

**“I’m having so much fun here!”
Expatriate children negotiating rules
and practices in a Finnish
international school**

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**Career
expatriates**

**Temporary
migrants**

**Transnational
corporate elites**

**Highly skilled
experts**



- Highly skilled professionals move abroad for career reasons
 - Voluntary mobility
 - Relatively well-off
 - Often temporary stays
 - North-north or south-north

Expatriate childhood: Children's experiences of temporary migration (2019-2024, Academy of Finland)



8-15-year-old expatriate children in Finland

- position in Finland and on the global arena
- everyday lives in Finland
- belonging & identities & distinctions

Research Methods

Ethnography

participant observation

children's interviews

photo projects with children



Schools

Most international schools in Finland

- are free municipal schools
- follow the Finnish curriculums

Rules and practices of school systems

- Start school at a different age
- Different curriculums
- Schools operate with the assumption of continuity



M: When you came to this school, was it easy to start studying?

S: Yeah. Because the things that we do here, I've already learned.

.....

M: How does that feel?

S: Like I'm revising things more and more times.

M: Is it boring?

S: Nah.

M: Ok. So if you went to India now, what would happen?

S: I would be sad... I would be behind all my friends in India. So I would need to continue fifth grade then. And I don't want to go to India.
(Sonu, 9 years)

The school is much better in Finland. One can just relax and enjoy.
(Ajey, 9 years)



Finnish schools expect relatively much independent agency from children

- clothing & equipment
- homework
- schedules
- mobilities



Moments of resistance within school

Why do I need to learn these words? It's boring. I'm not going to need them. I'm going to move to a more interesting place. (Amir, 9)

- Awareness of temporary sojourn

I go home by bus. When I arrived in Finland, I never thought it would be possible for me to take the bus alone. (Sonu, 9)

Finland is a relatively safe country
For many children, coming to
Finland has meant more agency
in terms of independent local mobility

Relatively short school days and
daily changing schedules



Breaking the rules or not fitting within the rules and expectations?

- Challenges in navigating school systems
 - Cannot break the rules but can try to bend them
 - Power of the state and institutions
- Children's agency in schools and beyond
 - Negotiating spaces of agency

