

## MIGRANT STAY-AT-HOME MOTHERS LEARNING TO EAT AND LIVE THE FINNISH WAY

### Abstract

Integration programmes can be seen as a space where migrants can acquire language skills and context-relevant skills and achieve an autonomous position in society. This article explores an integration and language course for stay-at-home migrant mothers and their young children in the capital region of Finland. Ethnographic data were collected through participant observations, open-ended in-depth interviews and photographs. The results show how the participants are silenced when course instructors bring an ethnocentric perspective to their teaching. However, the results also show how the women, especially those with more education, negotiate and resist this approach, highlighting their own perspectives and pushing the instructors to take a learner position.

### Keywords

Migrants • stay-at-home mothers • adult education • critical intercultural education • ethnocentrism

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### Introduction

Integration programmes can be seen as a space where social issues are fought for and where people can struggle for social change (Martin 1999, 2003). They offer adult migrants second language courses and thereby an opening to the new home country. Communication skills in the language spoken by the majority of the population are a key to empowerment and inclusion as well as a means for migrants to fight against socio-economic exclusion (Papageorgiou 2012: 142). Thus, integration programmes may assist migrants to obtain an autonomous adult position both economically and socially. Language courses can also support parenthood by helping parents communicate in the language spoken by the majority of the population when taking care of family issues like meeting authorities, medical doctors, day care staff or educators (Fieldhouse 1996: 17). Learning the language spoken by the majority of the population also means a possibility for social involvement.

The public discourse in Finland constructs the integration of migrant stay-at-home mothers and their language education as a challenge to authorities and public educational institutions, since stay-at-home mothers often fall outside the labour market and work-enabling training. Simultaneously, a challenge for these women specifically, is the difficulty to participate in training programmes because they take care of small children at home.

In Finland, integration programmes for migrants are organised by the public sector. The programmes are free and often full time and mainly for those who will be able to enter the labour market.

However, for those not actively in the labour market, such as the elderly, disabled and stay-at-home mothers, there are part-time classes organised by NGOs on a voluntary basis and taught by both professional and non-professional teachers (Hirsaho & Vuori 2012: 232). The data for this study was collected in association with a national project called *Capable Parent* that offered an alternative way of learning Finnish for migrant mothers who take care of young children at home. The overall goal was to develop an integration path for stay-at-home mothers and increase their sense of belonging as well as support the integration process of both the mothers and their children (Tarnanen *et al.* 2013: 214–216).<sup>1</sup> Thereby, the project intended to help migrant women understand Finnish society and support the women's citizenisation process (see also Nordberg & Wrede 2015). Hence, the integration programme aimed at getting the women socially involved in Finnish society.

This article examines the activities of an integration programme intended for migrant stay-at-home mothers from the perspective of critical intercultural education (Gorski 2006, Sleeter and Grant, 2003; Sleeter, 1999) and ethnocentrism (Baraldi 2012). Ethnographic data were collected through participant observations, open-ended in-depth interviews and photographs of the programme activities.

The purpose of the *Capable Parent* integration programme was for migrant stay-at-home women to acquire basic skills in Finnish as well as become acquainted with Finnish culture through practical activities together with their children. We explore what kind

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of knowledge the programme activities draw upon. To what extent do the activities build on the resources of the women's previous knowledge and experiences? Is ethnocentrism an issue and if it is, what kind of role does it play? Of interest is also to explore how the mothers talk about this group and the activities, and compare their perspectives to the instructors' points of view. The article focusses specifically on an example of a discussion about food and eating habits from the perspective of nutritional values, which clearly brings out the differences and contradictions between what mothers and instructors consider as 'support for becoming a good mother'.

## A critical intercultural education perspective

Migrants bring their values, languages and cultures to the new society, often influencing the social and cultural environments. This is at times perceived as a problem by the majority population and the public discourse often takes an ethnocentric perspective, meaning that there is a tendency for representatives of the majority culture to view their own cultural ways of doing and thinking as superior, while other cultural ways are judged as inferior (Neuliep 2003). Ethnocentrism is a perspective in which one's own group is considered as the centre of everything and taken as the norm (Toale & McCroskey 2001, 72–75). The educational goals for migrants frequently entail cultural replacement and assimilation into mainstream values and practices (Salazar 2013: 122–123; Warikoo & Carter 2009: 374). An ethnocentric perspective risks enforcing the view that teachers and instructors are seen as the knowledgeable ones and the participants as ignorant.

At the other end of the spectrum of ethnocentrism is a critical intercultural perspective to integration and second language learning (see Carlson 2006: 312, 318–320). A critical intercultural education pedagogy perspective (see for example Gorski 2006; Sleeter 1999; Sleeter 1996; Sleeter & Grant 2003; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995) starts with the students' personal situations, endorsing their ability to reflect on and change their own situation by assisting them in making connections between their individual issues and the socio-political context in which they are embedded. This student-centred, empowering and democratic approach allows teachers and students to learn and reflect on everyday social issues, such as discrimination, together. Critical intercultural education aspires to connect to students' experiences of diversities and inequities. Freire (1970) talks about a 'cultural silence' that is produced by the economic, political and social circumstances as well as by paternalism, meaning that instead of encouraging the oppressed to take charge of their situation, they are kept suppressed. Freire (1970) further regarded the schooling system as one of the most significant ways to maintain and feed this 'cultural silence', as in traditional schooling, teachers are the knowledgeable ones and students are regarded as the ones becoming knowledgeable thanks to the teachers.

These ideas form a basis for a critical pedagogy that aims at sensitising oppressed people or people in danger of being marginalised. In our case, it means that the stay-at-home migrant mothers need to become aware of their possibilities to become active citizens and participate in society with the help of language and integration training. Freire's (1970: 17) basic assumption is that individuals are active subjects who can change their environment and are able to affect the society they live in. Doing so, they can live individually and socially fuller lives (see also Freire & Shor 1987: 24–30; Roberts 2000: 41; Schugurensky 2011: 67).

## Ethnography of a mother and child activity group

The study presented here is a critical ethnography (Carspecken & Walford, 2001) of an activity group for migrant stay-at-home mothers and their young children. All the activities were planned for mothers and their children to do together. These activities included, for example, baking, handicrafts, singing, playing, reading books and talking. This form of integration programme also enables the mothers to get to know each other, establish social contacts and share their feelings and experiences regarding everyday life. In critical ethnography, the goal is to examine how things work and how they could be improved for the participants (Thomas, 1993). Hence, the focus here was how the group meetings worked for the mothers and what could be improved for them. After the proper permissions were obtained and the fieldworker introduced herself to the participants as a researcher, the fieldwork lasted from September 2012 to May 2013 with participant observations, photography and open-ended in-depth interviews as data collection methods.<sup>2</sup> Looking at the photos and talking about them with the mothers was one way for the mothers to remember and reconstruct situations and what happened during activities. Photos are an innovative way to facilitate communication when the interviewer and interviewees do not have a common language (Holm 2008: 327; Veintie & Holm 2010: 328). The participants' observations focussed on obtaining an understanding of the purposes and structure of the activities. The communication between the instructors and the mothers became the focal interest for the fieldworker. Specifically, how they communicated, what was said and what the power relations were in the communication was followed closely. One of the goals of observing the participants was for the fieldworker to build a trusting relationship with the mothers. This was also facilitated by the fact that the fieldworker was a mother with a young child. The fieldworker was an active participant in all activities in the meetings. The fieldworker took notes during the group meetings and then elaborated on the notes later.

The group met once a week for 2 hours indoors in an open day care centre, which was basically a community house with a playground. Open daycare services (from 9 am to 4 pm) were available for all families and were free of charge. The children were supposed to arrive accompanied by an adult. Children could play with other children and participate in a wide range of organised activities with other children. For parents, the open daycare centres offered a place to meet other parents. Professionally skilled staff was available to support and assist parents.

In the integration course studied, there were no pedagogically trained language teachers but the open daycare centre's two activity leaders, who were trained as practical nurses, functioned as instructors. Both of them, Kaija and Laura, were middle-aged Finnish women who were themselves mothers. The practical nurses were trained in a mix of social and healthcare work. Sometimes, another slightly younger practical nurse, Tommi, who also had several children, worked there. There were eight mothers with their children (0–5 years old) participating in the activity group programme. In the following, we give background information about the women's education and their husbands' work status, as education and social class influenced how the women participated in the course.

Of the eight women in the group, one was a Buddhist and all the others were Muslims<sup>3</sup>. Sawan, whose origins lie in Southeast Asia, was married with one child but lived temporarily apart from her husband. She had 5 years of schooling and was employed providing

personal services. All the three Somali women who participated in the group spoke some Finnish, but had very little formal schooling. Halima's situation differed from that of the other participants, as her children live in Somalia and she was a widow. Sahra and Deeqa were both married, had children and lived with their husbands who were unemployed at the time of the study. Fatima, whose origins lie in Central-Africa, was married with several children and was pregnant at the time of the study. Her husband has held various part-time jobs in Finland. She had several years of education and had previously worked as a hairdresser. Three women had higher education, were married and had at least one child. Jelena, whose origins lie in the Balkans, had finished high school and had begun studies at the university before she moved to Finland. Khadija, whose origins lie in Morocco, had a Bachelor's degree and spoke some Finnish. Mariam, whose origins lie in the Middle East had a Master's degree. The husbands of these three women were all working in the service sector in Finland; one owned a restaurant.

At the beginning of the course, the organisers did not ask participants about their educational background, occupation, or previous diplomas as these issues were considered irrelevant by the group's organisers and the staff as mentioned in the interviews. The mothers were participating as mothers and women, thus the overarching characteristics for them were considered to be motherhood and migration background. Most of them introduced themselves by telling where they came from, how long they had been in Finland and how many children they had.

The weekly meetings started the same way each time with a group song, making note of the date written in Finnish, and discussing news and the weather with each other. After this introductory activity, there was often some specific issue to be discussed or they pursued some other activity, such as handicrafts or baking together. The meetings always finished with a group song after which there was a possibility to have coffee or tea together.

Since there was no main common language for communication between the mothers and the fieldworker, the fieldworker took photos (about 300 photos) during the group's activities in order to use them for the photo-elicitation interviews. With the help of the photos, the mothers could recall the situations without having to use complicated, descriptive language, and the photos formed the basis for communication during the interviews aided by an interpreter. The mothers could pick photos they considered significant from the selection of photos. Some of them looked carefully at the photos and selected some for discussion, while others wanted the fieldworker to show the photos and ask questions about them. Looking at the photos also served as an icebreaker and a lead into the interviews.

Besides the fieldnotes and photos, the data consisted of nine semi-structured photo-elicitation interviews. Each interview was on average 45 minutes long. Eight of the interviews were individual interviews with mothers, and one was a group interview with the group's instructors. There was an interpreter present in all of the interviews except with two mothers who preferred to be interviewed in English and without interpretation. The interviews were done when the participants had attended the meetings for seven months. The interviews covered the group's meetings, the tasks done during the meetings and how the mothers felt about the group and its activities. What concrete and implicit things had they learned? How had they learned? In other words, had the group, for example, supported them in their motherhood, and, if so, how? In the beginning of the interviews, mothers were also asked about their background and family situation. The instructors were asked about their point of view

about the same issues and also why and how they had chosen the activities. The interviews with the instructors were pursued in Finnish, which was their mother tongue.

The transcribed interviews, the fieldnotes and the photographs were analysed by systematically searching through all the data for emerging themes and patterns. The three sets of data were triangulated. Of the themes emerging from the data, one is discussed in this article. The course staff reported that they had received no preparation for their job as instructors in this programme. We have chosen to discuss the programme instructors' utterances through a detailed description of one example in order to show the development and negotiations going on with regard to the instructors' way of speaking about the participants and the participants' reactions and actions.

### Learning to eat the 'right' Finnish way

Talking with one of the instructors, the fieldworker was informed that the following week, they would talk about nutrition and wholesome food. The instructor Laura told the fieldworker that she was shocked by the eating habits of some of the group's mothers and their children. As an example, she mentions Sawan and her 1½-year-old baby who drinks quite a lot of juices and hot chocolate using a baby bottle. Based on the discussions with the instructor Laura, the fieldworker made the following notes:

She tells me that she has to talk about this with the mothers because it is important for them to realise that their children's eating habits are not healthy. She continues telling me that both the baby bottle and juices are bad for the teeth, and it is also important for them to know how we eat here in Finland. She explains that it is really necessary for these children to learn to eat as we Finns do, especially before they start kindergarten or school. She finishes by saying that they have not talked about this issue with the mothers, so now it is time to do it.

Laura is concerned about the children's eating habits and seems convinced that we, the native Finns in the room, know what is healthy and best to eat. Still she recognizes that she has not talked about this with the mothers, so she does not actually know much about their eating habits. The only thing she knows is what she has seen during the once-a-week meetings. However, what is healthy can be seen as a cultural and learned issue. It can be difficult for the mothers to accept what the instructors describe as the way to eat because the mothers subscribe to different ways of eating and knowledge about foods, which causes a cultural gap between instructors and mothers.

To deal with the perceived cultural gap, the instructor explains the majority system (see also Kriz and Skivenes 2010). The example above reflects findings from other research about policy-makers' and practitioners' concern for migrant mothers' capacity to be 'good mothers' (see also Nordberg 2015). The instructors here do not take into consideration that different kinds of food traditions may carry different ideas about what is unhealthy and that for someone not understanding Finnish or English or being illiterate, it can be difficult to learn such context-specific knowledge. This lack of recognising different ways of relating to nutrition among parents can constitute barriers in interaction between migrant parents and educators (Jones 2003: 94–95). The other instructor, Kaija, similarly based her teaching about cooking on her own everyday experiences, not taking

into account the different life experiences and circumstances in the group:

Kaija has brought cookbooks into the room. We will talk about nutrition and wholesome food today. She asks the mothers to come and sit around the table. Kaija starts by telling that 'today we are talking about food' and points to the books in her hand. She picks them up, browses through them and shows the covers to the mothers who are sitting around the table watching and listening. Nobody says anything. Finally Kaija says in Finnish: 'Desserts, goodies, everyday food'. Khadija asks: "What does 'everyday' mean". She does not know the word in Finnish. Kaija answers: 'Hmmm... It means Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. During the week. Everyday food, everyday life... We are in a HURRY. Coming from work to home. And we are in hurry and need to cook something fast for the children. That is everyday!' Khadija nods and mutters: 'Hmm. Ok.'

However, for these mothers 'everyday life' may mean something else; they are not working outside the home at the moment and preparing meals for their families is part of their work. At the moment, their everyday life does not resemble the Finnish model of the working woman rushing between home and the work place. Additionally, Fridays are for many Muslims not 'everyday' but the most important day of the week, which the instructor does not take into account in her explanation of 'everyday' food.

Both of the excerpts above indicate that the instructors neither have an understanding of the mothers' living situation nor does there seem to be an institutional set-up for the instructors that would compensate for their lack of relevant knowledge about the target group. The organisation of activities did not support the accumulation of such knowledge, either. As already mentioned, the mothers were not encouraged to talk about themselves, their background or current situation when they introduced themselves to the group at the beginning of the class. Hence, the instructors do not know the women and their individual perspectives on life, motherhood and childrearing. In the example below, the habits of Jelena's daughter habits are a complete surprise for the instructor.

Laura asks Jelena: 'Jelena, how many meals does your daughter have daily?' Jelena answers: 'In the morning when she wakes up, one meal; during the day, two meals; and then some snack and before going to bed, a supper'. Laura continues: 'What does she have for breakfast?' Jelena's answer is: 'In the morning, for breakfast, she has something Italian, like macaroni or spaghetti.' Laura looks incredulous: 'In the morning? For breakfast!' Jelena answers: 'Yes, she loves that. She wants that all the time.' Laura replies: 'In the morning people do not eat macaroni or spaghetti; for breakfast, they should have something like bread, yoghurt or something else, not a warm meal'.

Laura does not consider that a Finnish breakfast (which she universalises to what 'people' in general eat) can also include warm food like porridge, sausages and eggs. Migrant parents' child-rearing practices have also been found in other studies to be subordinated, if they do not conform to the educative practices in the dominant culture in the host country (Guo 2012: 125–130).

We continue talking about nutrition. Laura turns to me and asks: 'Minna, would you like to tell us what your son eats?' I explain briefly what and what time we eat in our family and then I add

that our habits may vary a bit from the typical Finnish model as my husband is a migrant and so, we have a mix of two cultures at home. Then Laura wants to know what my son eats for breakfast and I answer bread, yoghurt and fruits. Laura smiles and turns to Jelena: 'You see? Not macaroni, not spaghetti. Like Minna's son's breakfast, for example, is a good one.' Jelena smiles back and says: 'But my daughter does not like it, and she needs to eat.'

Jelena resists Laura's ethnocentric model for breakfast. Unlike most of the other mothers, she stands up for her way of parenting by making a point that the most important thing is that her daughter eats, not what form the food has. She has the confidence to repeat her opinion, although Laura does not approve. She is at a more equal level with Laura, thanks to her education and social class background, which might make it easier for her to argue back when she disagrees.

Laura continues talking about the meals. She says that five meals should be eaten per day. Fatima breaks into the conversation: 'But in our country, we only have three meals per day'. Laura replies: 'No, there should be five meals, also for adults. It is important and good for the blood sugar'. Fatima insists: 'Yes, but everyone in my country takes three meals a day: breakfast, lunch and dinner. And our meals are different than here. For breakfast, my son takes chocolate cereals; for lunch, noodles or macaroni with fish or meat; and for the dinner, he repeats the same food we had for the lunch'. Laura listens. Finally she nods and says: 'Ok, that is ok. You may have a different way in your country, which is ok. Anyway, it is good for your health to have five meals per day'. Jelena raises her eyes from the magazines and says: 'Should we really eat five times a day? I cannot eat so much! If I ate that much, I would weigh one hundred kilos!' Laura adds: 'Yes, five times, but only a little bit each time.'

Laura takes an ethnocentric perspective as her starting point, but adjusts her views somewhat when the mothers keep insisting on their point of view. Mothers are active, resisting and negotiating in these dialogues. Both are learning: the instructor learns how things can be done differently in other parts of the world and the mothers learn about the Finnish way of doing things and the expectations placed on them by the representative of the Finnish society. Laura seems to resign a bit and does not protest against the chocolate cereal for breakfast as long as the other meals in her view are healthy meals. Insisting on five meals, she does not give any other reason than that it is good for your blood sugar.

## Learning to live the Finnish way

In addition to the examples from the 'nutritional talk' above, the same ethnocentric approach is often present during the weekly meetings. The weekly practices often privilege middle-class western approaches aimed at assimilation and reinforcing the cultural silence: they keep the mothers silent about their culture, language, history and values, thus denying their humanity (Bartolomé 1994: 176; Rodríguez & Smith 2011: 91–92). The cultural silence can be observed in that the opinions of the mothers are seldom heard, and the situation is related to the question of whose knowledge is valued. An example of maintaining cultural silence is as follows:

Kaija asks which day and date it is today and some of the mothers answer, some others just follow and smile. After this Kaija shows a calendar and points to the coming Sunday and says that next Sunday will be Father's Day.

Tommi picks up a paper tie and says: 'Now we are going to make this for daddies'. He continues saying: 'On Sunday you will give this to daddy and daddy will sit down on the sofa and you will give him coffee and cake. And then a massage!' The mothers smile, some of them laugh a bit.

Kaija invites everybody to sit around the table and says: 'Ok, let us start to work'. We sit down and take the children with us. We start to prepare paper ties: we cut coloured papers and decorate ties. Children participate too by painting and gluing decorations.

The mothers made ties, and they seemed to be happy to work together with their children, but afterwards two of them said that they did not give this present to the family's father because they are not used to celebrating Father's Day. Halima who is a widow left the tie in the open daycare centre. Overall, it is a bit difficult to understand the symbolic gesture of a paper tie for anyone but, especially for women and men coming from cultures where ties are not commonly used or might symbolise the ruling class or the colonisers.

When the instructors ask the women to prepare a tie, a symbol of a middle-class white man, they do not ask if these mothers celebrate Father's Day in their culture and if so, how and when. They also do not show interest in these mothers' cultural traditions; instead of talking about their traditions, handicrafts and celebrations and learning from them, a western model is emphasised. Guo (2012: 125–130) demonstrated similar patterns in his study on acknowledging migrant parents' cultural knowledge; parental and cultural knowledge and needs are often ignored by the members of the dominant culture. This happens in the following example as well:

Today is the first time when the instructors ask the mothers to tell something about their country. Laura asks 'where are you from' and then the mothers show their home country on a map. One of the women who is illiterate cannot find her home country and needs help. Other mothers help her. Then the instructor ignoring these difficulties tells us we do not have any more time and we shall sing the last song.

Being illiterate makes it more difficult to read a map, but this important background information concerning one of the participants is not taken into account by the instructor. However, there are times when the women take charge of their own learning along the line of Freire's idea of conscientisation (1970: 26). For example, Mariam has learned to keep track of her own learning as well as enhance it through practice. Together with Khadija, Mariam solves a problem on her own without relying on the instructors for help. There are also some situations where the critical pedagogy perspective triumphs as it is seen in the following example (similar practice has been studied by Hirsaho and Vuori, 2012: 238–239):

We have started the meeting, as usual, by singing the group song and talking about the weather and general news. Then Kaija tells us that we are going to bake an apple pie today. I notice that the mothers do not understand and they just look at Kaija. Then Mariam starts to smile and says with an enquiring tone of voice: 'Cake?', and Kaija answers: 'Yes, a cake, a Finnish pie. Apples'.

We enter the kitchen. Kaija and Laura have written the names of kitchen instruments and baking ingredients on small notes, like 'a bowl', 'butter', 'sugar'. They give the notes to the mothers and ask them to put the notes on the right objects in the kitchen.

Some of the words are difficult for the mothers, but they discuss them together and finally put the papers in correct places. When it is Mariam's turn, she asks for Khadija's help in Arabic. Khadija translates the word for her and then both of them write this word down in their notebook. Afterwards, Mariam shows me that she is doing her own Finnish–Arabic–Finnish–dictionary.

During the meeting, Khadija and Mariam continue collaborating; together, they are able to find the meanings for the words 'melt' and 'recipe'. Then they stumble on the word 'ginger'. They ask me to explain and I try, I even try to draw it but they do not understand. Mariam takes her mobile phone and calls her husband to ask what this word means. After the phone call, she smiles and nods and says: 'Ok, now I know.' and translates the word to Khadija.

This example points out how Mariam, who has a Master's degree, takes responsibility for her learning process, asks questions, negotiates and participates. She takes her learning outside of the classroom by calling her husband to learn the meaning of the new word.

Another example of being an active subject and responsible for the learning and socialisation process can be seen in the following example:

Jelena is sitting on the sofa next to a Finnish mother (not part of the group) who is breastfeeding her baby. Jelena saw that the Finnish mother has a sling to carry her baby. Jelena becomes interested in the sling and starts to chat with the Finnish mother to get more information about the sling. They start a conversation about slings and the benefits of carrying babies. Laura walks past them and says: 'Ok, now we cannot get started because there are other mothers here too.' Jelena does not even look at her but keep talking with the Finnish mother about breastfeeding and babies' sleeping habits.

This example shows how the instructor intervenes in the spontaneous interaction between one of the participants and a native Finnish mother. She shows her frustration because the planned programme of the day has not started yet. However, this is an explicit example of the desired social involvement that is a goal of the programme. The mother is connecting with a Finnish mother and they are having a conversation about childrearing. Jelena is here not in a receiver position but instead she has initiated the subject that is discussed. She participates as an equal adult, not as a migrant mother in a learner's position. Laura fails to recognise that Jelena is herself taking an initiative through which she may become more integrated into Finnish society - the main point of the mother and child group as defined in the project set-up. Again Jelena's social class background and education might facilitate the initiation of a discussion with a Finnish woman.

Activities through which the instructors believe that they are supporting parenthood, as we can see in the examples above, often means that the instructors offer a western model of child rearing and giving instructions to the mothers. However, occasionally, the instructors take the role of a fellow mother or traveller:

Kaija smiles at Sawan's 2-year-old son who is babbling to his mother. Sawan turns to Kaija and says, looking a bit worried, that her son does not say any real words, only those 'baby words', his own words and some syllables. Kaija asks if he talks in their own language and Sawan tells her that he does not speak in any language, neither Finnish nor their own language. Laura enters the conversation by asking if Sawan has taken her son to the child health clinic. Sawan says that they had an appointment with the pediatrician who gave them a referral to speech therapy. Kaija says: 'Do not worry about that. My son did not say anything in real language, he only used his own words and nobody except I understood him. I was so worried about that, and then, at the age of three, he started to go to speech therapy and learned to talk quite quickly. And he still keeps talking a lot and very well, and now he is 32 years old!' Sawan smiles and looks relieved.

In this example, the instructor and the mother are having a conversation as mothers and equals. The instructor shares her own experience and does not try to tell the mother what to do.

In the interviews, the mothers express appreciation and support for the activities despite protesting in class against some of the instructors' views. Their appreciation is based on what they believe their children need to know in the future in Finnish society.

During the interview Jelena is describing the morning routine:

Jelena: First we come, we sing and repeat the name of all of us, of parents, of mothers, and kids.

Fieldworker: And what do you think about them?

Jelena: I like that. I like that because my daughter remembers every song, and she is singing at home also and she remembers words of the songs and she learns new words. [...]

Fieldworker: And what about handicrafts? What do you think about them?

Jelena: I like them because I feel like a child. It is creative. And my daughter remembers everything, like when we made dolls here. The mothers and children together. [...] That is good. It is funny, it is creative for my daughter because she learns something to prepare with fingers and not just buying in shops. [...]

Fieldworker: So you mean that it is important for your relationship with your daughter?

Jelena: Yes, of course. It is good, yes. Because if you are at home, you do not sit with baby. You cook, you clean, you must read something, you must put something in internet. But here in school, you know that you are not at home and you relax. That is good. I think it is great that mothers and children go to school together, when children are small. It is very, very good. [...] And I remember some words. Talking with somebody, I can remember. Here we sing that song 'head, shoulder, butt, knees, toes'. And then I remember that. And my daughter remembers it all! She knows how to say in Finnish 'one, two, three, four, five'. She knows how to say 'eye, nose, mouth'.

In the interviews, when the mothers were asked about how they feel about activities and lessons, their answer often reflected that they believe the lessons are good for their children's development as well as for their own relationship with their children. When they say that they like something or consider something important, they mention that it is because their children like or enjoy it or because it is good for their children or the children learn a lot through the activity.

The significance of what is best for their children emerges in the mothers' answers. The same phenomenon can be seen when

analysing the mothers' reflections on 'the nutritional talk'. Even if they resist in a silent way or with words, 'the right way of eating', they say that it is important to know since the children need to adapt to kindergarten and school, and one aspect of that is to be able to eat as other children do.

Fieldworker: What about when we talked about nutrition? Do you remember that?

Jelena Yes, I remember. So nice. It was good because we learned how to say 'lunch', 'breakfast', 'dinner', we learned what people eat here. I think that if I eat five times a day, I will be one hundred kilos. I am eating two times a day, I am eating well. [...] But yes, I liked that, because I also asked if children eat like this in school and they explained to me what and how children eat in school and kindergarten, which is great. I wanted to know that because my daughter must know, she must eat everything.

Interestingly, the mothers in the interviews chose to ignore the normative and judgmental lessons exemplified here by the nutritional talk and the emphasis on the Father's Day celebration. Instead, they bring forth the positive side of knowing what the norms are, because knowing the norms will make it possible for them as mothers to help their children be included and succeed in the Finnish school (see Säävälä 2012: 7–8). Regarding the interviews, it is important to acknowledge that the mothers might state things they know are socially acceptable and desirable since the fieldworker is also a Finn (see also Rinne & Tuittu 2011). In addition, they know the fieldworker only from the open daycare setting, which might make it more difficult to criticise the instructors or the instruction.

## Discussion and implications

As it is seen in our data, the instructors act as cultural instructors. They try to instruct the mothers about Finnish values and child rearing habits and concepts about what is good for children. According to Kriz and Skivenes (2010: 13) this approach avoids going into real communications, meaning in this case that the issues to be learned during the meetings are proposed by the instructors and the mothers often stay in the receiver position. This leads to one of two kinds of situations: either the starting point is the ethnocentric perspective and the mothers fall silent, or the learning turns from an ethnocentric-deficit model into a more critical intercultural approach. The latter happens when the mothers do not accept being the objects of the Finnish, middle-class model offered by instructors but they instead actively start to negotiate and bring forth their own views and cultural ways. When the mothers defend their way of living and their cultural capital, the instructors are at times forced to take more of a learner position. Interestingly, only women with higher education and from a more middle-class background speak up for their ways and habits. Their education and social class put them at a more equal level with the instructors who are not actually teachers but practical nurses.

What have the mothers actually learned in this course? All of them say that they have learned some Finnish as they were supposed to do; some of them say that they would have liked to learn more grammar and study more seriously; others say that they now can understand and use the Finnish language much better. There are no tests in the course, so it is impossible to show objective, measurable results of their language skills and knowledge about Finnish society. However, the mothers who indicate that they can use the Finnish language now thanks to these meetings seem to have passed an

invisible barrier for speaking Finnish and feel more comfortable with the language. However, there are many disempowering elements in the instructors' approach, including insinuating to the mothers that their knowledge about child rearing is not valued or is inferior compared to the instructors' knowledge (see Guo 2012). Despite the policymakers' rhetoric about equality and a learner-centered approach, the instructors often face difficulties in moving away from an ethnocentric perspective to a more empowering perspective (Carlson 2006: 324). Another goal was for the women to learn about Finnish culture, which they did to some extent through baking and cooking traditions as well as knowledge of holidays and celebrations, like Father's day.

Commonly, migrants are guided first to conventional language courses and told that once they master the language, a full membership in society will follow. If migrants are to be able to integrate into society, integration and language courses cannot be conducted using an ethnocentric approach requiring assimilation (see Anis 2008: 90). A one-size-fits-all approach cannot easily reach female stay-at-home migrants with young children (Kilbride *et al.* 2008: 1, 3).

## Conclusion

The integration course for stay-at-home mothers with young children discussed in this article is part of a larger integration programme to support migrant parents in a variety of ways. It is a well-intentioned attempt to accommodate the stay-at-home mothers in their integration process even though it is misguided in some ways. This is to a large extent due to that the instructors being part of and acting within a broader system of integration policy, and practice trying to do their best without having received an education for the task. Despite the talk about equality, needs and qualifications of students, educators often face difficulties problematising their own approaches to students (Carlson 2006). More reflexive perspectives on integration training still need to be developed.

In the studied integration course, the instructors aim at introducing the participating women to Finnish traditions and ways of thinking with regard to nutrition and eating customs but do so without being

able to take the perspective of the participants. Neither have the instructors been educated in how to actively bring the participants into the learning process. However, by learning some basic Finnish, the mothers are increasing their possibilities for becoming more socially engaged in Finnish society, which was one of the goals of the programme.

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## Notes

1. The Capable Parent project was carried out as part of a national development project called "Participative Integration into Finland", launched for the years 2010-2013 to promote the integration of migrants into Finnish society in a holistic way (Tarnanen *et al.* 2013: 18-20).
2. Conducted by Minna Intke-Hernandez.
3. Some of this information has been recapitulated above but deliberately in vague terms in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. <AQ: Please note that as per NJMR style guide footnote is not allowed. So that footnote has been converted as endnote>

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