

‘Where Should the Orthodox Christian Go?’ The (Un)intentional Distinctions Based on Religion 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

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
- belonging
- everyday lives in Finland



Fieldwork

- Fieldwork with 9-year-olds 2019-2020
(9 months)
- Fieldwork with 14-year-olds 2021-2022
(8 months)
- participant observation
- children's interviews
- drawings, photos & film



Finnish school system

- Private profit making schools are not allowed
- All municipal schools follow the same national curriculum
- No significant quality differences between schools
- Municipal international schools



Compulsory religion lessons

The dominant religion is **Evangelical Lutheranism**

- the church was educating people until late 1800s
- Even today, the church is closely co-operating with schools and the state
- religion lessons:
 - ethics and civilising mission
- but at the same time,
 - Christian agenda of the church
- 2003: teaching one's own religion



Celebrating internationality

The principal recommended our class for this research because we are so international. This class has 21 students and 16 nationalities. (classroom teacher)

Danau Tanu (2018): international schools aim to produce cosmopolitan global citizens



Religion as a distinctive category

*Tomorrow, a new pupil will join our class. He's Canadian.
(classroom teacher)*

What is his religion? (Anton)

- Weekly religion lessons:
different classrooms and groups



Christian practices

In Finnish schools, the ‘most established celebrations are those based on the Lutheran ecclesiastical year’...

Although religion does not play an important role in most Finnish people’s everyday lives, Lutheran traditions have become an inseparable part of Finnishness in the education system. (Lappalainen 2006: 105-107)



Christian practices

- Advent church
- Easter church
- Alternative program in the school

*Where should the
Orthodox Christian go?*
(a classroom teacher)



**Oh, Light the candles
All around the world
Let them shine
Let them shine, oh
Let them shine**

Activities offered by the local congregation

After school clubs

Overnight camp for 9-year-olds



- School lunch
- Birthday candies

I will not do yoga. I am not some Buddhist. (Andy)

M: Do you like the Islam lessons?

T: Yeah, we learn about God, our prophet and those things.

M: Do you learn about that also at home?

T: No. (Taara)



Religion as a distinctive category and an identity tool

- ➔ In the Finnish *international* school, religion is being emphasised as a distinction tool to a much greater extent than nationality
- ➔ 'inter-*religious*' school?
- religion becomes a marked and recognised identity
- the school practices not only encourage the pupils to define their religious identities but demand that they do so
- Religious identities are actively formed and used in the everyday life of the school

