

# International children and the infrastructures of schools in Finland

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



## Ethnographic study on 8-15-year-old expatriate children in Finland

- Participant observation
- Interviews
- Visual projects

**Career  
expatriates**

**Highly skilled  
experts**

**Transnational  
corporate elites**

# Schools as institutional infrastructures

- National agendas
- Rigid paths



# Smooth progress vs disruptions

- Changing from one school infrastructure to another means disruptions
  - Different timings and curriculums



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

S: Yeah. Because the things we're studying here I've already learned.

M: Yeah, you are ahead. In [...] science, maths, English?

S: Yeah, I've read all those things.

M: How does that feel?

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

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

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





# Schools

## Most international schools in Finland

- are free municipal schools
- follow the Finnish curriculums

Finland ranks high in the Pisa testing  
- schools have effective practices  
(preparatory classes) for  
*integrating*  
migrant  
children



- Keeping up with the school in one's passport country or adjusting to the Finnish system?

**Private international schools** form a separate global institutional infrastructure but available only in some places and only to some children

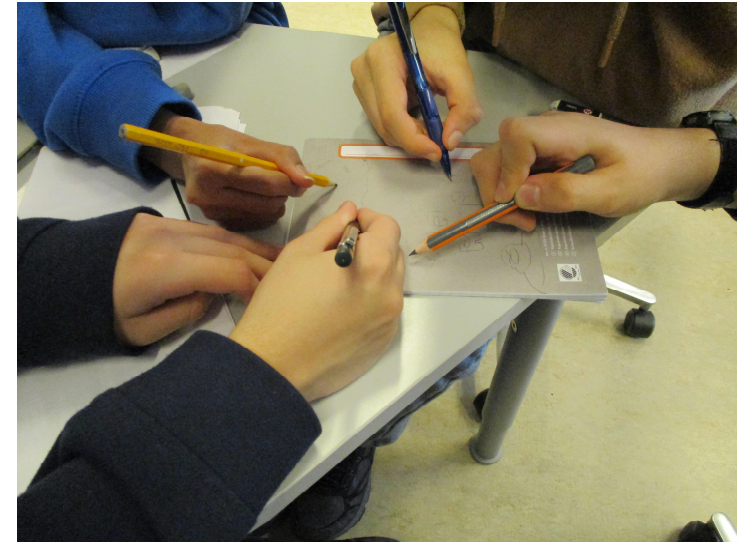
not a coherent global infrastructure but rather several separate structures  
*≠ smooth path*





I must improve my grades in order to get into the IB high school. I'm really nervous about it. (Elsa, 15 years old)

- Secondary education mostly in Finnish in Finland (a broken path)
- Raising global citizens with limitless possibilities or marginalised youth with limited options?



# Institutional infrastructure of schools

- Children cannot escape this infrastructure
- School infrastructures are usually constructed with national aims and with rigid paths
  - challenge for the transnationally mobile children

