 2010). In their minds, there was no hope of breaking through the barrier of being different.

It should be reiterated that although such discrimination was not as pronounced in the Icelandic context, it is necessary to point out not only that all teachers interviewed in Iceland were white, but that only people who were employed as teachers at the time were interviewed – i.e. the sampling method meant that people would not have been encountered who had either not been hired or who had been fired. Sampling was differently approached in each country, with teachers chosen in Iceland simply because they were known to be of immigrant background – i.e. they had a reputation which the researchers had heard about – whereas in the Finnish context, most teachers were selected because they had been students in the researchers' university, where they had

gained their teaching credentials. Ultimately, these different sampling methods may have resulted in different kinds of teachers being interviewed in each country.

Finally it should be pointed out that the social status of teachers in any country (reflected for example in the number of applicants for teaching positions) may be different in each country, meaning that Icelandic schools may have a harder time recruiting and keeping well qualified teachers than Finnish schools. In other words, there may be more competition in Finland than in Iceland for teaching positions, which could conceivably account at least in part for the increased friction seen there in the work environment of immigrant teachers.

Interculturally Competent Teachers

The teachers who participated in this study had a vivid awareness of what it means to be an immigrant and what it takes to achieve full participation in society. They drew on their experiences and multicultural backgrounds to help them become better, more empathetic teachers. Many were aware of the struggles of immigrant students and felt an additional commitment to them. Some of the teachers showed commitment beyond the classroom through voluntary work and participation local government, which demonstrates a high level of intercultural competence (Jokikokko, 2005; 2010).

As Kohli (2009) points out, there is an assumption that teachers with diverse backgrounds better understand diverse students, even if they do not have the same cultural backgrounds as their students. Moreover, as Santoro (2013) states, “There is a risk that culturally diverse teachers are seen by schooling systems as a panacea for the problems of inadequately prepared teachers who frequently struggle to work effectively with culturally diverse students“. We argue that there should be teachers **in all schools** who are trained in multicultural education and have intercultural competences, not only to teach students with diverse backgrounds, but to teach **all** students.

Conclusions

The teachers in this study seem to be strong, independent people who are hard-working, confident and determined. Despite challenges, they have successfully negotiated their personal and professional identities and are positively contributing to their workplaces and society. They are keen on professional development and in some cases willing to take on positions of leadership. This study poses the question whether the personality traits shared by these teachers are, in general, common characteristics of teachers with immigrant backgrounds or simply characteristics of good teachers. Certainly, one implication for teacher education is that **all** teachers should be trained to work in diverse classrooms. They should have sound understandings of multicultural education and critical pedagogy and strive for social justice and active citizenship in schools and society.

Identity plays an important part in teacher motivation and commitment. This study shows that when immigrant teachers feel accepted in the workplace, their professional identity is strengthened, and their self-esteem and self-efficacy increase. Thus, they are more likely to become better, more committed teachers, capable of using their resources to contribute to the classroom and their profession.

Notes on contributors:

Samúel Lefever is an Associate Professor in language teaching in the School of Education, University of Iceland. He has a MA in Education with emphasis on Teaching English as a Second Language from the University of Kansas, USA. His research focuses on immigrant students' language learning and their participation in schools and society.

Heini Paavola is a lecturer in didactics and multicultural education in the Department of Teacher Education, University of Helsinki, Finland. Her research focuses on diversity in teacher education, schools and kindergartens. She has 20 years experience of teaching in mainstream, special education and Finnish as a second language classrooms.

Robert Berman is an Associate Professor at the School of Education, University of Iceland. His research interests have developed in recent years from issues associated with speakers of other languages learning English. Nowadays he is also interested in the lives, identities and languages of immigrants, especially children.

Hafdís Guðjónsdóttir is a Professor at University of Iceland School of Education (IUE). She has been an educator in the field both as a classroom teacher and in higher education. Her research interests are in the area of inclusion, pedagogy, teacher development, professionalism, and self-study of teacher education practices.

Mirja-Tytti Talib is Adjunct Professor at the University of Helsinki. She has been researching and writing on teacher personal and professional identity as well as diverse students' hybrid identities. Talib has worked both locally in Finland and globally (in USA, Saudi Arabia and Nigeria).

Karen Rut Gísladóttir is an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at the University of Iceland. Her research interests are in sociocultural understanding on language and literacy and teachers' professional development. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy and Studying Teacher Education*.

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