

Chapter 27

Finland and Sweden: Muslim Teachers as Cultural Brokers



Inkeri Rissanen

Abstract This chapter focuses on the experiences and perspectives of Muslim teachers, who serve informally as “cultural brokers” in Finnish and Swedish schools. It begins by reviewing research on minority teachers and their roles as cultural mediators, as well as on Muslims in European public education. After that, the contexts, methodology and results of a case study are presented. The data includes semi-structured interviews with 14 “cultural broker” teachers. The results present the tasks of cultural brokering, as well as teachers’ perceptions of what makes a good cultural broker and how this role should be developed. The chapter includes a critical discussion on what is expected of minority teachers; they are not a homogenous group and their willingness to take on the tasks of cultural brokering depend on the nature of their jobs. The simplistic view of cultural broker teachers as role models for minority students is scrutinized, likewise the ways of outsourcing “all things multicultural” in the school to them.

Introduction

Diversifying the teaching staff in culturally diverse schools by recruiting minority teachers is promoted in many European countries for several reasons. For instance, increasing “parent-teacher ethnic match” is considered an important means to develop parents’ trust in the school and achieve higher parental involvement (Mantel, 2020; Calzada et al., 2015). Minority teachers are regarded as important “role models” for minority children yet the assumptions and implications of what it means to act as a role model are sometimes criticized as vague and simplistic (Carrington & Skelton, 2003). In any case, having higher proportions of ethnic minority teachers has been found to correlate positively with ethnic minority students’ educational achievement (Lindahl, 2007).

I. Rissanen (✉)
Tampere University, Tampere, Finland
e-mail: inkeri.rissanen@tuni.fi

The common focus on minority teachers as intercultural mediators includes a risk of increasing stereotypical images of teachers as “ethnic professionals”, and of recognizing their competencies only in urban-immigrant neighborhoods. On the other hand, many teachers of immigrant background willingly assume the role of mediator: they wish to be of use particularly in such contexts through their language skills and experiences attached to their personal histories. However, naïve assumptions of minority teachers as a homogeneous group are common, and more research is needed on the experiences of teachers from different minority groups in various contexts (Mantel, 2020; Santoro, 2015).

Apart from the question of whether minority teachers want to tie their professional identity to their ethnic/racial/religious positioning, the need for intercultural mediators in school communities has been recognized. “Cultural broker” is a descriptor, which in the educational research literature has been assigned to intermediaries who in different ways help to bridge the gap between the worlds of minority families and school. They may be teachers, instructional aides, family members, staff in community programs, or different kinds of project workers. Their role as intermediaries can be officially recognized, or they may informally mediate in various negotiations between members of the school community over and above their principal work duties. Cultural brokering is used as an umbrella concept for a wide array of tasks, such as translating and interpreting language, helping immigrant parents to navigate the school system, serving as advocates of minority parents and integrating and affirming their cultural values, educating school staff about the cultures of the families and generally helping disparate social systems to adapt to each other on both micro- and macro levels (Cooper et al., 1999; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007; Yohani, 2013; Ishimaru et al., 2016).

The role of cultural brokers in schools may be recognized as important and valuable, but often their work is not without tensions. Acting simultaneously as advocates of parents and as institutional agents means that cultural brokers, on the one hand, are part of and reproduce the existing order, and on the other hand, expose forms of structural injustice in it. This means they may receive credit in the school from the more superficial bridging activities (e.g. organising cultural activities), but encounter resistance when exposing the privileges of the dominant group or calling for extra resources to fight against existing inequalities (Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007). This article presents the results from a study that explored Muslim teachers’ perspectives and experiences of serving as cultural brokers in Finnish and Swedish schools. Since the vast majority of Muslims in Finland and Sweden are of immigrant background, the focus is mostly on the role of cultural brokers in supporting the inclusion of immigrant Muslims. The research questions are:

1. What tasks are involved in cultural brokering?
2. What makes a good cultural broker?
3. How do cultural brokers perceive their role and how would they like to see it evolve in the future?

Muslims in European Public Education

The reason to focus research on Muslim cultural brokers stems from the relevance of questions concerning Islam and Muslims in European public education systems. European Muslims are a heterogeneous group and categorize themselves in various ways, but identification as a Muslim rather than identification through ethnic identities, and the construction of collective Muslim identities have been rising trends, powered by common experiences of exclusion (Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011; Tinker & Smart, 2012). However, failure to understand the “diverse diversity” of Muslims stemming from e.g. different schools of law, cultural factors and different identity strategies in the West is mirrored in the perception that there are two kinds of Muslims – “good Muslims” who share “our” modern liberal lifestyles, and “bad Muslims” who are non-modern and difficult (Mamdani, 2002).

The majority of young European Muslims are educated in public (i.e. not faith-based) schools. The accommodation of Muslim identities in compulsory schooling has raised debates that reflect the wider renegotiation of the public role of religion in contemporary European societies. The failures experienced in Muslim inclusion in public schools have increased the willingness to found Islamic schools in many European countries. Muslim parents’ reasons for prioritizing faith schooling relate to concerns about the general well-being of their children – developing a positive sense of identity and belonging – and fears and experiences of discrimination in public schools (McCreery et al., 2007). In Finland and Sweden, for example, Somali parents feel that teachers assume parents do not know what is in their children’s best interests (Haga, 2015).

Much is known of the high impact of socio-emotional factors and teacher-student relationships on learning. Thus, the mis/recognition of students’ identities in school as well as negative teacher attitudes may play a role in explaining the differences in students’ educational achievements. Immigrant pupils from Islamic countries may be outperformed by other immigrant students, and these differences are not fully explained by socio-economic background, characteristics of the school or education system (Dronkers & van der Velden, 2013). However, research on the inclusion of immigrant Muslims in education has been somewhat polemic – either Muslims have been posited as a social problem or teachers have been accused of racism and Islamophobia (Niyozov, 2010). The focus of this study on the experiences and perceptions of Muslim cultural brokers is one attempt to overcome this polemic.

Contexts of the Study: Finland and Sweden

Finland and Sweden are Nordic welfare countries with majority populations that can be described as “secular-Lutheran”, but they are becoming increasingly multi-cultural, Finland a little later and at a slower pace than Sweden. Muslims in Sweden account for approximately 5% of the population, while the corresponding figure in

Finland is 1% (Larsson., 2015; Pauha, 2018). The Muslim population in both countries is heterogeneous. The state and municipal school systems in both countries offer instruction in pupils' mother tongue and Finland provides religious education (RE) "according to students' own religion". Islamic religious education (IRE) has been offered in Finnish schools since the mid-1980s, and currently it is the second largest form of RE with 2.2% of students participating in it – Lutheran RE still dominates in Finnish schools (Sakaranaho & Rissanen, 2021). In both countries, the vast majority of pupils study in mainstream (not faith-based) schools; however, in Sweden there also are Islamic schools.

Both Finland and Sweden have been ranked as countries of "strong multiculturalism policy" (Multiculturalism Policy Index, 2010), and have included efforts to recognise and support minority cultural identities in their public education systems, but Sweden has experienced a backlash in multiculturalism policies with the state taking less responsibility for immigrants' cultures (Zilliacus et al., 2017). In Finland there seems to be a gap between the multiculturalist policies and the everyday realities. For instance, attitudes toward Muslims are exceptionally negative when compared to those in other countries in Western Europe (Pew Research Centre, 2018), and teachers' attitudes mirror this general tendency (Rissanen et al., 2015). School cultures in Finland and Sweden are commonly based on trust, democratic leadership and low power distance (Rissanen, 2018). School-home collaboration is regarded as important and actively pursued. In the face of increasing cultural diversity new forms of collaboration as well as parental education have been developed; however, there are also reports of immigrant parents being treated by their children's teachers in a manner which they find alienating, paternalistic or even discriminatory (Mohme, 2017; Haga, 2015). Earlier research has described how the "secular normativity" of Finnish and Swedish schools indicates that non-religious positions tend to be regarded as "normal" or "neutral", while religious positions, and particularly Islam, are seen to be contradictory to modern, rational and independent thinking (Berglund, 2017; Rissanen, 2018, 2020, 2021).

In both countries, the number of students with immigrant background entering into teacher education is slowly increasing. There are also more ways for teachers with foreign degrees to complement their studies and achieve eligibility for teaching in Finnish/Swedish schools. However, teachers with immigrant background and without proficiency in the local language are often recruited for positions where they mainly teach immigrant students – for instance, as native-language support teachers, language teachers or RE teachers (Käck et al., 2018; Virta, 2015; Hahl & Paavola, 2015). School leaders in both countries emphasize the importance of hiring teachers with migrant backgrounds as a strategy to develop multicultural schools, and often take for granted teachers' ability and willingness to serve as cultural interpreters (Rissanen, 2021; Jönsson & Rubenstein Reich, 2006; Lahdenperä, 2006, 10). However, immigrant teachers themselves may want to emphasize their professional role as teachers even though they also are willing to mediate relations between home and school. They struggle for professional respect and see their position as marginalized and insecure, often face discrimination and sometimes feel their background is seen as a handicap (Colliander, 2017; Virta, 2015; Lefever et al., 2014).

Methodology

This study is part of a larger qualitative research project concerned with the inclusion of Muslims in Finnish and Swedish schools. In this project, principals of Finnish and Swedish urban multicultural schools ($n = 10$ in each country) as well as Muslim parents and teachers/other staff members ($n = 8$ in each country), were interviewed. For the present article, the perspectives and experiences of the Muslim teachers (of religious education, languages or social sciences) (total $n = 16$) were analysed. They all were self-identifying as Muslims and served informally as cultural brokers in their school communities. Eight of the interviewees were female and eight male; apart from two native Finns, they were first-generation immigrants (from Iraq, Iran, Malesia, Morocco, Senegal, Somalia and Turkey). They were fluent in Finnish, Swedish or English and the interviews were conducted in these languages.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the informants in the spring of 2016. The interviews lasted from 50 to 90 min. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data were analysed by means of inductive qualitative content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). Condensed meaning units were formed of the parts of the interviews that related to the research questions. The condensed meaning units were then coded and the codes categorized. In this article, the results for each research question are reported in their own respective sections and the categories appear in bold face and in italics in the text. Previous analyses on the data of the project have focused on schools as the arenas for negotiations on Muslims' inclusive citizenship (Rissanen, 2018), principals' diversity ideologies in supporting the inclusion of Muslims (Rissanen, 2021) as well as School-Muslim parent collaboration and the role of parental cultural capital (Rissanen, 2020).

Findings and Discussion

What Tasks Are Involved in Cultural Brokering?

Serving as Information Banks for Other Teachers, School Leaders, Parents and Students Previous research on cultural brokers often highlights their role in educating minority families about the dominant culture and its school system (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Cooper et al., 1999). The brokers of this study also reported these tasks but often put more emphasis on their role in providing information for other teachers as well as school leaders about Islam, Muslims, and the realities of Muslim immigrant families. Through this they challenged teachers' eurocentric views, increasing understanding on the internal diversity of Islam and tackling prejudices. Sometimes Muslim parents' or students' prejudiced views of teachers as racists also needed to be challenged by giving them information about the Finnish/Swedish educational culture. Furthermore, the brokers were educating both teachers and

parents about the different cultural styles of communication in order to reduce friction. All this was done informally through everyday interactions with the different members of the school community. The cultural brokers who worked as teachers of all students (as class teachers or subject teachers), mostly wanted to confine their brokering tasks to providing information and avoid a role where they would be seen as the allies of minority students:

F3 (Finnish Islamic Religious Education-teacher): It's more like... a teacher comes to me before the meeting (with Muslim parents) to ask why it is that they want this and that, like informally we discuss the issue and I can explain what I think the problem is and the interpretations (of religious matters) some families have. They come to me for information, I am a Finn so I understand their view and I work at the school, but I also understand the families' views and why some want to obey certain rules a bit more strictly. Rarely do I participate in those meetings because I would be in a very uncomfortable position, I work at the school but I'm also a Muslim, I would have to choose sides, which would be uncomfortable, so consciously we have tried to avoid these situations.

Serving as Advocates and Support Persons of Parents and Students However, cultural brokers who mainly taught minority students also served as advocates and support persons in school for Muslim families, which meant they positioned themselves more openly as their allies and as minority members themselves. According to them, Muslim parents contacted them with a much lower threshold than they did other teachers, asking for help in matters concerning the accommodation of their children's culture- or religion-based needs in the school:

S6 (Swedish teacher of social studies): When I have had Muslim students, their parents seem to trust me, like oh, ok, so you will understand that my child cannot eat pork in school... and these kinds of small things we talk about, they trust me.

Furthermore, they talked about how Muslim students often long for an adult who understands both their religion and their everyday realities, and sometimes even trust cultural brokers with their most difficult issues.

Serving as Role Models Efforts at diversifying teaching staff in many countries are often based on the "role model" argument (Carrington & Skelton, 2003), but the cultural brokers in this study rarely participated in this discourse of minority teachers as role models for minority students; they deemed it more important to model and represent Islam to non-Muslim teachers and students. Only the Finnish IRE teachers talked about themselves as role models for Muslim students in the sense of combining identities as Finns and as Muslims. The idea of Muslim girls needing role models met with criticism:

S8 (Swedish language teacher): Each time I got hired, I encountered the discourse of being...they thought that it was good for the school to get a role model of a veiled Muslim woman, who has an academic background. So... I mean for me, that's fine, but... why people don't realise that Muslim women with hijab, with a veil, can be educated?

Because in Indonesia, in Iran or Iraq, they are members of the parliament, in Indonesia, they do work in universities, they are like you, you know— but the thing is that... we should be role models for the Muslim girls but the Muslim girls KNOW that women can get educated. So it's like, they (teachers and principals) have the...the idea that these girls belong to a closed world... that these girls think that because you are a Muslim and you have hijab you cannot succeed in life, so here's a teacher to show you. But these girls live in a Muslim environment, they KNOW...

Mediating Conflicts If there were conflicts between the members of the school community – these were reported between parents from different ethnic backgrounds, between Muslim students and non-Muslim teachers, parents and school leaders, and among Muslim students – the cultural brokers were often asked for help. Sometimes they helped in resolving conflicts even in other schools or outside the school:

F2 (Finnish Islamic Religious Education teacher): For example, last week in one school one kid's parents came to me and told me that the kid had been bullied outdoors. They did not want to go to the principal since the quarrel seemed to have been between Muslim kids and Finnish kids. So they asked if I could take care of the situation and maybe also talk to the principal.

Even though conflicts are often trivial, cultural brokers regard it as important to work to resolve them by increasing mutual understanding. They also talked about how the problem often is not in a lack of cultural knowledge but failure to listen or respect and, for instance, principals' authoritative ways of managing issues or giving up on collaboration. However, they also reported on seeing how through dialogical practices the need for cultural brokers as mediators diminishes.

Serving as Interpreters Very commonly, the cultural broker teachers served as interpreters in the school, even though some of them also talked about the importance of simultaneously encouraging parents to practice their Finnish/Swedish skills in the school and communicate without an interpreter. However, when negotiating difficult issues the cultural brokers wanted to help with the language since they felt that immigrant parents were often in a weaker position and not respected as intelligible equal adults due to their lack of Finnish/Swedish skills, even though entirely able to express themselves in other languages.

Influencing Practices and Structures in the School and Municipality Some of the cultural brokers also reported efforts to exert influence at the structural level. They had taken an active role in developing an inclusive school culture, but had also been involved in different committees designing municipality-level solutions and suggestions. Resistance was reported but also successes: one of the cultural brokers had designed a whole new model for hiring assistants from different language backgrounds for schools, and now worked as their supervisor.

What Makes a Cultural Broker?

A Good Understanding of the Majority Society and Sufficient Commitment to Its Norms All the cultural brokers wanted to emphasize that having certain ethnic or religious background is never a sufficient condition for successfully serving as cultural broker. A good understanding of the majority society and sufficient commitment to its norms was considered vital. The brokers deplored some principals' lack of interest in what teachers new to the society (and sometimes hired without formal qualifications) actually taught and the models they provided for minority children. Even though cultural brokers need not share all the values and ways of thinking common in the dominant cultures, they had to understand them – and make them understandable to others. A profound understanding also made it possible to promote immigrant minorities' matters constructively:

F6 (Finnish mother tongue teacher) [...] For religious reasons, people feel they have to be polite and express gratitude. But AFTER that, these problems have to be intelligently faced [...] you always have to remember the histories of things and people, get to know them, to remember that you are from Somali culture and how to effectively communicate there and how here, also to know the history and culture of Finland.

Being Seen as an Insider in Minority Cultures and Knowing Enough About Them On the other hand, cultural brokers also felt a need to be seen as insiders among the minority groups. Mere recognition as a Muslim is sometimes enough to create trust in Muslim parents, but most informants regarded familiarity with the minority culture and religion (and their internal diversity) essential for their brokering tasks. They talked about the problems that occurred if all Muslim teachers were assumed to be able to serve as experts and mediators in issues related to religion; IRE teachers could be expected to possess this kind of knowledge. Nevertheless, being members of minorities enabled the cultural broker teachers to discuss sensitive issues with families:

F6 (Finnish mother tongue teacher): The kind of conversations I have (with the parents), it is impossible for Finns to have, they will be called racists. But I can have those conversations, and I can be blamed for being westernized, but I have the benefit that I KNOW the field, and they know me and that I am a well-intentioned person, I just want people to see things from both sides.

Developing Networks Outside the School Some of the informants reported that their success as cultural brokers was heavily based on their networks and relationships outside the school, which they had consciously cultivated. The IRE teachers in particular reported creating a position where they enjoy the trust of Muslim families from very different backgrounds had required a lot of footwork among the ethnic and religious communities. However, the brokers had very varying views on this and the networks were regarded as important mostly by those teachers who themselves mainly taught minority students: those who had a teaching position where they taught majority and minority students alike actually considered it harmful to be associated with minority communities and tried to keep their distance.

Knowing the Limits of Cultural Brokering The need to critically reflect their role and be aware of the limits of appropriate cultural brokering was discussed:

F4 (Finnish Islamic Religious Education teacher): I also want to question this role of a consultant, there are some pitfalls in it. Like...a typical question to the Islamic religious education teacher is, what is appropriate clothing for Muslim girls in the P.E. lessons? You know, I am not a fatwa-bank. What is important is that they have separate clothing for sports and are able to take care of their personal hygiene, I mean I don't issue scarf measures. Or tell them how much ankle they can show. It is an erroneous idea to put RE teachers or mother tongue teachers in this kind of position, where we actually would violate equity and freedom of religion. I am not going to dictate how people can practice their religion, that is not my job as a teacher, as a public servant.

According to this broker, some Muslim teachers did not understand that it was not their job to standardize religious practice, and this undermined the autonomy of families.

How Do Teachers Perceive Their Role as Cultural Brokers and How Would They Like to See It Evolve in the Future?

Experiences of Cultural Brokering as a Rewarding and Respected Position The brokers talked about seeing the everyday problems Muslim students and their families face in the school and feeling the urge to help. As already discussed, their willingness to profile themselves as cultural brokers varied, but some had purposefully sought to be employed in schools where their background and cultural/religious expertise could be of use. They talked about big differences in how they were seen by other teachers and principals: many brokers worked in several schools and reported difficulties in receiving respect in some of them, but being regarded as “key persons” and “treasures” in others. Principals who valued their contributions as cultural brokers occasionally organized substitute teachers for their lessons so that they could use their time on brokering tasks.

Experiences of Frustration However, experiences of frustration and exhaustion were also reported. Much of the frustration was caused by the fact that the brokers were given a lot of responsibility, but little power. Many of the issues they tried to handle – for example, problems in school-family collaboration – would require more structural level changes to be truly resolved, but the brokers' endeavors to influence school level or municipality level decision-making were often met with resistance and even hostility. Occasionally brokering felt like continuously cleaning up the messes other teachers or principals had made through their ignorance or insensitive communication. Sometimes the immigrant teachers felt caught between two fires – being accused of being “too westernized” by the immigrant Muslim families, and being seen as difficult or “reluctant to integrate” in the professional community. Also the students' might “test” them, as described by this broker:

S8 (Swedish language teacher): when I had a conversation with one student, she told me this is SWEDEN here, and she told me in that tone you know, this is SWEDEN [...] And they like to test me, in the class, like what do you think about gays, so well, you know, I don't really care. If I didn't tolerate gays I would live somewhere else... so they test me. I don't know how it goes with other teachers but I suppose that I get... It might be little more difficult for me to handle the group, to build the relationship with the group as a teacher. And then I get all the immigrant kids who try to, "ok, you speak Arabic so you are our friend". No, I represent Swedish values and, you know... So no, I don't speak Arabic. And I get, ok, it's haram, it's haram, from some students who always try to drag me into these conversations, but I avoid it, systematically.

According to the brokers, many immigrant Muslim parents were afraid of raising any issues in the school for they fear their children would be seen in a negative light, but needed a channel to express the feelings of frustration they sometimes had behind the polite and grateful façade. Here is how one cultural broker described efforts at negotiating issues related to organising IRE in schools:

F6: (Finnish mother tongue teacher): They (parents and teachers) lean on me in all kinds of questions, but I don't have any answers to them. I have sought guidance from the education division of the city administration, but everyone just evades the issue. Nobody wants to take responsibility. [...] I am constantly in contact with the city administration and ask them to come up with guidelines, but the answer is that this is the law and we live by it. But I think this is not responsible. And I take flack because of this but I don't care. As long as I know I'm doing the right thing. Somebody has to raise these issues.

Furthermore, open communication on the part of other teachers was sometimes prevented by fears of being regarded as racist. Thus, cultural brokers served as filters for concerns and emotions from different sides.

Perceptions of the Continuous Need for Cultural Brokering at All Levels of the Public Education System In order to avoid segregation in the public educational system, cultural brokers called for public schools to be developed as arenas where the inclusion of different groups in society was continuously negotiated, and saw the role of cultural brokers in this as also relevant in the future. They did not consider the need for cultural brokers to be an interphase: in multiculturalizing societies, negotiations on inclusion are contextual and continuous. School cultures have to reflect the changing realities and local populations, and cultural brokers are needed as "continuous problem solvers", as described by one of the informants.

Perceptions of the Need to Help Minority Members to Take Agency in Society When talking about the changes they would like to see in the educational system and society, none of the brokers considered this as something that could be expected to arise from the majority society: they emphasized the agency of active minority members such as themselves to push unflinchingly through resistance by acting like model citizens and finding new ways to exert influence. They wanted to believe that relentless work on correcting misconceptions and increasing mutual understanding through knowledge would have the desired effect.

Conclusions and Implications

This study analyzed the experiences of Muslim cultural broker teachers in Finnish and Swedish schools. There are limits to the interpretations that can be made on the basis of this case study sample, which is by no means representative. The study does not aim to cover the whole variety of experiences of Finnish and Swedish Muslim cultural brokers and it makes no claim of generalizability. Furthermore, it is likely that some differences in the brokers' views may have been linked to their respective background factors such as nationality, but making interpretations of these correlations on the basis of individual representatives of different nationalities in this data would be mere speculation. However, the data enabled tentative interpretations on the links between teachers' orientations to cultural brokering and their job descriptions (whether or not teaching mainly minority students). Previous studies have demonstrated how minority teachers are sometimes stereotyped and their professional competence is reduced to being "professional ethnic", which serves to narrow their career paths and professional prospects. Professional respect for minority teachers may suffer if their background is seen as the reason for their recruitment (Santoro, 2015; Wilkins & Lal, 2011; Carrington & Skelton, 2003). On the other hand, they may have very different orientations: while some want to be assimilated into the dominant professional community of teachers, others seek to be employed in urban-immigrant neighborhoods and want to use their language skills, cultural competences and experiences to negotiate issues related to the inclusion of minorities (Mantel, 2020). The cultural brokers in this study also seemed to have different orientations, which were linked to their professional roles. All teachers who mainly taught minority students (RE teachers or mother tongue teachers) were strongly committed to cultural brokering and took up a wide variety of brokering tasks. Those whose job description was not mainly focused on teaching minority students wanted to avoid being profiled as the advocates of minorities; however, they, too, wanted to serve as cultural brokers by advising their colleagues.

The "role model" argument, according to which minority teachers are primarily needed as role models for minority students, has been criticized for its vagueness (Carrington & Skelton, 2003) and the brokers in this study also criticized the often simplistic views of Muslim girls in particular being in need of role models. They saw the barriers to inclusion in the fixed attitudes and misconceptions of majority teachers and principals rather, and challenged assumptions of ignorance and lack of academic motivation among Muslim minority members. Even though minority teachers are often recruited to teach minority students, the thinking and professional practices of their colleagues and principals may also change through collaboration with these teachers (see Rissanen, 2020, 2021). This study demonstrated the strong agency of cultural broker teachers: their professional role was not limited to the expectations and tasks assigned to them from outside, but much shaped by their own active way of getting involved in matters where they believed their contribution might be needed.

According to the findings of this study, policies that enable developing some formal recognition and resourcing of the informal tasks of cultural brokers are to be recommended. The results reveal the quantity of the work cultural broker teachers continuously accomplish informally in addition to their “normal” workloads. Sometimes this work extends outside school hours and school premises. Much of the work is invisible to the professional community, and meagre resources are allocated to it. Furthermore, cultural brokers are often asked to address problems at the grassroots level, which in their view would need more structural level solutions. The mismatch between the problems they are asked to resolve and their lack of power to influence their root causes creates frustration. Thus, another policy recommendation is to increase cultural brokering at all levels of the education system and educational decision-making.

Furthermore, the challenges encountered by cultural brokers demonstrate the need to cultivate all teachers’ cultural responsiveness. Sometimes cultural brokers are given complete power and responsibility to deal with “minority issues” without any support or interest from principals or other teachers: this is experienced as indifference towards developing inclusive schools. Thus, even though many Finnish and Swedish principals affirm the value of cultural broker teachers in schools (Rissanen, 2021; Jönsson & Rubenstein Reich, 2006; Lahdenperä, 2006, 10), the common assumptions that they can outsource “dealing with minorities” to cultural broker teachers and that all minority teachers are willing to assume this role are decidedly problematic and based on perceptions of one-way inclusion. Instead of giving cultural brokers responsibility for “all things multicultural”, culturally responsive teaching and efforts to promote inclusion, equality and social justice are the responsibility of all teachers (see Santoro, 2015).

References

- Berglund, J. (2017). Secular normativity and the religification of Muslims in Swedish public schooling. *Oxford Review of Education*, 43, 524–535.
- Calzada, E. J., Huang, K. Y., Hernandez, M., Soriano, E., Acra, C. F., Dawson-McClure, S., Kamboukos, D., & Brotman, L. (2015). Family and teacher characteristics as predictors of parent involvement in education during early childhood among Afro-Caribbean and Latino immigrant families. *Urban Education*, 50(7), 870–896. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085914534862>
- Carrington, B., & Skelton, C. (2003). Re-thinking ‘role models’: Equal opportunities in teacher recruitment in England and Wales. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(3), 253–265. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930305573>
- Colliander, H. (2017). Building bridges and strengthening positions: Exploring the identity construction of immigrant bilingual teachers. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*.
- Cooper, C., Denner, J., & Lopez, E. (1999). Cultural brokers: Helping Latino children on pathways toward success. *The Future of Children*, 9(2), 51–57. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1602705>
- Dronkers, J., & van der Velden, R. (2013). Positive but also negative effects of ethnic diversity in schools on educational achievement? An empirical test with cross-national PISA data. In M. Windzio (Ed.), *Integration and inequality in educational institutions* (pp. 71–98). Springer.

- Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2007). Qualitative content analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), 107–115.
- Haga, R. (2015). Freedom has destroyed the Somali family. Somali parents' experiences of epistemic injustice and its influence on their raising of Swedish Muslims. In M. Sedgwick (Ed.), *Making European Muslims: Religious socialization among young Muslims in Scandinavia and Western Europe* (pp. 39–55). Routledge.
- Hahl, K., & Paavola, H. (2015). "To get a foot in the door": New host country educated immigrant teachers' perceptions of their employability in Finland. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(3). <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v40n3.3>
- Högskola (University Collage). (2006). Working paper. 1.
- Hopkins, N., & Blackwood, L. (2011). Everyday citizenship: Identity and recognition. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 21, 215–227.
- Ishimaru, A. M., Torres, K. E., Salvador, J. E., Lott, J., Williams, D. M. C., & Tran, C. (2016). Reinforcing deficit, journeying toward equity: Cultural brokering in family engagement initiatives. *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(4), 850–882. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216657178>
- Jönsson, A., & Rubenstein Reich, L. R. (2006). En yrkesidentitet i förändring? Invandrade lärares möte med den svenska skolan. [An occupational identity in transformation? Immigrant teachers meeting with the Swedish school]. *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige*, 11(2), 81–93.
- Käck, A., Männikkö Barbutiu, S., & Fors, U. (2018). Unfamiliar ways of thinking and practising in teacher education: Experiences by migrant teachers. In M. Sablic, A. Skugor, & I. Durdevic Babic (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 42nd ATEE annual conference 2017 in Dubrovnik, Croatia: Changing perspectives and approaches in contemporary teaching* (pp. 219–235).
- Lahdenperä, P. (2006). *Intercultural leadership in school environments*. Södertörns.
- Larsson. (2015). Sweden. In O. Scharbrodt, S. Akgönül, A. Alibašić, & J. Nielsen (Eds.), *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe* (pp. 549–561). Brill.
- Lefever, S., Paavola, H., Berman, R., Guðjónsdóttir, H., Talib, M.-T., & Gísladóttir, K. R. (2014). Immigrant teachers in Finland and Iceland: Successes and challenges. *International Journal of Education for Diversities*, 3, 65–85. <http://blogs.helsinki.fi/ije4d-journal/volume-3-2014/>
- Lindahl, M. (2007). *Gender and ethnic interactions among teachers and students: Evidence from Sweden* (No. 2007: 25. Working Paper). IFAU-Institute for Labour Market Policy Evaluation.
- Mamdani, M. (2002). Good Muslim, bad Muslim: A political perspective on culture and terrorism. *American Anthropologist*, 104(3), 766–775.
- Mantel, C. (2020). Being a teacher with a so-called 'immigrant background': Challenges of dealing with social boundaries. *Intercultural Education*, 31(2), 173–189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2019.1702291>
- Martinez-Cosio, M., & Iannacone, R. M. (2007). The tenuous role of institutional agents: Parent liaisons as cultural brokers. *Education and Urban Society*, 39(3), 349–369. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124506298165>
- McCreery, E., Jones, L., & Holmes, R. (2007). Why do Muslim parents want Muslim schools? *Early Years: An International Research Journal*, 27(3), 203–219.
- Mohme, G. (2017). Somali swedes' reasons for choosing a Muslim-profiled school – Recognition and educational ambitions as important influencing factors. *Journal of School Choice*, 11(2), 239–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2017.1302256>
- Multiculturalism Policy Index. (2010). Retrieved from <http://www.queensu.ca/mcp/>
- Niyozov, S. (2010). Teachers and teaching Islam and Muslims in pluralistic societies: Claims, misunderstandings, and responses. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 11(1), 23–40.
- Pauha, T. (2018). Finland. In O. Scharbrodt, S. Akgonul, A. Alibašić, J. S. Nielsen, & E. Račius (Eds.), *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe* (Vol. 9, pp. 232–247). Brill.
- Pew Research Center. (2018). *Being Christian in Western Europe*. <http://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2018/05/Being-Christian-in-Western-Europe-FOR-WEB1.pdf>

- Rissanen, I. (2018). Negotiations on inclusive citizenship in a post-secular school: Perspectives of “cultural broker” Muslim parents and teachers in Finland and Sweden. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 64(1), 135–150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2018.1514323>
- Rissanen, I. (2020). School–Muslim parent collaboration in Finland and Sweden: Exploring the role of parental cultural capital. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2020.1817775>
- Rissanen, I. (2021). School principals’ diversity ideologies in fostering the inclusion of Muslims in Finnish and Swedish schools. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 24(3), 431–450. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1599340>
- Rissanen, I., Kuusisto, E., & Tirri, K. (2015). Finnish teachers’ attitudes to Muslim students and Muslim student integration. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 54(2), 277–290.
- Sakaranaho, T., & Rissanen, I. (2021). Islamic religious education in Finland. In L. Franken & B. Gent (Eds.), *Islamic religious education in Europe: A comparative study* (pp. 112–127). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429331039-7>
- Santoro, N. (2015). The drive to diversify the teaching profession: Narrow assumptions, hidden complexities. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 18(6), 858–876. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.759934>
- Tinker, C., & Smart, A. (2012). Constructions of collective Muslim identity by advocates of Muslim schools in Britain. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(4), 643–663.
- Virta, A. (2015). “In the middle of a pedagogical triangle” – Native-language support teachers constructing their identity in a new context. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 46, 84–93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.11.003>
- Wilkins, C., & Lal, R. (2011). You’ve got to be tough and I’m trying’: Black and minority ethnic student teachers’ experiences of initial teacher education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 14(3), 365–386.
- Yohani, S. (2013). Educational cultural brokers and the school adaptation of refugee children and families: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of International Migration & Integration*, 14, 61–79. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-011-0229-x>
- Zilliacus, H., Paulsrud, B., & Holm, G. (2017). Essentializing vs. non-essentializing students’ cultural identities: Curricular discourses in Finland and Sweden. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 12(2), 166–180.

Inkeri Rissanen is a docent (associate professor), and university lecturer at the Faculty of Education and Culture at the Tampere University, Finland. Her fields of expertise include multicultural education, religions and worldviews in education, teachers’ intercultural competencies, and growth mindset pedagogy.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

