The role of cultural background in a parent-teacher relationship:

The case of Russian immigrant parents and Swedish elementary school teachers

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ABSTRACT

The growing multiculturalism of the Swedish society affects the school environment and leads to raising cultural and ethnic diversity among pupils. While there are many immigrant groups in Sweden, this research focuses only on the current residents of Sweden who have Russian background. One of the reasons is an increasing migration flow of the Russian born people to Sweden during the last 15 years.

One of the necessary conditions of a child's development is cooperation between educators and child's family; therefore, the successful communication between teachers and parents is crucial. Well-being of a child can be challenged if school and home fail to cooperate. The risk of failure might be higher if teachers and families have different cultural background and do not speak a common native language. Therefore, the issue of communication between parents and teachers has to be studied in order to understand the area of possible conflicts and ways to solve and avoid it.

The aim of this study is to describe and to analyze how parents of Russian origin communicate with teachers in the Swedish elementary school and preschool class and how cultural differences influence their communication. An empirical qualitative approach has been used. The data for the study has been collected through interviewing a number of Russian parents and Swedish elementary and preschool class teachers.

This study investigates how communication between these teachers and parents usually occurs as well as what perspectives and attitudes toward the schooling process, childrearing, teaching and learning processes are hold by the participants.

The results of this research show the risk areas where the cultural mismatch can occur and the conditions of the minimal and maximal influence of the cultural background. These areas generally refer to teaching methods used in the Swedish schools, teacher's role in the child-rearing process, conditions for well-being of a child, importance of a child's achievement and learning outcomes. The bigger cultural mismatch, the higher level of dissatisfaction and the higher risk of communication failure.

The most important factors for successful communication between the immigrant parents and teachers have been defined as level of satisfaction, trust, awareness of potential cultural difference and similarities between the parents' and teachers' worldviews. Focus on the similarities in the process of building strong relationships and communication between the school and immigrant parents is viewed as a key to successful cooperation of the parents and teachers with reduced negative influence of cultural clash.

Keywords: *multicultural education, cultural mismatch, parental involvement, culture, immigration.*

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the current situation of multiculturalism in the Swedish society, the risks and challenges connected to increasing cultural diversity, the position of multi-ethnic schools and their role in the context of a growing heterogeneity. Next, the aim of the study and research questions are introduced, followed by a brief discussion about the relevance and significance of the conducted research and its limitations.

One of a significant characteristic of modern Swedish school is its diversity and multiculturalism. According to the Swedish National Agency for Education 23,8% of the pupils attending Elementary school (*Grundskolan*) in 2014/2015 academic years have a foreign language as their second native language and more than 9% do not recognize Swedish as their native language. Additionally, the data from Statistiska Centralbyrån (Statistics Sweden) shows that the number of foreign-born persons has been steadily increasing: in 2004 they made up 12% of the total population and 10 years later, in 2014, their share of the total population had increased to 16 %. Currently, more than 1 600 000 of people residing in the country are born outside Sweden. As a rapidly growing diversity of the Swedish society does not seem to slow down, the number of children with various cultural backgrounds is expected to grow.

Many scholars recognize the issues connected with ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of Swedish society. The main focus of their research often lies on the largest immigrant groups, which in most cases differ from the Swedish population in regards to their religious background such as residents with origins in Iraq, Iran, Syria and other countries. However, very little attention is paid to smaller immigrant groups. One of such groups is the Russian ethnic group.

In the changing environment of rising multiculturalism various challenges and risks may appear. For instance, emerged ethnic segregation in Sweden and its negative outcomes has already been widely discussed by scholars (Borevi, 2014; Anderson, 2000). When some of the schools stay relatively homogeneous, others, which are located in segregated areas and often with lower prestige, have a tendency to be mostly attended by children from immigrant families (Bunar, 2011, p. 142). The outcome of this division can be even greater segregation. Despite the government's attempts to apply new policies and to improve schooling system through various pedagogical experiments, isolation of some immigrant groups remains. While facing number of problems, school institution is one of the key elements in the process of integration and can be viewed as a bridge between immigrant families and general Swedish society (Rubinstein Reich & Tallberg Broman, 2000; Goldstein-Kyaga, 1999)

Importance of school education in every individual's life is obvious, both as a source of knowledge, platform for training vital skills and a chance to become a competent social actor. School influences not only the child but also the entire family, as parents are continuously participating in direct or indirect communication with teachers and school

representatives; especially frequent is teacher-parents interaction in Elementary School. This connection between school and family gives an opportunity to ease the effects of geographical and societal segregation (Reich & Broman, 2000, p. 19).

As modern school becomes a meeting point for thousands of children and parents with various cultural backgrounds, intercultural competence of teachers is crucial. Many parents, while struggling with adjusting to a new environment, may have difficulties with understanding teacher's instructions or explanations, which is noticeably reflected in their children' ability to adapt to Swedish schools (Johannesson, 1975, p. 348). Most of researchers agree that lack of understanding and "cultural mismatch" between the school and the family often leads to underperforming among the children and increases the likelihood that they will exhibit behavioral problems in the classroom. Besides newcomers and integrated groups, Sweden has a number of well-integrated citizens with foreign origins who have lived in the country for many years, but also can experience various difficulties based on cultural differences. Thus, there is a great risk that communication between educators and parents might fail in these circumstances, which can affect child's well-being.

Many researchers point out the significance of a successful communication between teachers and families (Dodd & Konzal, 2002; Eberly, Joshi & Konzal, 2007). Teachers have to be prepared to work in a multicultural environment in order to reach mutual understanding with all parents. The problems based on cultural differences and the growing heterogeneity of the class often appear when teachers do not possess a sufficient knowledge, skills, competence and motivation which are necessary in multicultural environment (Vedder, Horenczyk, Liebkind, Nickmans, 2006, p. 163). Intercultural competence of the educators requires their awareness and understanding of other's beliefs and values, as well as their ability to accept "the cultural frameworks of families different from their own in order to establish open, frank, and ongoing communication with them" (Eberly, Joshi & Konzal, 2007, p. 10). Additionally, all the problems faced by teachers in the culturally diverse contexts may also affect teacher's well-being and professional satisfaction by bringing them to the point of "diversity-related burnout" (Horenczyk & Tatar, 2002).

Despite all challenges and risks, growing multiculturalism can significantly enrich school environment and the entire schooling system once the home – school bridge is build. In order to resolve existing problems and avoid possible failures, the understanding of the parents' values, beliefs and expectations has to be continuously studied. As it has already been said, trustful relationships and open communication between teachers and families are key elements in managing heterogeneous multi-ethnic environment. Therefore, it is necessary for educators and researchers to develop professional tools that can help to build those relationships and improve communication with culturally diverse families and to do so they have to "to hear these families' voices and be aware of and sensitive to their insights and expectations" (Yakhnich, 2015, p. 388). This study is concentrated on the improving parent-teacher understanding and investigation of both parents' and teachers' perceptions on various issues, such as role of teacher in child-rearing.

The communication pattern of immigrant parents may vary according their cultural background, level of acculturation and integration, education, occupation, family status, gender and other factors. This research aims to investigate the tendencies influencing

communication between teachers and parents within a particular group of immigrants who have moved to Sweden from Russia, currently Russian Federation. According to the data from Statistics Sweden, the amount of immigrants from Russian Federation has been continuously and rapidly growing in Sweden (Table #1). Additionally, this group will probably grow bigger as there is no obvious reasons for slowing down the immigration flow.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Russian Federation	6,523	7,344	8,243	9,090	10,133	10,951	12,121	12,748	13,464	14,443	15,511	16,412	17,320	18,224	19,028

Table #1. Immigration to Sweden by country of birth. Source: Statistic Sweden, 2015-03-02

Although the Russian immigrant group is not the largest one, this group is significant in size and in fact there is more people with Russian cultural heritage or very similar to it than the numbers show. It is here important to remember the historical past of Russia. The Russian nation and state has for big part of its history been united with many other nations forming different countries, such as the Russian empire and the Soviet Union. Today many of these are independent countries, but it might be suggested that these, now sovereign countries, culturally are very similar to Russia, and thus sharing resembling attitudes. Analyzing the data from the World Value Survey for the period 2010-2014, such countries as Russian Federation, Republic of Belarus, Ukraine and Republic of Kazakhstan have very similar responses regarding importance of different qualities in children. This result shows, as mentioned above, that these countries are very close in their values, especially in the area of child-rearing. Additionally, those countries, which have communistic past related to Soviet Union, such as Poland, are likely to have resembling understanding of the school practices, teaching and learning processes. Therefore, families with origins in Russia may culturally represent a big part of ethnically diverse Swedish society. Another reason for selection of families from Russia is the absence of any similar researcher regarding this group of immigrants.

Both of those countries – Sweden and Russia – have been taking the unique path of developing public school system and school culture. Various historical and cultural factors determine and influence this process. Modern Swedish School was greatly influenced by the Social Democratic Party, at the same time the Russian School has developed in the context of the communistic regime and further exemption from it. Besides obvious differences in the structure and school practices, such issues as teaching style, teacher's status in the society, understanding of child-rearing, importance of parents' involvement, perspectives on pupil's achievement and others significantly vary among these cultures.

1.1 Aim of the study and research questions

The main aim of this study is to investigate how the cultural background of parents with origins in Russia can influence their communication with teachers in the Swedish elementary school and preschool class. In order to achieve the main aim of this research the following questions will be studied: (1) How do Swedish teachers and immigrant parents communicate with each other? (2) What are parents' perspectives on the schooling process,

childrearing, teaching and learning practices? (3) What are teacher's perspectives on the schooling process, childrearing, teaching and learning practices? Are there any differences or similarities in the teacher's' and parent's perspectives? In general, this research is an attempt to improve teacher-parent communication and mutual understanding of both parties through exploring possible differences and similarities.

1.2 Significance of the study

As it has already been discussed above, growing multiculturalism in Sweden creates a variety of difficulties. Public school is one of the most affected areas, and at the same time, it is a crucial element in the process of managing growing heterogeneity of the society. The most obvious contribution of the research is presented in the school context. Overall, this study will help to draw a picture on the current situation in a multicultural school from an intercultural communication perspective. However, the most important contribution refers to improving the communication between teachers and parents. This research may help in developing professional tools and tactics that can be used by teachers in the process of building relationships with immigrant parents in general, but especially with parents from Russia and other countries that is culturally close to Russia. Thus, the study contributes to creating a more suitable environment for children's well-being, where they can successfully learn and develop. This study reveals parent's perspectives, values, beliefs and expectations. Therefore, the finding of this research could be used by teachers for improving intercultural competence and raising the awareness about possible "cultural mismatch". This study might be a useful tool, applicable for immigrants from other post-USSR countries such as Republic of Belarus, Ukraine and Republic of Kazakhstan.

The significance of this study can be viewed with interest from the societal perspective as it might help decreasing the cultural segregation. Studies which aims to give constructive answers to provide an adequate help and support to immigrant families in the process of integration into the new environment and culture, is maybe more relevant than ever.

Besides all, the investigation of the presented phenomena has a value from the scientific perspective as a cross-cultural and intercultural study. It provides deeper understanding of culturally imprinted images of school, teachers, parenting and child-upbringing. Furthermore, this study is a good ground for further development within the topic. It can be used as the methodological foundation and be applied in a study of parent-teacher communication in relation to any other immigrant groups and in the context of other countries.

1.3 Delimitations

As this study is focused on the influence of the cultural background on communication between parents and teachers, as well as on their perception of various school practices, there is a risk of misjudgment or false conclusions. Any research in the field of communication faces a danger of "misleading and biased generalizations" as a result of ignoring differences that exist "between activities, groups and individuals on a non-national

level" (Alwood, 1985, p. 2). Values, believes or communication patterns of an individual can be a result of many factors such as education, occupation, social status, gender, age and etc. Cultural influence is often more significant when a person strongly identifies himself with particular ethnic group (Alwood, 1985, p. 3). A researcher has to be aware of this danger and analyze the data considering possibilities of non-ethnic influences on communication between parents and teachers. Although the author of this research reflects on the gained data and mentions other influential factors but cultural background, such as education, occupation, age and duration of expatriation, the study is limited with intercultural communication perspectives and cross-cultural analysis.

This study is focused only on the first-generation immigrants born outside of Sweden as they are expected to be slower in the process of acculturation and to have a bigger risk of misunderstanding compared to second-generation immigrants. An important factor for selection of the foreign-born participants is their experience of attending compulsory school in Russia. The parents who moved to Sweden at early age and attended school in Sweden are not expected to experience lack of understanding due to different cultural backgrounds and cultural mismatch, when they interact with teachers.

Another limitation of the study is related to the participants' gender. The majority of participants, both teachers and parents, are female. Therefore, a cross-gender comparison is impossible. An overwhelming number of the interviewed teachers are women, as female teachers are generally prevalent in a primary school. The fact that the immigrant parents who participated in the study are mostly presented by mothers have various reasons. First of all, Russian culture tends to lean toward a traditional concept of family, where women embrace a role of the main child carer (Ashwin, 2000). Secondly, women appeared to be more available for participation in the research, probably due to maternity leave or higher level of social interaction and involvement in the existing communities for parents and immigrants that has been used for participants' recruitment.

This research is focused on investigating the stated issues in the context of elementary school (corresponding to *Lågstadium* in old Swedish schooling system) and preschool class, which is preparation classes before compulsory school). Thus, it does not explore the higher levels of education, as older pupils are more independent and parental involvement is lower. The most frequent interaction of the parents and teachers usually occur in preschool class and lower grades of compulsory school.

2 BACKGROUND

This chapter gives a brief overview on the dynamics of the Russian migration flow in Sweden, as well as general description of the Russian segment in Swedish society. It is followed by an overview of the schooling systems in sample countries. This part mainly focuses on the structures and policies of the compulsory education in Sweden, Russia and USSR. The chapter ends with description of the teachers' education in Sweden and general evaluation of the teachers' training in intercultural pedagogy.

2.1 Russian migration to Sweden: an overview

During the USSR period when the Iron Curtain was up, the number of immigrants from Soviet and Russia was almost non existing. After the collapse of the USSR, many opportunities were opened for Soviet immigrants: possibilities for joining Swedish labor market, acceptance of marriage migrants, and openness of universities for Soviet students (Olofsson & Malmberg, 2011, p. 94). Nevertheless, Russian migration flow in Sweden stayed relatively small for some period. Based on the data from Statistics Sweden, this situation has been rapidly changing: in the last decade the number of people with Russian origins has doubled and grew from 10 133 to more than 19000. As the number of Russian immigrants tends to grow each year, it can be suggested that Russian migration flow will have even bigger effect on the demographic image of Sweden coming years.

At present time, Russian citizens can legally move to Sweden on the grounds of work, studies, family ties, humanitarian grounds and the need for protection (Olofsson & Malmberg, 2011, p. 102). J. Olofsson and G. Malberg (2011, p. 102), who conducted a valuable study dedicated to the dynamics of Russian immigration to Sweden, found out that one of the most frequent reasons for migration among Russian population, as researchers point out, is family reunion. Besides the cases when Russians move to their relatives with Russians origins who already in Sweden, the migration on the ground of marriage with Swedish citizen is very common. The marriage or partnership between Russian women and Swedish men is a frequent phenomenon. It can be seen in noticeable prevalence of the Russian females over males residing in Sweden: Statistics Sweden shows that in 2014 there was 6455 men and 12 573 women. Most of the people who move from Russian Federation are under the age of 30 and have high education level – university and higher; after 1990s more of young people move as students and get enrolled in Swedish universities (Olofsson & Malmberg, 2011). Despite being well-educated, Russian immigrants have, generally, harder time in succession on labor market compared to native Swedish population.

Russians get actively involved in activities connecting them with their cultural heritage. There is Russian Orthodox churches in Sweden, a few Russian schools, a number of organizations setting meetings and activities for Russian speaking people, active Facebook groups, Russian radio and much more.

2.2 An overview of schooling systems in Sweden and Russia

The institution of the school does always have significant influence on the development of the individual. The way we perceive world around us and understand various social practices is largely depended on the experience we gain attending compulsory school. Thus, individuals expectations regarding interaction with school representatives, teacher's role and responsibilities, learning and teaching methods, level of parental involvement in the education process and many other aspects connected with school context can be greatly influenced by one's knowledge of school practices that he or she has gained attending school in particular country.

2.2.1   Schooling in Sweden

Compulsory school in Sweden usually starts at age of seven; however, most of the children are enrolled in Early Childhood Education that is mostly presented by preschool and preschool class. Majority leaves preschool care at age of six and get involved in preschool class, although it is not mandatory. The Swedish national Agency for Education (2011) – Skolverket – describes functions of the preschool class bridging between kindergarten and compulsory school and, thus, the main goal of the preschool class is to prepare children for the next schooling level. The pedagogical methods applied in the preschool class are usually based on the creating work and learning through games approach. Generally, it can be viewed as combination of preschool and primary school education. Every child who reached the age of six has to be provided by the municipalities with a place in the preschool class. The next level in Swedish Education System is primary compulsory school (9 grades), which most of the children start at age of seven, it is also possible at age of six or eight. Another existing types of compulsory schools are the compulsory school for learning disabilities (9 grades), Sami school (6 grades, after 6th grade pupils have to attend common primary school) and the special school (10 grades) (Skolverket, 2011). Modern Swedish compulsory school unites elementary and lower secondary levels of school education in one structure. Primary schools in Sweden are always publicly funded; however, there are grant-aided independent schools that are attended by 14% of pupils (Eurydice, 2015). Usually, selection of the school by parents and pupils is based on its proximity to their home; nevertheless, they are free to choose any other school. Each school can have its own orientation like Montessori, sport, English language etc. (Skolverket, 2011).

The size if school often depends on the area it is located in. According the information provided by European Encyclopedia on National Education Systems (Eurydice, 2013) one third of municipal schools and the half of independent schools have less than 100 pupils each. Sometimes children of different ages are grouped together in these schools with the purpose of giving possibility to keep the small local school open (Eurydice, 2013). Commonly, however, children are grouped by age, even though mixed-age activities or projects are also possible.

The new grading system in the primary Swedish schools was introduced in July 2011. New six grades – from highest A to lowest F – has replaced four old grades with six new, therefore the number of levels in scale system has been increased (Skolverket, 2013). Before 2012 implementation of the grades started on 8th year of schooling, now grades appear as early as on 6th year. Pupils' progress, which means both learning and social development,

is periodically discussed with both the pupil and pupil's parents or curator. These kind of meetings between school representatives and families is called development dialogue (Skolverket, 2013). One of the functions of the development dialogue is outlining and fixing in the document individual development plan for the pupil.

The team of pedagogues who work with children in lower grades of compulsory school and preschool class usually includes preschool teachers, school teachers and free-time pedagogues. Although school teacher does not stay with pupils all day, preschool and free-time teachers often work throughout all school day (Johansson & Moss, 2012, p. 30). Free-time pedagogues can be in charged for such activities as drama club, artwork, sport etc.; additionally, they may help main teachers during the class.

2.2.2   Schooling in Russian Federation

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, schooling system in Russia has experienced various changes, while it still is greatly influenced by the country's communist past. As reported in UNESCO report ("World Data on Education", 2010/11, p. 9) since the beginning of 1990s, a majority of the changes in the schooling system has been made in order to strengthen democracy, consolidate national identity and move toward a market economy. Compulsory school in modern Russia consists of primary education (elementary school), basic secondary and complete secondary education. Pupils are always grouped by age and in some cases both by age and by gender. A majority of the children is enrolled in primary school at the age of six or seven, and stay there for three years (before 2004 it was three to four years). Basic secondary school or lower secondary covers 5 years of schooling while the complete secondary school – 2 years. A majority of the schools are general education schools and only 2% – 3 % is gymnasiums and lyceums, which have specific orientation, for example, focus of technical or humanities subjects ("World Data on Education", 2010/11, p. 14). However, some general schools offer classes with intensive learning within certain fields. The management of the all schools, public and private, is under responsibility of the state.

Generally, grading system in the Russian school remains the same since the Soviet schooling system. Teachers use four-grade system for evaluating pupils' learning outcomes, where the highest grade is 5 and the lowest is 2. Grading system is usually applied on early stages of the schooling. First year in school has to be free of any evaluation except descriptive (act "About organization of the studying process in the first grade of four-year elementary school" from 5th of September № 2021/11-13), but on the level of the 2nd grade grading system can be fully used. In the end of academic term, pupils usually have to complete various tests and evaluating assignments. When graduating pupils have to participate in Unified State Examination.

2.3   USSR heritage

Since the collapse of the USSR, Russia has gone long way. Schooling system in Russia were developed under the communist regime and was greatly influenced by the then

prevailing ideological doctrine. Therefore, it is important to understand the heritage of the Soviet regime in order to be able to comprehend the school system in Russia.

Compulsory school in USSR consisted of 8 years and later 10 years of schooling (in some regions 11), where first 4 or 3 years was an elementary school and the rest – secondary. Grade system in the USSR was identical to the current one in Russia – from the highest grade 5 to the lowest 2, also pupils could get a mark about their behavior. The positions of the teachers in their relationships with pupils and parents was always a position of the authority. Traditionally, school teachers were perceived as carrier of the important mission in the society and role models that deserve public respect (Kerr, 1991, p. 333). While teachers were influential figures in the society, they faced many limitations in the contents they could teach and methods they could use. Strict following of the standard approved material was an essential part of the teaching process, which is connected with importance of the ideological background and socialist ethics in the Soviet school. Therefore, the teacher had to "transmit standardized materials to the students" that were supposed to be memorized by pupils (Curtis, 1996, para. 56). These methods minimized creative and individualized approach to studying process for both teachers and pupils. Unification was also done through obligatory standard school uniform. The first steps in the democratization of the soviet school were made through the reforms in 1980s, when the demand for changes and modernizations within the education system was obvious (Kerr, 1991, p. 333).

An important part of the studying process in the Soviet schools was education and child rearing through both mental and physical work. The significance of a healthy physical work among youth is explained and highlighted in the law *About the strengthening of the connection between school and life and of the further development if the public education in the USSR* from 1958 ("Library of USSR regulations"). In the modern Russian school it is still common to organize such activities as *subbotniki,* where pupils and teachers gather for cleaning school territory or public places such as parks and squares.

2.4   Teacher education and intercultural training in Sweden

Overviewing the history of teacher education in Sweden, researchers highlight that before 1980s there were two traditions: the elementary teacher education seminaries and grammar school teacher education (Beach, Bagley, Eriksson & Player-Koro, 2014, p. 161). Elementary teachers were recruited from the lower class and were less prestigious compared to grammar school teachers, who taught older middle or upper-middle class children. In 1984 a new reform were launched with the purpose to eliminate separation between teachers and differences in their professional status, nevertheless, before the reform had shown its full impact a new bill was accepted in 2007, stopping the process of unification teacher education. (Beach, Bagley, Eriksson & Player-Koro, 2014). Currently, teacher education is organized within higher educational institution and can be obtained by receiving following degrees: a degree in pre-school education (210 hec), a degree in primary school education (usually 240 hec), a degree in subject education (from 270 to 330 hec) and a degree in vocational education (90 hec) (Eurydice, 2012).

Once cultural diversity in Swedish society has started to grow rapidly, many researchers paid attention to the crucial need for including intercultural training to the teacher education programs and improvement of teachers' intercultural competence (Rubinstein Reich & Tallberg Broman, 2000; Goldstein-Kyaga, 1999; Norberg, 2000). This problem was generally admitted and, thus, the new reform regarding teacher education appeared in 2001. This reform, recognizing increased multiculturalism and diversity of Swedish society, stated the need of "understanding and respect for different cultural identities", therefore, future teacher has to be prepared and qualified to work in multicultural environment (Carlson, Rabo & Gök, 2007, p. 39). Nowadays, higher institutions provide many different courses within teacher education and intercultural pedagogy is usually accessible for future teachers. Intercultural pedagogy generally is based on an "understanding and appreciation of difference" and teaches future educators respect pupil's unique characteristic such as cultural background, gender, personality etc. (Carlson, Rabo & Gök, 2007, p. 44). Although intercultural competence of teachers was improved, some of the researchers still express critics toward new ways of training teachers for diverse school context. Carlson, Rabo and Gök (2007) presented analysis of the program in teacher training college with "intercultural" profile and focus on diversity. Firstly, as claimed scholars, there was no focus on "similarities" and no analyses of "how 'same' and 'different' mutually constitute each other"; all attention was given to the simple talk about the need to respect differences (Carlson, Rabo & Gök, 2007, p. 46). Secondly, in practice educators had no consensus on understanding of interculturalism and diversity. In general, the main critics falls on the tendency to see and highlight differences instead of similarities in the diverse group of people. Another scholar, Maurice Craft, notices that one of the problems of the teacher education development is a slow progress in initiating compulsory courses within teacher training institution that prepare teachers to work in culturally diverse environment (2012, p. 127). Nevertheless, Sweden has already overcome many difficulties and it is more reasonable to talk about improvement of the teachers' competence rather than teacher's preparation for working in multicultural schools (Craft, 2012, p. 127).

3   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents a reviewed literature and theoretical background of the study. In the beginning, we discussed the notion of the culture and different approaches toward the culture, the cultural dimension as theoretical framework are explained. After we reviewed such concepts as cultural identity and intercultural communication. The following part of this chapter is focused on the concept of the intercultural interaction in the school context, which included such topics as multicultural education and "cultural mismatch in the school". Next part is dedicated to overview of several studies dedicated to communication between teacher and parents and importance of the parental involvement. The chapter ends with presentation of the analytical framework that was designed for this study basing on the reviewed theoretical ground.

3.1   Culture

Many scholars and researchers has been working on the concept of culture, and many attempt to define and analyze it have been made. One of the classical and fundamental works "Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions" written by Kroeber and Kluckholm (1952) gives an overview of dozens definitions of culture. There is still, however, no unified way of understanding the phenomenon. In general, there are two distinguishing approaches toward culture - static or essentialist and dynamic approaches (Fang, 2006).

3.1.1   *G. Hofstede and cultural taxonomies*

G. Hofstede is one of the most influential scholars in the field of culture and intercultural communication. His definition of culture is "psychological and mental programing of mind" distinguishing among different groups of people (1984). G. Hofstede, along with many other researchers, represent an essentialist or static approach to culture which have been the dominant approach in the cross-cultural and intercultural studies for a long time (Hofstede, 1984, 2001; House et al., 2004; Trompenaars, 1994). Static approach is generally characterized with viewing culture as stable and unchangeable over time, focusing on differences between national cultures (Fang, 2006). One of the core theories of the essentialists is cultural taxonomies and classification of the existing national cultures. G. Hofstede's (1986; 2001; 2010) classification proposes four main dimensions of analysis national cultures:

- Individualism versus Collectivism – this dimension expresses the relationships between the individual and the group. Individualist cultures tend to look after his or her own interests and the interests of his/her closest family members. Collectivist cultures, on contrary, believes that every individual belong to tight "in-groups", that protect the interests of the members. Members of "in-group" are expected to be always loyal to the group. In general, collectivism and individualism of the culture is determined by the extent to which people view themselves as a part of collective.

- Power Distance – the extent to which less powerful members of society accept and expect inequality in power. The certain degree of inequality exists in any culture but a core issue here is the degree of tolerance regarding unequal power distribution. The societies with high power distance are characterized with large degree of general acceptance of hierarchical order, where every individual has a place. Desire to stabilize the distribution of power and demand for justification of inequalities of power is common features of the society with low power distance.

- Uncertainty avoidance – ways of dealing with uncertainty, the extent to which people feel nervous in unclear and unpredictable situations, as well as, their propensity for avoiding this situation by following strict regulations and rules. Cultures with strong uncertainty avoidance tend to maintain fixed codes of believes and to be more intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas. Weak uncertainty avoidance cultures are more accepting toward risk-taking, comparably tolerant and relaxed.

- Masculinity versus Femininity – the extent to which achievement, assertiveness, material success is appreciated and respected. If masculine society in general is more competitive and striving for achievements, feminine society appreciates cooperation, interpersonal relationships, a concern for a weak and quality of life.

Later three more dimensions have been developed: long-time orientation versus short-time orientation, indulgence versus restraint, monumentalism versus self-effacement (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Those dimensions are not as developed and known as first four fundamental categories.

3.1.2 Critique toward essentialist notion of culture

Despite of the significant contribution of Hofstede's research and other essentialists' to the development of cultural analysis, cross-cultural comparison and intercultural communication their approach has been widely criticized last decade. In T. Fang's work *From "Onion" to "Ocean"* (2006, p. 72), the author notice that cultural taxonomies can be useful in cross-cultural comparison and building very general understanding of characteristic of particular cultural nation, highlighting a number of weak points in the static approach that he describe as the bipolar paradigm when analyzing national cultures. Therefore, he claims that bipolar paradigm has quite a few of disadvantages (Fang, 2006):

- Complexity of the variable phenomenon of culture is largely simplified;
- The unit for analysis is artificially created and isolated from each other nation-states;
- The focus is only on the differences between cultures;
- "Values determine behavior, not vice versa";
- National cultures along with their values stay stable and hardly change over time.

Generally, placing culture to particular categories excluded possibility of existing these societies that can fit both opposed categories, although cultures often have very paradoxical character (Fang, 2006, p. 74). Furthermore, this view of national cultures leads to assumption that once two or more cultures meet they will collide and cross-cultural conflicts

are hardly avoidable. Some researchers put especial focus on the danger of the belief about unchangeable nature of the culture.

This essentialist notion of the culture might foster racism and intergroup discrimination through rationalization of social hierarchy (Vedder, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Nickmans, 2006, p. 158). On the individual level the static and essentialist approach make it difficult to view a person in a dynamic paradigm, for example, as a carrier of more than one cultural identity or as going through process of actualization.

At present time, more researchers and scholars carry on a dynamic view on the cultures, which characterized with attention to "dialectical and paradoxical nature of culture" (Fang, 2006, p. 73). Some of these researchers are J. Allwood (1985), T. Fang (2006), S. Sackmann and M. Phillips (2004), P. Vedder et al (2006), M. Verkuyten (2005) and others. In general, they investigate cultural groupings outside of national boundaries, multiple cultural identity, multiple cultures perspective, experience of intercultural interaction etc. T. Fang (2006) suggests that the best way to view culture in modern globalized world is to use the metaphor of the ocean. Thus, phenomenon of culture can be viewed as an ocean with no boundaries, where "various waters are both separate and shared, both different and similar, and both independent and dependent" (T. Fang, 2006, p. 88).

3.1.3 Allwood's theoretical framework

The author of this work understands and uses the term "culture" as it has been suggested by J. Allwood (1985, p. 1), who states that **culture** refers to all characteristics common to a particular group of people that are learned and not given by nature. This definition represents relatively flexible approach toward culture. Firstly, J. Allwood (1985) highlights the groups of people who possess particular set of characteristics do not have to be national states. These group might exists within or beyond national borders, which gives an opportunity to analyze culture of immigrant groups considering various paradoxical processes that take place when a person changes his cultural environment. Secondly, these characteristics is learned and not programmed, therefore, people have capability to change their culture throughout lifetime. The analysis of the characteristics representing culture of particular group can be analyzed through four primary cultural dimensions (Allwood, 1985, p. 1):

- Patterns of thought – common ways of thinking, where thinking includes factual beliefs, values, norms, and emotional attitudes.

- Patterns of behavior – common ways of behaving, from ways of speaking to ways of conducting commerce and industry, where the behavior can be intentional/unintentional, aware/unaware or individual/interactive.

- Patterns of artefacts – common ways of manufacturing and using material things, from pens to houses.

- Imprints in nature – the long lasting imprints left by a group in the natural surroundings, where such imprints include agriculture, trash, roads or intact/ruined human habitations.

In this research only two dimensions are going to be used: patterns of thoughts and patterns of behavior. Every individual possess certain ways of thinking and behaving, therefore those two dimensions are always involved in human activities, unlike third and fourth dimensions (Allwood, 1985).

3.2 Cultural identity

Every person is a carrier of various identities, which constantly overlap each other. Our identities are built up on the facts and feelings of belonging to a particular social group and depend on our identification with our age, sex, education, occupation, religion, ethnicity, family status etc. Some of the social identities are more dominant compared to others. The identity, largely determines human attitudes, norms, values and behavioral patterns in various activities (Allwood, 1985, p. 13). Often the feeling of belonging to a particular group can be triggered by certain circumstances, where some of the personal characteristics are more influential than others. In some cases people tend to identify themselves strongly with characteristics that are considered important for their national or ethnic groups. Therefore, in this situations ethnic membership is crucial (Allwood, 1985, p.3). Additionally, one can have a strong multiple or hybrid cultural identity constructed on the sense of belonging to more than one ethnic groups, which is especially common among immigrants (Vedder, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Nickmans, 2006, p. 158). Researchers claim that cultural identities of immigrant are "formed and transformed in interaction with the majority population" (Vedder, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Nickmans, 2006, p. 158). Thus, cultural identity of an individual as well as culture of an entire group of people can change and shift.

3.3 Intercultural communication

There are various definitions of the term "intercultural communication", which is mainly explained with different reading of both notions of "culture" and "communication". In this research **intercultural communication** is viewed as the sharing of information on different levels of awareness and control between people with different cultural background, where different cultural backgrounds include both national cultural differences and differences, which are connected with participation in the different activities that exist within a national unit (Allwood, 1985, p. 3). Researcher highlights that generalization and stereotyping about cultural differences in communication patterns can be dangerous and misleading as people belong to one ethnic group do not necessarily have exactly same communication and behavior patterns. Thus, such influential factors as individuals who participant in the communication and activity of which the communication is a part should be always taken into consideration (Allwood, 1985, p. 13). The influence of individuals is connected to their various characteristics such age, sex, family status, personal preferences and etc. Especially important is identity, which determines many values and beliefs of the person.

In regard of activity, the attention should be given to such factors as purpose of the activity, roles, used artefacts and physical circumstances.

One of the main issues of intercultural communication is a potential problem with understanding between people with different cultural background, which can lead not only to difficulties in cooperation and solving everyday tasks but serious conflicts. Therefore, recognition of potential risks and types of problems is crucial for solving as well as preventing communication failure and conflicts. Allwood (1985; 1984) points out that the reason of the communicative failure during intercultural interaction is often lack of common pre-understanding that usually share people with the same cultural background. Pre-understanding usually refers to knowledge in following areas: realia (geography, history, religion, political system, food, clothes, housing traditions etc.), esthetic culture (art, music and fiction), expert knowledge in special subject areas, attitudes and values that are given by cultural environment (Allwood, 1985, p. 15). If there is no shared knowledge between participants of the communication, such problems as lack of understanding or misunderstanding might appear. Lack of understanding appear when recipient cannot connect incoming information with the information stored in his memory (Allwood, 1984, p. 2). In other words, when one person cannot interpret words and actions of another person. In the case of misunderstanding recipient makes an attempt to interpret the incoming information but this interpretation is inadequate or incorrect (Allwood, 1984; 1985).

In general, problems of intercultural communication can be avoided with high level of awareness about differences between cultures and communication patterns and flexible attitude toward these differences (Allwood, 1985, p. 23). Thus, a participant of intercultural communication should have adequate level of intercultural competence, which means knowledge about differences and similarities among cultures, awareness of possible risks, and flexibility toward different cultures, good communication skills and others.

3.4 Multiculturalism and education

In the globalized world one of the recognizable characteristic of education is multiculturalism. School becomes a meeting point of thousands pupils with various cultural background. In general sense, multiculturalism refers to cultural pluralism. It is generally accepted that in the situation of growing cultural heterogeneity of the society, school becomes has an important role of the bridge between the cultures of the immigrant families and the rest of the society with respect to the diversity (Reich & Broman, 2000; Wright & Stegelin, 2003). Therefore, the notion of the multiculturalism in relation to the education has special significance not only for the child's development but also for the wellbeing of the society in total. As an approach, multiculturalism deals with issues of ethnic and cultural diversity in the society, based on existing realities.

One of the common assumptions within multiculturalism is positive effect of better recognition and greater appreciation of diversity, nursing of the connections with particular ethnic and cultural groups in the process of building solid society from different ethnic groups. However, this assumption is widely questioned now. Many researchers claim that too much focus on cultural backgrounds, cultivation of the migrant's customs and tight

bounding with ethnic heritage may lead to increased prejudice and racism within society, as well, to slowing down of the process of immigrant acculturation and integration (Reitz, Breton, Dion & Dion, 2009). Malik (2010, p. 450) notes that it is important to distinguish "hard" version of multiculturalism, which refers to "non-negotiable imposition of minority 'difference' upon majorities" and sacrificing of the democratic values for the sake of the culture, and "progressive" type of multiculturalism. One of the main features of the "progressive" multiculturalism is respect for and concern about all citizens, both majorities and minorities: its goal is to create a comfortable and non-discrimination environment for all members of the society. This means that some public accommodation of migrants' groups may be required in certain situations.

This debate about multiculturalism influences many institutionalized structures within society and one of the most affected areas is education system. There are various approaches to multicultural education, which are usually synchronic with general understanding of the multiculturalism by the researcher. Researchers within the field of multicultural education focus on various issues: adding new material and changing existing curricula, improving teaching styles and pedagogical methods with consideration of culturally diverse environment, rethinking entire education system from the perspective of the multicultural society (Cumming-McCann, 2003, p.9). Nevertheless, all studies of the multicultural education are based on the belief that all people, "regardless of their gender, social class, and their ethnic, racial, and cultural characteristics, should have an equal opportunity to learn in school" (Banks & Banks 2006, p. 3).

Vedder et al (2006, p. 160) define the term multicultural education as referring to the variety of ways in which schools and the school system deal or may deal with cultural diversity. The main goals and challenges of multicultural education connect with satisfying educational needs and interests of immigrant students on the same level with non-immigrant students, so everyone could have equal chances for social and economic mobility (Vedder, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Nickmans, 2006, p. 160). Second challenge for multicultural schools is related to the fact that cultural diversity is not always desired situation for everyone. Therefore, educators have to reduce tensions in intercultural interactions successfully. A shared goal for schools should be attainment and enhancing successful and healthy intercultural relationships.

A great number of researchers, such as J. Banks, C. Sleeter, C. Grant, S. Nieto and others, made attempts to create models of multicultural education answering needs of the modern globalized world. Big part of their works focuses on the improving schooling system and school environment in term of inclusion and reduction of prejudice. For example, S. Neito (2004, p. 346) connects multicultural education with education reforms that "challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society" and accepts diversity among students and teachers. This approach requires practical implementation of the theory: implementation of the developed strategies and pedagogical approach by educators and the state, new multicultural curriculum and material, school culture and environment responding to ideas of multicultural education and etc. Currently the gap between the theory and its implementation is one of main challenge of the multicultural education in many countries (Johnson, 2008, p. 9). The practical implementation usually refers to culturally responsive pedagogy or teaching.

Despite its popularity, the existing models of multicultural educations as well as traditional beliefs of multiculturalists are criticized by many contemporary researchers. Many critics argue that multicultural curriculum suggests psychological solutions to political problems – school cannot significantly affect social and economic futures of the poor pupils (Johnson, 2008, p. 12). Furthermore, the scholars criticize essentialist approach toward culture among many multiculturalists. Vedder et al (2006, p. 161) claim that when cultural diversity is emphasized and cultivated, even with respect to it, essentialist notion of the culture occurs in the multicultural education. Beliefs that one has particular set of the characteristics programmed by his culture and cannot be changed creates a situation of the great risk of growing prejudice and racism. Additionally, many multiculturalists do not consider a multiple cultural identity. In the context of multicultural education, it is important to understand that a students can have feeling of belonging to more than one ethnic group. In fact, these individuals have lower level of stress and anxiety while going through the process of integration into the dominant culture (Vedder, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Nickmans, 2006, p. 160). Therefore, multiculturalism, adapting this approach, can better help minority youth in adapting to the new environment.

3.5   Cultural mismatch in school

Difference in cultural backgrounds of the teachers, children and their parents in the school context can lead to the situation of misunderstanding and lack of understanding. The situation when can be observed "differences between the beliefs of the child's home culture and those of the child's school culture" can be referred as cultural incongruence, cultural discontinuity or cultural mismatch (Rogers-Sirin, Ryce & Sirin, 2014, p. 16). Cultural mismatch can be defined as state of "difficulties that arise when, significant differences exist between a student's home culture and school culture, leading to situations where teachers can easily misread students' aptitudes, intents, or abilities as a result of the difference in styles of language use and interactional patterns" (Delpit 2006 cited by Rogers-Sirin, Ryce & Sirin, 2014, p. 16). Many researchers believe that parent's values and attitudes toward education and school is till certain extent constructed by the common perception of the school and orientations toward education in the country of parents' origins, which can lead to the conflict between parents' and teachers' perspectives

There are number of possible premises for the occurrence of the cultural mismatch. One of the biggest challenges of teaching in the culturally diverse environment is lack of the sufficient knowledge among educators (Vedder, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Nickmans, 2006, p. 163). Besides knowledge and information, the might be absence of the motivation that can help to overcomes the challenges. From another side, students or parents may lack basic knowledge about school's functioning and its policies. Educators working in the culturally diverse environment often struggle with successful implementation of the pedagogical approaches and methods common in the country where the schooling process takes place. The same methods and tactics can work perfectly with children whose families are from this country originally, but fail for immigrant children.

G. Hofstede (1986) proposes four fundamental areas connected with teaching and learning practices where problems of mismatch between teachers and students with different cultural background might appear:

- Differences in the social positions of teachers and students in the two societies;
- Differences in the relevance of the curriculum (training content) for the two societies;
- Differences in profiles of cognitive abilities between the populations from which teacher and student are drawn;
- Differences in expected patterns of teacher/student and student/student interaction.

Although G. Hofstede analyzed only teacher - student interaction, the same assumptions can be applied to interaction between teachers and student's parents. Furthermore, communication between educators and families can be greatly influenced by differences in the child-rearing practices and general values and beliefs about the world.

One of the most striking differences are often connected with perspectives on the child rearing, which influences teacher-parents interaction. Eberly et al (2007) through empirical studies concluded that teachers have the biggest problems with accepting immigrants' practices of child upbringing. In this situation teachers tend to accuse parents in bad parenting and judge for their actions. For example, such disagreements can be related to issues of discipline (parents "too harsh"), valuing education (Eberly, Joshi & Konzal, 2007, p. 22), parental involvement and others. Teachers, especially those who have low intercultural competence and limited experience of working with diverse classes, may think of the immigrant parents in terms of "fixing" their values and beliefs (Eberly, Joshi & Konzal, 2007, p. 23). In context of the Swedish school, some empirical studies showed that teachers are usually relatively open towards cultures and customs towards non Swedish parents. Nevertheless, there is a tendency among some immigrant parents to demand from teacher to be more authoritarian (Norberg, 2000, p. 515). Parents who come from countries with authoritarian education can "get the impression that there are no rules or discipline in the classroom, relating visibly to the teacher's authority (Norberg, 2000, p. 515). In this situation or similar, the judgmental attitudes and accusation can come from the parents' side toward pedagogues.

Some researchers explain teaching and learning across cultures basing on the existing cultural taxonomies (Hofstede, 1986; Shor, 2007). G. Hofstede (1986) suggested different tendencies in the context of the education from the perspective of his four cultural dimensions: collectivist versus individualist, power distance, masculinity versus femininity and uncertainty avoidance. The school practices, teaching style, beliefs about teaching and learning processes and communication patterns between teachers and students depend on if the society characterized with low or high power distance, if it collectivistic or individualistic culture and so on. For example, in the cultures with high power distance teachers are generally accepted as authorities and called by titles, when in the county with low power distance teachers are treated as equal outside of the class and entire education process is fully centered on the students. Shor (2007) points out that in individualistic societies pupils are taught to do personal choice and be more independent, when in

collectivistic cultures pupils are expected to follow prescribed roles and obligations. In the masculine cultures achievement and grades of the students are very important and, thus, there is a high level of competition among students; in the feminine society, on contrary, students are expected to be more modest and failure in the performance is relatively small issues (Hofstede, 1986). When it comes to cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, teachers are supposed to be very direct and exact in his/her instructions and has no right to express lack of knowledge. In the weak universality avoidance, culture teachers more tend to give broad assignment and can say "*I don't know*". Basing on those perspectives, once the family that possesses characteristics of particular culture, for example, collectivistic and masculine get involved into schooling process in the country, which has individualistic and feminine society, the difficulties and conflict is almost unavoidable.

Cultural mismatch between teachers and families have clear negative effects on the wellbeing of children. Generally, when researchers talk about negative outcomes of the cultural mismatch they refer to acculturative stress. Primarily it damages communication between educators and families, which is a crucial issue in the educational process (we talk below about importance of the communication between teachers and parents). Interaction of the family with school representatives can lead to the great stress for both parties (Rogers-Sirin, Ryce & Sirin, 2014, p. 15). Often cultural mismatch results in poorer performance of the immigrant children in academic tasks and displayed behavioral problems in the class (Vedder, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Nickmans, 2006, p. 163). Difficulties in school context may influence the process of child's adaptation in the new environment in general. Additionally, the conflicts and failures in the school contexts affect not only family and children, but also facilitates acculturative stress among teachers that damages both personal and professional well-being of the pedagogues. This kind of stress among teachers is called "diversity-related burnout" (Horenczyk & Tatar, 2002).

3.6   Communication between parents and teachers

U. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests viewing children's development through ecological framework, where family and schools are viewed as parts of the microsystems, there relationship between the family and school – parts of the mesosystems and cultural notion – macrosystem. As child grow up under influence of the overlapping systems, the strong meso link between systems is has to be established and maintained. Basing on this theory communication between school and parents as well as parental involvement are crucial element in the process of the child's development. Researchers often use this theoretical framework when studying connections between families and schools (Eberly, Joshi & Konzal, 2007).

Parental school involvement is usually understood as participation of the parents in the entire educational process as well as "used to describe parental expectations regarding academic achievement, and parental behavior at home and in school aimed at improving children's educational performance (Yakhnich, 2015, p. 389). Many researchers agreed that parental involvement has positive effect on the performance and behavior of the children: if parents understand the school culture and demands and, thus, can provide support in meeting school's expectations at home, children learn better and more (Henderson & Berla,

1996). J. Epstein (2008) stresses six ways of parental involvement: 1) parenting, which means sustaining a supportive home environment; 2) learning at home and helping children with school-related tasks; 3) communicating with the school; 4) volunteering; 5) decision making and advocating for children; 6) collaborating with the community to strengthen school programs. As it is shown, big part of the parental involvement it is communication and interaction of the parents with school representatives.

The significance of successful communication between parents and teachers has been noticed by many scholars (Dodd & Konzal, 2002; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Eberly, Joshi & Konzal, 2007). In the situation when school is challenged by cultural diversity of the families, it is especially important to build open and trusting relationships with parents in order to avoid possible misunderstanding. Researchers notice that when educators and family are able to communicate openly there is a better chance of "increased social capital, which then leads to common understandings and expectations about the best ways to help children learn" (Eberly, Joshi & Konzal, 2007, p. 8). Only through honest and open communication, parents and teachers can learn each other's values, beliefs and perspectives, which would reduce the risk of the conflicts between those two systems and facilitate creating of a harmonic and comfortable environment for children both at home and school.

The significance of the communication between families and schools is clear and generally agreed on; however, the main challenge is establishing and maintaining necessary relationships between parents and educators. Reaching of this goal might be even more complicated in the culturally diverse environment. Eleberly et al (2007) along with other researchers (e.g., Gonzalez-Mena, 2000) stress that many teachers do not have enough of understanding of the family's cultural background and do not know how to build the bridge between school and families. Firstly, the key to successful communication between families and school representatives is mutual respect, trust and great degree of acceptance. These issues can be solved if teachers "assume their professional responsibility to reach out to parents in thoughtful and respectful ways" (Eberly, Joshi & Konzal, 2007, p. 8). Teachers must listen to parents carefully to be aware of their values and beliefs, expectations, attitudes and possible differences. Generally, teacher's goal is to learn from parents, which require a great degree of flexibility and acceptance. Empirical studies show that some of the teachers understand that it is important to understand and accept parent's beliefs regarding child-rearing practices, nevertheless, they have difficulties to implement this on practice and avoid judging of the parents. Researchers suggest that in these cases teachers might benefit from professional development programs where they would be asked to confront their own cultural biases about "good" child-rearing practices (Eberly, Joshi & Konzal, 2007, p. 20).

3.7   *Analytical conceptual framework*

The analytical framework for this research has been developed and designed basing on the several wide theoretical concepts such as ecological framework of the child development, cultural dimensions, understanding in intercultural communication and boundary objects.

The broad ground of this research is model of human development designed by U. Bronfenbrenner (1979), which has been already mentioned before in this work. Bronfenbrenner's social ecological model suggests that individual's (child's) growth occurs in the context of four systems: micro, meso, exo, and macro. All of the systems directly or indirectly affect child development process, however, the components of the microsystem has the biggest influence as a child has direct contact with them. Family and school are parts of the microsystem and, therefore, have a dominant role in child's development. The interconnections and relationships between family and school are the components of the mesosystem. Macrosystem – the outer layer of the development model – is connected with attitudes and ideologies of cultures and influences all components of the context, including families and schools. Communication between families and schools, as a link between those systems, is crucial for the child's development.

In the current research, the concept of Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework is mainly used for understanding the role of school and family in the process of child development as well connections between child, parents, teachers and cultural contexts. These three figures – a child, a teacher and a parent – are main component of the analysis in the settings of the school, in our case multicultural school (Pic. 1). All of three components are interconnected and continuously interact with each other. Although according Bronfenbrenner the links between systems are bidirectional, which means that child also affects family and school, only one direction of the influence is taken into account – from teachers and parents to child. In the center of the framework is communication (link) between teachers and parents as one of a core factors affecting child.

Cultural context in the framework of our research is presented through the cultural dimensions suggested by J. Allwood (1985). We use only two dimensions - patterns of thoughts and patterns of behavior (see above in the subparagraph *Culture*), that reflect characteristics of the cultural backgrounds of teachers and parents. Both parents and teachers possess certain beliefs and value connected to child-rearing, school practices, teaching and learning processes, which are likely common for the Swedish and Russian cultures in general. Furthermore, they can have certain ways of behaving and communicating which also reflect general behavior practices of their cultures. The communication between participants, as well as parenting and teaching processes, is greatly affected by their ways of thinking and behavior patterns, therefore, by their cultural backgrounds. When analyzing certain culture – particular attitudes, beliefs and values typical for this culture - two approaches can be used: conducting empirical observations, interviews or surveys and investigation of the historical background that could influence formation of the culture. The historical analysis should pay attention to following factors: nature and climate, resources, technology, population density, types of behavior and ideological influences (Allwood, 1985, p. 15). The validity of the research raises if both of the approaches are used. Although this research is based on the empirical studies, when discussing the results historical background should be taken into consideration.

When teachers and parents who belong to different cultural or ethnic groups are engaged into communication, it is arguably an act of intercultural communication. In the context of the current study, the major interest lay in the degree of understanding between the family and the school when it can be challenged by cultural differences. The differences in the

patterns of thoughts and patterns of behavior distinctive for Swedish and Russian cultures may result in misunderstanding and lack of understanding: the bigger difference, the higher risk. Therefore, it is important to understand the level of pre-understanding and which values and beliefs regarding child-rearing and school practices differ among teachers and parents. This will help to outline the areas of possible communicative failure and accordingly to draw the strategy for improvement.

Links between actors in a school context
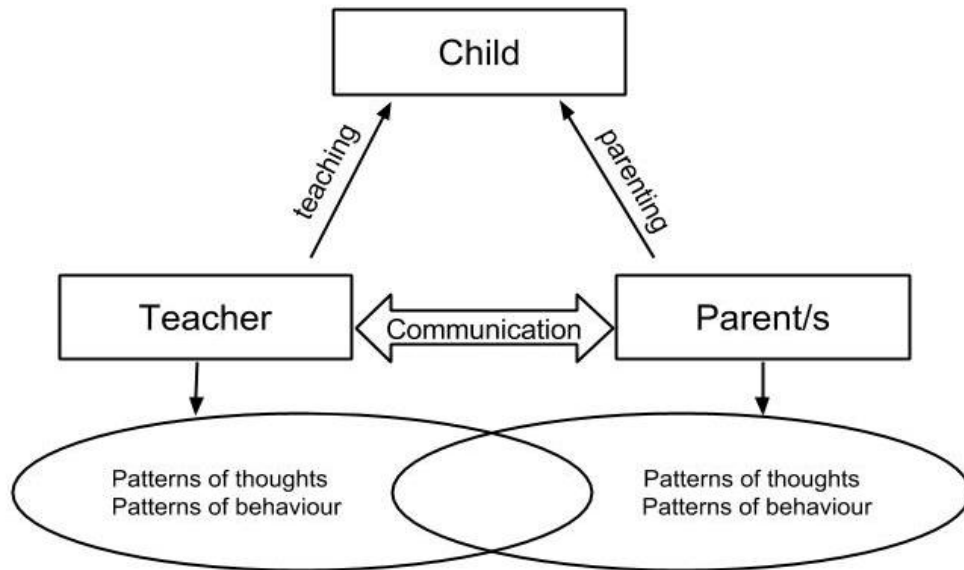
Pic. 1

Another broad concept, that helped to frame this research and influenced the understanding of the teacher-parent cooperation in the school settings, is the theory of **boundary objects.** This theory gives additional perspective on the issues and its philosophical conceptualization. As described by Star and Griesemer (1989) in their article *Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology*, the concept of boundary object can help us to understand how people are enabled to communicate, cooperate and organize themselves while having different worldviews. The boundary objects are 'objects' that exist and are used within different social worlds simultaneously and cross the boundaries between those social worlds. The main criteria used for the *boundary object* are that it should not only be recognized independently of various locations and situations where it occurs but it should also afford changeability in regards to the comprehension of the people whom is using it. The boundary object should also be able to adapt to local circumstances. Childrearing, as an example, can be seen as a boundary object: parents and teachers might have completely different ideas about what to put into it and how to view it. Nevertheless, it acts as a bridge between different worldviews and, thus, focuses on the overlapping where translation between the different worldviews are possible, which creates room for collaboration and communication. The creation of the boundary object, for example – common beliefs about childrearing or school practices should be seen as process in which the different actors, in

this case a child's parents and teacher, together form the meaning of what the concepts means, through their social worlds, enabling them to translate their subjective ideas through communication. Star (2010) points out that boundary object as a concept cannot be applied in all research fields and should not be confused with linguistics or semantics, due to the fact that the essence of the concept is not to understand why the meaning of words are understood differently by different people, but rather to show how a socially constructed concept can act as a platform for cooperation and communication among people with social heterogeneity. Star and Griesmer (1989) emphasize that when using the theory of boundary object, it is important to highlight how the acceptance of heterogeneous worldviews, through the boundary object, actually gives room for cooperation. If one single perspective is enforced on the object, it minimizes other actor's role in deciding the use of it, and therefore cooperation will not take place.

In the case of intercultural communication or cross-cultural studies, the theory of the boundary objects fits well with dynamic approach to the culture, which view culture as an ocean where "various waters are both separate and shared, both different and similar"(T. Fang, 2006, p. 88). In the similar way, the boundary object theory suggests that encounters both share some parts of their worldview and, at the same time, are separated by different perspectives on the same object.

In application to this research, teachers and parents are viewed as linked to each other by several boundary objects: school practices, child-rearing, teaching and learning processes etc. They have different ways of thinking about these objects and behaving in relation to them; however, there are certain area which overlaps – this overlapping is a field of common beliefs and perceptions (Pic. #1). Understanding of this overlapping area of the teachers' and the parents' worldviews can help to highlight some of similarities between the participants of the research and not only differences. Analysis of the boundary objects between teachers and parents can contribute to the establishment of strong connection and successful cooperation between home and school.

4   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The following chapter gives an extensive description of the methodological framework of this research. The qualitative approach as the general study method is presented in the beginning of the chapter. The overview of the data collection method and interview strategies is followed by presentation of the sampling and method of the data analysis. This chapter ends with outlined limitation of the method and ethical considerations of the research.

4.1   Methodological framework

The methodological framework is shaped accordingly the main aim of the research. In order to understand how cultural backgrounds influence on the communication between parents and teacher and outline the beliefs and attitudes of the parents and teachers we have conducted qualitative research based on the empirical studies conducted through open-ended interviews. The aim of the qualitative research is in outlining generalizable explanations of real-world phenomenon (Mason, 1996). Qualitative research generates "subjective data based on the perspectives of the people being interviewed (DeCoster & Lichtenstein, 2010, p. 232). In general, qualitative method is "the elicitation of reports of lived experiences through a variety of means" such as interviews or recorded conversations between people (DeCoster & Lichtenstein, 2010, p. 232). Two main characteristics of the qualitative analysis are flexibility and awareness of the social context. Unlike quantitative approach, qualitative methods let researchers outline a broad range of data about the investigating phenomena. Additionally, it gives an opportunity for person-centered approach with focus on the individuals in the particular and unique settings and context. This method grounds on the participants' information that is revealed to the researchers.

Researchers stress that qualitative methods is the most suitable for studying a phenomenon before the strong theory is developed and when a new perspectives on in issue are required (DeCoster & Lichtenstein, 2010, p. 235). Therefore, the inductive approach of the data analysis, where the researcher conduct collection of the accurate data and basing on this data create a theory, is often goes together with qualitative methodology. Generally, inductive theory building is proceeded through reflection of the researcher upon of the data. Researcher, analyzing the gained data, constantly reflects on the meanings of the text and on "how narratives are constructed by the participants according to their particular worldview or experience, and how a theory of action or meaning is produced through these narratives" (DeCoster & Lichtenstein, 2010, p. 233).

4.2   Interview as data collection method

As it has already been mentioned, the data for this study has been collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews to allow the participants to give as broad and deep answers as possible. This interviewing method is typical for qualitative research. Qualitative interview has a form of the guided conversation, where interviewer listen to respondent in order to collect certain information related to the studied phenomena. In this

case, interviews is rather interested in the deriving interpretations and perspectives from the respondent talk, than factual information (Warren, 2015, p. 85). The interview research has been designed with consideration of the seven steps of the interviewing suggested by Kvale (1996, p. 88): thematizing, designing; interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting, which, in general, refer to the processes of planning, conduct, and interpretation of the interview (Warren, 2015, p. 84)

The first stage of the interview - <u>thematizing</u> – has been done through outlining of the key concepts fitted to the research. Key concepts has been cautiously and carefully selected from the he theoretical framework in order to operationalize them into interview questions with concern about main aim of the study (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson & Wängrerud, 2012, p. 55). The interview guides for participants teachers and participants parent have been designed basing on the selected concepts and themes. The interview guide consists of the three main sections:

<u>Personal information</u>**.**
For parents: general information about participant, such as age, profession, ethnic background, occupation, level of education, year of the migration to Sweden at etc. Also information about family: how many children, how old are they and which grade they are attending, what is the ethnic background of the husband/father of the children and so on. *For teachers*: general information about participant, such as age, ethnic background, education, current place of teaching and the length of the pedagogical experience.

<u>Experience of the interaction.</u>
For parents: information about experience of communication/interacting with teachers in Swedish elementary school or preschool class. Here the participants are asked several questions regarding the school practices of communicating with parents that they have experiences and the evaluation of these practices. Parents asked to think of situations where they felt misunderstanding or confusion when talking to school representatives. *For teachers:* information about experience of communication/interacting with non-Swedish parents, especially Russian. The teachers were asked questions revealing if they ever experienced any difficulties working with them and if they felt fully confident in intercultural communication.

<u>Values, beliefs and attitudes.</u>
For both parents and teachers: questions regarding various aspects of the school practices, child-rearing, teaching and learning processes. Participants were asked to express their personal opinions and perspectives regarding such themes as grades, discipline, role of the teacher, parental involvement and others.

Although the key concepts have been established and the interview guide has been designed, the flow of the qualitative interview cannot be exactly the same with every participants. The interviewer had to guide and shape the conversation with additional questions and request for clarifications, as the goal of the interviewer to relieve distinctive meaning-making actions of interview participants (Warren, 2015, p. 86). Therefore, some of the focuses have appeared during the process of the data collection.

In the end of the data collection process,14 semi-structured interviews have been conducted. Ten interviews were done face-to-face and four via Skype as some of the participants live in another city or preferred Skype-interview over face-to-face. The face-to-face interviews were carried out either in various physical environments such as cafe and school. During live interview the conversation has been recorded on the mobile phone and the skype-interview was recorded on the computed with special software. The average length of the interviews is approximately 25 min.

4.3 Sampling

The participants of the research have been arranged into two sampling groups: 1) teachers; 2) parents of Russian origins. The participants of the research have been recruited through contacting public compulsory schools in Gothenburg, various internet communities for immigrant and foreign speaking parents in Sweden and personal contacts. In few cases, something similar to snowball sampling have been used, where some of the recruited participants helped finding other suitable respondents for the interview, for example, some of parents organized meeting with teachers of their children.

Following requirements were shaping the selection of the participants: 1) Teachers had to be raised and educated in Sweden; 2) Teachers had to have an experience of working with Russian parents and parents from post-USSR countries; 3) Parents had to be raised in Russia and to be graduated from the compulsory school in their original country. In total, 14 persons participated in the interview: 5 teachers and 9 parents. The sample groups of the participants and basic information about them are shown in the Tab. # 2, 3. Although some of the children are older than in an age of elementary school, as the parents still have an experience of communicating with elementary school teachers, this factor is not considered.

#	Age	Gender	Time in Sweden	Age of a child
P1	41	female	10 years	6
P2	28	female	4, 5 years	7
P3	33	female	6 years	11
P4	39	female	2,5 years	12
P5	41	female	16 years	15
P6	46	female	17 yeas	9 and 16
P7	47	female	24 years	8 and 10
P8	27	female	4 years	7
P9	40	female	7 years	6

Tab. # 2 Respondents - parents with Russian origins

#	Gender	Working experience	Type of the schooling
T1	female	approximately 16 years	elementary school
T2	female	7 years	preschool class
T3	female	33 years	preschool class
T4	female	12 years	elementary school and preschool
T5	male	2 years	elementary school

Tab. # 3 Respondents - teachers

Every participant received a code which reflected the information whether he/she is a teacher or a parents: letter P for parent and T for teacher and the number. All participating teachers work in different schools. Most of the children of the interviewed parents were attending the elementary school or preschool class at the moment of the interview, nevertheless some of the participants had older children. Those participants who had children of older school age were asked to speak about their experience of interacting with elementary school teachers and preschool class teachers and not middle or high school teachers. Although most of the interviewed parents and teachers are not connected, two pairs have interacted with each other in a school setting: P1 and T3, P9 and T1. The overwhelming majority of the participants are female, despite the appreciation of the diversity in the research. Most of the respondents reside in the Metropolitan Gothenburg area; however, several of them live in other Stockholm.

4.4 Data analysis

The method of analysis in this research is Content Analysis method. After the collected data has been transcribed and translated into English in cases when it was originally in different from English language, we started organizing qualitative data. The organization of the qualitative data includes open coding, which means writing down of the notes and headings while reading, creating categories, groups and abstractions or formulation (Elo & Kunga, 2008, p. 109). Open coding was followed by categorization of the data, which was done through repeated reading of the data. Researchers point out that the goal of the data grouping is reduction of the number of categories through "collapsing those that are similar or dissimilar into broader higher order categories" (Elo & Kunga, 2008, p. 109). The

classification of the data is based on its belonging to particular group, which is defined through comparison between the data from different categories. Grouping and categorization helps researcher to generate knowledge. Once the knowledge was generated and the categorization was created, we made an attempt to interpret it. Generally, it is a process of the making sense from the data within selected unit of analysis. The final stage of the sample analysis is reporting of the results, interpreting it and creation of the conceptual model.

As it has already been mentioned, the main orientation of this research is inductive analysis. However, it is important to notice that there are certain elements of deductive approach too. Before the data was fully collected and its analysis, the broad analytical framework based on the various theoretical concepts were determined and, therefore, adding relatively broad analysis matrix, which common for deductive method, to sample analysis (Elo & Kunga, 2008, p. 109).

4.5   Limitation of the research and ethical consideration

Some researchers express critical position toward quantitative studies and see it as vague, soft and with unclear guidelines compared to quantitative researches (Pope & Mays, 2000). Nevertheless, DeCoster & Lichtenstein (2010) counter this opinion with claiming that researchers working with quantitative methodology must have solid theoretical framework, specific research questions and careful selection of the relevant methodologies. This research has been organized and maintained with consideration of these aspects in order to keep the study valid. Additionally, general critique of the qualitative research is often related to the role of the researcher in the process of data collection and interpretation. Firstly, the researcher's own characteristics greatly shape the connection between him/her and the participants. The information that was revealed to one researcher may not necessarily be the same as that provided to another researcher (DeCoster & Lichtenstein, 2010, p. 234). Secondly, the issue of the subjectivity of the data interpretation also may occur, especially if researcher does not have enough of expertise (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000). To overcome this problem the researcher tried to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon of the interests and participant's situation, develop a clear analytical framework and follow the chosen set of methods as well as constantly pay attention to interviewer's own role and influence.

Lack of the control group can be seen as one of the limitation of the chosen research method. Since there is only one group of parents participating, it is hard to judge whether the interviewed parents hold views typical for only this particular immigrant group or they represent opinions of the majority of parents in Sweden. Therefore, the author of the research does not claim that the gained results are applicable only for the Russian immigrants, neither those results reflect the situation of general parental attitudes. This research is suggested to be viewed as the case study and investigation of the phenomena in relation to experience of the particular individuals.

Although the amount of the participants is satisfying this kind of qualitative research, it does not give as a solid ground for making any generalization. The conducted study is based

on the several particular cases which can give us deep understanding of the phenomenon in the individual's experience but limit us in the understanding of the typical and most common patterns among majority of Russian parents or Swedish teachers. However, this is not the intention of this research, but rather raising the question and discussion on the topic, as well as developing an analytical framework for the research in the intercultural communication between educators and families. As it is common for purely qualitative research the sample size is sacrificed for depth (Rawlins, 2007), as the

Another limitation of the study is a possible insincerity of the participants. Thus, for example, teachers may try to avoid talking about conflicts with parents as this might affect their professional image. As the outcomes of the research are based on the respondent's words, this issue might become a serious problem for study's validity. Nevertheless, all participants, while being guided by the interviewer, had right to reveal only those information they felt comfortable to talk about.

As it has already been mentioned, the majority of participants are female. Although the researcher planned relatively diverse group of the respondents, this turned out to be not that easy. This can be explained with prevalence of the female teachers in elementary school and preschool classes. When it comes to parents, women were more open for the participation and easily reachable compared to men in the process of recruitment.

Taking into account ethical issues, the author of the research concerned about causing no harm to any of the participants in the process of collecting the data, interpreting and performing it. The potential risks of creating a ground for cultural or ethnic prejudice have been considered during the study. The participants could chose not to answer any of the interviewer's questions during the interviews and stop participating in the research at any point. The collected data is used only for a scientific purpose and remains confidential. The names and identities of the participants are protected and kept anonymous.

5 RESULTS

In this chapter the results of the study, which has been gained through analysis of the gathers data, are presenting. It starts from the findings related to the communication process between teachers and parents: channels of communication, issues of understanding, communication failure, awareness of the cultural differences, advices and recommendation as part of communication between educators and parents. It is followed by display of the results connected to the attitudes of the participants towards schooling system in Sweden and teaching methods. After the respondents' perspectives on role of the teachers, achievement, grades and parental involvement are provided.

5.1 Communication channels

Communication between teachers and parents in the preschool class and elementary school settings occurs frequently and through various channels, such as face-to-face conversation, sms, phone call, email and printed information sheets. According to the respondents, the face-to-face conversation is one of the most common ways of communication as parents and teachers see each other on the daily basis when parents leave children at school in the morning and pick them up after classes. Those talks are usually not planned. The teachers often use this opportunity to talk to parents when they have to discuss some issues regarding particular child:

> *When we want something special about the child, we talk to the parents. We can talk when they leave. Most of the information we take when they take children home. (T1)*

The parents, when seeing teachers, can also freely approach teachers if they have any questions. Often the parents have rather general questions concerning their child's behavior or performance this particular day. The majority of the parents characterizes school teachers as easily reachable and open for questions and communication. However, one parent describes very different attitude of the teachers. Significantly, the same parent reports a severe lack of understanding between her family and the school representatives. Unlike in all other cases, those parents feel that they have a hard time in reaching out teachers:

> *I see teachers when they stand in front of the door and say "hej". That is all, because they never have time to talk about child. If you need something, you have to book time. (P7)*

Besides the occasional talks, school organizes tet-a-tet meetings between teacher, parents and the child where they discuss development of the child. When one of the parents compares it with those meetings where many parents present at once that are commonly practiced in Russian schools, she expresses a positive attitude toward Swedish model:

> *Not like we had it in Soviet when you break the glass you will be smashed in front all class! And you are sitting at home and thinking if teachers told on the meeting that you had broken the glass or not <...> or somebody had made even more troubles. There are no such things in here! (P1)*

Generally, any opportunity to talk with teachers about issues related to their children's development and performance are viewed by parents as an important part of the schooling process. They also appreciate weekly updates about plans for the coming week and summing up of the past weeks, which are usually sheared over e-mail. Additionally, the parents find it very useful to have an internet platform where they can view various information regarding their child's schooling such as homework, learning progress, information about lateness and others. A variety of different communication channels create an information rich environment and, therefore, parents feel well-informed about school life of their children. This contributes to establishment of the stronger links between school and home which as an important factor influencing child development and wellbeing.

5.1.1 *Issues of understanding*

Basing on the overview of all responses, it is concluded that although parents feel well informed about school life of their children, majority of them admit experiencing certain disagreements or difficulties in mutual understanding with school teachers that likely to result on the quality of the communication between families and school. The interviewed parents talk about disagreements mostly based on the differences in viewing teaching and learning or/and child development processes. Teachers, however, when discussing occurring lack of understanding with non-Swedish parents, firstly stress language issues and lack of proficiency in Swedish among some of immigrant parents, while generally agree on possibility of some cultural differences:

I think it is when they do not understand the language. That is the biggest problem. Sometimes they do not know how to say it. Sometimes it is easier to talk to one of the parents. Perhaps the one who speaks more English or Swedish. (T1)

… If they are not fluent in the Swedish language, it can be trickier to create a mutual understanding. (T5)

Some of the teachers gave some examples of the commonly occurring misunderstandings, which they also connect with difficulties in adequate understanding of Swedish language (T4; T1). Nevertheless, those problems are also connected with different etiquette practices and different concepts of time around cultures:

Actually in Swedish you can say like "it would be good if you come around eleven", then it means "we start at eleven", but it is not very clear [for non-Swedish]. Then you have to change your way of talking a bit. (T4)

Sometimes it can be misunderstanding because of language, like if they say "we will get here at 10 o'clock" and they come more at eleven. (T1)

Generally, language as the tool of communication is the core issue for creating good relationships between family and school from teachers' perspectives. Although those parents who admitted having difficulties when communicating with teacher, did not mention a language issue, the rest of parents, who stated that they do not have any problems

in interacting with school, explained their communicative success with high language proficiency:

I have not had any negative experience… No, have not had, because I have already known Swedish well and we do not need to speak in English so it is ok. (P2)

…. never felt it [cultural differences]. I speak Swedish almost perfectly. (P5)

Those responses fit well with the teachers' perspectives on language difficulties as the main source of problems connected with mutual understanding. In this case, once immigrant parents reach a certain level of mastering Swedish, the risk of communication failure is very low. However, some problems can be rooted in different values and beliefs possessing by teachers and parents. These types of problems do not seem to disappear with a language barrier. For example, one of the respondents and her spouse have been very concerned about learning achievement of their child and have had high expectations regarding their son's performance, but the teacher did not share those concerns and expectations (P8). Another interviewed parent failed to understand the teacher's request to limit an amount of home-schooling with her child since the rest of the pupils in the class are recognizably behind the mentioned child (P1).

The only phrase she repeated is that everything was good and wonderful. She was very surprised why we are so nervous and why we are trying to get some information from her. <…> We went in circus: she kept saying that everything was good and we kept saying that everything was bad. (P4)

I got recommendation to do less of math with my child. I ignored it. How can you tell me something like that?! Their advices, according my experience, are not progressive, but destructive! (P1)

In both cases, the communicative failure is likely connected with different cultural background and different attitude toward child's learning performance and achievements.

Concluding, while some of the parents did not report any difficulties in understanding the school teachers, the rest interviewed parents have experienced clash of opinions and the amount of years that they spent in Sweden does not seem to influence on this phenomena in the case of the respondents. Often this experience brings negative emotional responses, such as anger, frustration, disturbance, irritation and others. There is certain areas that seem to be with higher risk of the class between teachers' and parent's views on Swedish schooling system, teaching methods, *role of the teachers. achievement, grades and parental involvemen.* – those areas will be discussed later. The lack of understanding and misunderstanding between teachers and parents that is rooted in the different attitudes towards the same phenomenon are typical problems within intercultural communication.

5.1.2   *Giving and receiving advice*

When teachers and parents interact, child acts as subject bounding them together – it was also shown in the analytical framework before (Pic. #1). Therefore, the major part of the

information shared between teachers and parents concerns a child development and well-being. One of the responsibilities of the teachers is providing an adequate professional support for parents in the process of child's upbringing. As the participant's responses show, the great deal of the communication between parents and teachers characterized with teachers giving advices and recommendations and parents receiving them. Parents may ask teachers of their opinions and request their recommendations or teacher can be an initiator. In both way, according to the responses of the parents, they do not necessarily follow those advices or even consider them. Generally, parents showed very various attitudes towards teacher's recommendations. Part of them, especially those who did not experience any difficulties communicating with teachers, expressed high level of the trust toward teachers. For example:

> *I trust teachers very much and they have never advised me anything bad or weird.*
> *All advices has always been very right. (P7)*

Some of other respondents showed rather neglected attitudes toward teacher's involvement:

> *Their advices, according my experience, are not progressive, but destructive! <...>*
> *I never heard anything from them that I could find useful. (P1)*

Rest of the respondents expressed a general openness and appreciations of the teacher, but mentioned that they do not always agree with pedagogues. Here is an example, where one of the parents asked a question if they usually follow pedagogues' advices:

> *Usually yes but not always. I would think first. I think it is good at least to try to*
> *listen their advices, especially when you are foreigner, to understand how it works*
> *here. (P8).*

The teachers also have been asked if they think that parents usually listen to their opinion and act according their recommendation. Generally, the interviewed teachers hold relatively optimistic view towards these issues and suggest that commonly parents have a trust in teacher's competence, although they understand that parents do not always agree with them. One of the respondents emphasized that parents tend to pay more attention to the teacher's opinion when they first seek for teacher's help and, on contrary, less responsive toward critique:

> *Sometimes, yes. I do think [that they follow teacher's advices]. Depends on what the*
> *advice is. Sometimes they ask "what should I do?" I guess they do then. If I think*
> *something is wrong with the family, I do not think they follow. (T4).*

Some teachers mention that immigrant parents often come to teachers seeking for help not only related to the child rearing, but also with other problems that they face due to luck of the knowledge about new environment (T3). Therefore, working with immigrant families a teacher becomes an additional support for immigrant parents, especially newly arrived, and help them when they are not well integrated. The role of the teacher expands and the mission of improving a child's wellbeing is also sometimes requiring helping a family in gaining certain knowledge about society they are living in (P2).

Sometimes I have been like a social worker; they come with their bills and wonder why they got so high telephone bill. (T3)

Sometimes we feel that the schools' function is important for the parents, that we should try to explain the information or knowledge they need in the best possible way we can. (P2).

Furthermore, one of the parents admits that as she has her own mother far away, the teacher's help is especially important for her (P2). Thus, showing the importance of the school in her family's life.

[answering question if she relies on teachers]Yes, very much! I am a younger mother and my own mom is not here to teach me. (P2).

5.1.3   Overcoming the communication failure

As all of the teachers admit that there are sometimes certain difficulties when communicating with parents, whether the parents are Swedish or not. Teachers as professionals are expected to have some kind of strategies for solving occurred problems. The general approach for building mutual understanding was more or less articulated in all interviews, which was the need for a dialogue with parents. For examples, one of the teachers, basing on her 30 years of the teaching experience, puts especial focus on the importance of the open dialogue with parents and teacher's good communication skills in it:

It is clear that one needs to have a dialogue with the parents. I always start with saying something positive, that "your son, or daughter, is very good on this and that" and follow rules and listen what one has to say. <...> You open up yourself and be generous, absolutely. (T3)

Once the problem appears, it can be solved, first of all, through the discussion of the occurred issues with parents (T2). Some of the parents also mentioned that even if disagreements appear time to time, a good dialogue usually helps to solve it (P9)

If it hurts our educational environment, then we speak with the parents. We try to build communication and solve the problem. (T2)

We can disagree about something that they do. Yeah, but we usually… we talk and we achieve some agreement. (P9)

Ability to reach consensus through discussion as well as ability to express thoughts clearly are important for a pedagogue (T3; T5). It is even more important in multicultural environment where some families are not native speakers or might lack knowledge about policies and traditions of the schooling in the host country. Therefore, the Swedish teachers show their awareness of possible misunderstanding so they have to be very clear when expressing themselves as well as to make sure to provide the needed information:

I have been working so much with immigrant children with parents from other countries so I have learned to be very clear when I write something and I have told them that they should come and ask if they need something. (T3)

There are not so big differences [between Swedish and non-Swedish parents if they know the language properly, but if they do not, it does demand from me to explain more and be much more clear. (T5)

Therefore, general results show that teachers understand the importance of the successful and open communication between family and teachers, especially when it comes to immigrant families, as well as the pedagogue's role in achieving it.

5.2   Awareness of cultural differences

When the interviewed teachers were talking about their experience of working in multicultural environment with non-Swedish parents, most of them concluded that even though there might be cultural differences, the culture of the family is not the most influential factor in the parental involvement in the schooling process of their child. They tend to believe there is no significant difference between Swedish and non-Swedish people. For example, the participant P2 articulates that the teacher should work with the parents basing on their individual characteristic and do not look on the characteristics of the group they belong to:

I always see the individual and I work with an individual based perspective. I can never generalize people in different categories or groups and say they are so and so. (T2).

Similarly, another teachers claims that some of the factors, such as education of parents, are more influential, than cultural background:

… you can see that there are many similarities between those parents who came from Somalia, Sweden, Russia and have been to university – more of similarities than between of educated and not educated parents that came from one country. (T4).

Although the interviewed parents have not been asked directly if they feel or aware of any cultural influences, the way those participants were telling their stories led to assumption that they believe themselves that some of their values and attitudes come from their original cultural background. First of all, they often compare the Swedish schooling system and its practices with the Russian system. In addition, the respondents often highlight their cultural background and its influence on their worldview:

You look at the teacher and you see that she is dressed just as them [pupils]. Jeans with holes, sneakers and snus... Obviously, this also has some impacts. Maybe it is ok for them, but for me it is very weird. I guess it is my Russian upbringing (P2)

I brought up in our Russian school, so, of course, I think that there should be a homework (P4).

Some of the parents revealed that stress caused by cultural clash could lead to the fear of being judged or misunderstood, which can hinder them from speaking openly with school representatives:

You go in and there is sand everywhere, shoes lie around everywhere. I could complain, but I am a foreigner… I have even complained, but nobody heard me. (P7)

It is like I am doing this [homeschooling] because I am a crazy immigrant who is torturing… But it is not only me. My husband, and he is Swedish, also sees that! (P1)

Those parents, however, who generally showed a more accepting attitude towards schooling system in Sweden and Swedish culture also less frequently speak about themselves as about foreigners and the length of the migration time in Sweden does not seem to affect this phenomena in case of our respondents.

5.3   Attitudes toward schooling in Sweden

In the following sections, the results show attitudes of parents toward Swedish schooling system in general as well as teaching methods common for Swedish teachers and its quality. Those attitudes influence the way parents interact with teachers, reveal the possible ground of misunderstanding and, overall, show the level of satisfaction with schooling system among parents with the Russian cultural background.

5.3.1   *Attitudes toward schooling system and quality of education in Sweden*

While the teachers did not directly expressed their opinion about currently existing schooling system in Sweden, parents gave their evaluation of and showed their attitudes toward the quality of education and Swedish system of school education. The respondents can be divided into three groups: those who are generally satisfied with schooling in Sweden (P2, P5, P6), those who feel strongly dissatisfied (P1, P4, P7, P8), and those who have relatively neutral position but still see several flows in the system (P3, P9). Among the responses of the parents from the second and third groups certain patterns can be distinguished. One of the most common complaints is a little concern about high learning performance of the children and orientation on the learning minimum, rather than maximum. Some of the parents complain about the common practice to evaluate the level of the all pupils comparing with the weakest performance:

What really makes me mad is that we should equal to the worst and they would never move from studying letter M to letter N until the laziest child in the class will properly write this letter N. (P1)

Those parents tend to believe that this results in the low quality of education in total and significant slowing down of the learning process. Therefore, children have a very poor knowledge when they could have it much higher if the teachers aimed for it:

We do like this as one of the children cannot do it so we all trail behind him. <...> There is no such thing like "we have to know the multiplication table in the second grade". They do not know the table here even at fourth grade. They do not know anything! (P7)

Clearly, parents hold very emotional attitude toward this problem and have hard time in understanding methods of teachers in Swedish schools. It is important to notice that basing in this belief about slow learning development in the class, one of the parents insisted on transferring her child from the preschool class to the second grade. This request was not taken entirely positively by the school representatives. They neither deny the request, nor moved the child to another grade – this resulted in the parent's confusion and irritation toward the school. Therefore, the parent's dissatisfaction with the schooling methods lead to conflicting relationships between home and school in the reviewed case. The impression of the little concern about learning outcomes among teachers is connected with the school polices that highlight the care about psychological and social development of a child more than his or her studying performance. Those parents who find the quality of knowledge and the level of performance in school satisfactory also tend to appreciate the school's focus on nurturing and social development more than other parents do. For example, one of the parents, who also has an experience of working as a teacher and, therefore, has deeper understanding of the schooling system in Sweden, highlighted the importance of the teacher's work aimed to decrease 'booling', a school orientation on the nurturing gender equality, an environment of tolerance and accepting differences within a school. She also noticed that Swedish school has completely different approaches of nurturing and teaching compared to Russian school:

The goal [of the Swedish school] is nurturing, the development of the qualities, which means it is completely different model [compared to Russian model]. <...> They do not only give facts, but skills to search and pass it, develop abilities. (P6)

When the parents discuss good and bad sides and elements of the Swedish school, they tend to compare the model of Swedish school with the Russian or the Soviet models as well as with personal experience of attending the school. Furthermore, those parents who are unsatisfied with schooling in Sweden use the Russian model as the example of a better working system. For example:

My opinion as a person who was born in Soviet Union, there should be the same base for everyone. <...> Like in the Soviet school we had the same standardized amount of math, languages - the ground, base. (P7)

Those parents who like Swedish school, on a contrary, tend to use the example of Russian school system as flawed one in comparison with Swedish system.

We never had like this in our school [in Russia]! Now I look and it is so interesting when they go to the forest, explore the natural phenomenon right outdoors. (P2)

I am so happy that they get this kind of nurturing here in schools. In Russian schools they nurture boys - boys don't cry. And this is everywhere: "Why are you crying? Boys don't cry!" This is so terrible! (P6)

The frequency of this comparison shows that the way participants perceive the schooling processes and school as an institution is largely affected by the abstract image of the school that was learned when they were raised. An individual sees the teaching and learning processes through the prism of values, beliefs and social practices common to the culture they were raised in.

5.3.2 *Attitudes to teaching methods*

The parent's attitude to teaching methods and practices are usually connected to the opinion about schooling system in general. During the interview, teachers talked about the teaching and learning methods they use in the classroom and parents shared their opinion regarding those methods. Overall, many parents, except those who find the schooling system in Sweden satisfying, wish teachers to be more demanding and strict in order to make children to work harder. Teachers, from their side, when talking about their professional duties highlight that since they work with very small children their role is, first of all, to take care of social development and mental well-being of children. In the following quote, for example, the teacher speaks about the importance of supporting feeling of self-confidence:

It is important that children like school and they believe that they are very good at school and they get a good self-confidence. And as a teacher, your role is to communicating with a child and, then, you might think that your teacher is the best because teacher is believing in you and that is the best thing. (T4)

Parents who hold critical position, on contrary, believe that teacher should put high demands on the pupil's learning outcomes and the child should possess adequate amount of knowledge to deserve the approval:

It is so much of compliments in here, even if there is no reasons for it - they are smart just as they are. They did not do anything for those compliments. <...> She made three mistakes in one word, but teacher still wrote "good work". That's not a good work! (P1)

They [pupils] are too relaxed here, their self-appraisal is very high. I would even say too high while their knowledge are very poor. (P4)

Those views are common among Russian parents attitude and they clash with Swedish approach- It is also noticed by teachers:

I think they [Russian parents] tend to be more focused on results, even with younger children, whereas we, in Sweden, do look more at the whole picture, the caring, in another way. So it is more of the learning, like mathematics and so on. (T3)

Generally, those parents believe that the methods used by Swedish teachers are too soft and fail in creating an adequate environment for learning. For example, one respondent complained that after more strict approach of teachers in Russian schools, the softer methods of Swedish teacher resulted in both learning and behavioral problem (P2)

> *Those frames that Swedish teachers have were understood by my child as a complete freedom. He never did homework, he run around and ate berries [when they went to forest] and taught other kids to do this. (P3)*

When working with small pupils, elementary school teachers commonly use game approach toward learning and try to make it more fun (T2). While parents are not against the game approach toward learning in general, some of them claim that it is often overused which results in the lowering of the educational standard which resulting and, therefore, lack of adequate knowledge among pupils (P8):

> *We have a lot of core values which we follow and we try to make knowledge as funny as possible that is what we try to do. (T2)*

> *They never sit down and actually think, just playing all the time. School should be a source of knowledge, not only a playground. (P8)*

As it was mentioned before, not all parents have this negative attitude toward teaching and learning practices in the school and appreciate creativity in the classroom (for example, P2). Furthermore, majority of the interviewed parents both who have critical attitude and who does not, expressed their appreciation of the various outdoor activities where children can explore the natural world through close interaction with it (P9).

> *I like that they do not sit at the desk all the time, but also on sofas, carpets. They do some messages, play games, very often outside (P2)*

> *It is so good when they go to the forest and they read books there. They watch around and count trees - that's math, they look at the ground and watch worms - that's biology. (P9)*

5.4 Perspectives on the schooling practices and childrearing

The participants of the research, both parents and teachers, answered various questions showing their views on various concepts and practices connected teaching and learning practices, parental involvement and child rearing, which have emerged after the process of proceeding the gathered data. The gained data reveals where participants' values and beliefs overlap and where they are countered.

5.4.1 Role of the teacher

Almost all interviewed parents believe that teachers have to be a role models for their pupils. It is important to mention here that although many parents criticized school for poor

concern about high learning outcomes, they, at the same time, emphasized that a good teacher has to develop social qualities in children and teach them to be a competent social actors. Good educators have to achieve those goals by guiding and inspiring pupils with an own example (P1, P8). Therefore, the ideal teacher is seen as a guru, rather than just educator and instructor. This approach move under lights personal qualities of the teachers, not only their professional competence.

Teacher is an example for children. They copy many things in the teacher and it is very important that the teacher not only teach them how to write and read but show them their social roles, how to behave in society and so on. (P1)

They should be good role models for the children so they could and wanted to follow them. I think many things depend on the teacher's work and its results. They must be able to do both give knowledge and teach them to be a social actor, truly care about them. (P8)

Both parents and teachers have similar views on the teacher's role. The interviewed teachers also highlight that a good teacher has to be concentrated on the both giving knowledge and nurturing:

Teachers need to educate the children, help them grow as individuals and help them to function socially (T5)

Nevertheless, no one of the Swedish teachers expressed a thought that a good educator has to be a role model or guide students with an own example. Their descriptions of the teacher's role was generally focused on the particular functions and obligations that an elementary teacher as a professional carries out - helping children, communicating with them, supporting, educating, nurturing their skills and etc., which are interpenetrating with parent's views. Therefore, teacher's understanding of their role in the children's development is, first of all, connected with their professional skills and obligations.

5.4.2   Teacher's appearance

Only one interviewed teacher, who is also the oldest among them, admitted that, although there are no rules of how elementary teacher should look or dress, she believes the teacher's appearance can have an impact in the classroom:

Now there is no "you should not be dressed like this or like that" - it is not written anywhere. But one has to think a little, I believe, that one has to have a decent dress code, Because today it is so modern with tattoos both on women and men. (T3)

The rest of the teachers said that teacher's appearance and the way he/she is dressed does not play any significant role in the teaching process (T2).

I do not think it matters. The main thing is that the children have a good time together with the teacher and that the teacher does what he or she is supposed to do. Otherwise, it does not matter what clothes they wear. (T2)

Such casual attitude toward teacher's appearance greatly differs from the views of the parents. Only one respondent among parents (P6), who has an experience of working as a teacher, mentioned that she did not find this factor to be important or influential in schooling process. Two of the respondents did not mention this issue at all. The rest of the parents hold a strong belief that teacher's look matters. Furthermore, all of them admitted that they feel uncomfortable with the way teachers dress in Sweden. For example, some of the responses:

You look at the teacher and you see that she is dressed just as them [pupils]. Jeans with holes, sneakers and snus. Obviously, this also has some impacts. Maybe it is ok for them, but for me it is very weird. (P2)

In my son's school, in the class next door, they have female teacher and she is always dressed in very short skirt and with deep décolleté. I think it is not what the child should see. (P3)

In this point the parent's views of the teacher as an authority and role-model clashes with Swedish informality and beliefs about both social equality and freedom of expression of one's individuality.

5.4.3   Parental involvement

All of the respondents articulated importance of parental involvement and cooperation between school and parents. Nobody has any doubts in the necessity of the parent's support and help on the way of learning and development in their children's life. Parental support is beneficial for a child in terms of both learning performance and mental comfort:

It is important for parents to support their kids: if they do, their children will learn much more in school. (T5)

Very important that the parents supporting for their children and teach them to respect and listen, to be self-confident. (T4)

Participation is very important and advisable. It is like an investment: the more parents are involved in the child's life, the better (P6)

It has already been stated before that normally parents often communicate with teachers; they are well informed about school life of their children and have high concerns about children's development. Several parents, for example participants P9, P8, P6, even came to school to visit lessons or various school activities in order to gain more knowledge about the school environment. Furthermore, the majority of participants claimed that, besides helping children with school-related tasks like homework, they on the regular basis engage their children into studying additional material and work with them supplementary on some subjects:

We work on his Russian now, so we have lessons of Russian at home. In the summer we were reading much at home and did some math. (P8)

We are doing home schooling with Russian textbooks for the first grad. If she can read well, but have troubles with writing, then we will train writing; bad at counting, but good at writing, then we do much of math. (P1)

These parents also admitted that most of the Russian immigrant families acquainted to them practice home schooling on the regular basis. Although the parents do it with the good intentions and believe that they do the best for their children, Swedish teacher might not always hold these views. School educators often view the intense supplementary studies as dark side of parental participation. Most of the teachers, while having a belief about importance of parental involvement, hold an opinion that parents should help and support their children, but without putting too much pressure and let children to have some fun as it is supposed to be in their young age:

It is always good if the parents support their children in a positive way, in encouraging way, but it should not turn to negative like putting pressure on them. Then it leaves negative effect on the child. (T2)

If you look at those children where the parents are more focused on results, they really enjoy having space for their playfulness and creativity here and there. I do not say that these children sit at home all day long and do studying, but… You know, children are just children. (P3)

Only one parent (P1), among all of the respondents who admitted doing some kind of home schooling with their children, reported to be criticized by the teacher. The rest of the parents said that normally they do not have problems with teachers on this ground and if the child is far ahead of the classmates in his or her knowledge, the teachers just give more advanced tasks to the child. The participant P1, although, felt that the teacher has a wrong image of the home schooling she does with her daughter:

They say like I do not care about what my child feels. Of course, I care! <…> We also have fun and play with dolls, it is not like we only sitting with the books around. (P1)

Although teachers are normally very supportive toward parental participation their might view it in different way than parents and not all parent's opinions are completely shared and understood, which can be a reasons for the disagreements between the parent and teachers like the participant P1 experienced. From the gathered data, it is hard to judge whether teachers are commonly flexible towards the parent's opinions and worldviews. However, in the case of one of the interviewed teachers the certain non-flexibility could be recognized. She express the importance of parents to trust her professional opinion and not to interrupt in the teaching process even if they do not agree on some of the

They are not very highly seen [teachers]. Parents have too much to say… I mean, we have been studying for like 5 years at university. We know research, we know what is good for children and they should have more trust in school system. <…>[about parental involvement]It is very good. Not in the sense that parents should not tell the teacher how to teach, but in the sense that parents should be supporting for their children. (P4)

When the parents and teachers are disagree about some of the school practices like absence of grades or homework, the participant P4 calls it "the parent's thing" and that she "does not work like that as teacher".

Concluding, the interviewed teachers appreciate and encourage parental involvement and, according the responses of the participants; most of the interviewed parents show high level of the participation in the processes of learning and development of their children. Nevertheless, the choice of the parenting strategies in this context may differ among parents and educators.

5.4.4   Achievements and grades

As it has already been shown, many of Russian parents have a high concern about learning outcomes and performance of their children (see the section Attitude toward schooling system) and that is where the main critique toward schooling system rooted. This attitude is connected with a general appreciation of the grading and evaluations among parents. All of the interviewed parents, except the participant P6, feel the need for the grading system and importance of the evaluation in the educational process in Sweden; moreover, some of them wish to have it already at the beginning of compulsory school:

Grades are definitely a "must have"! For sure! Better if they start at the first grade. Well, maybe not the common grading system then, but some kind of starts, flowers… I do not know. Kids need to have some motivation (P1).

The teachers, however, are not that positive about grades at early age. It is likely connected with a reported prioritizing of care about mental wellbeing and social development of children, rather than high learning achievements even though the teachers do not deny the importance of learning performance. As an example, the participant T4 denies the grading practice completely:

You should not just put grade on you… It is something for the school system, it is not for life. I do not see the point, really. You know what you are good at and you actually can express that. <…> Children know if they good or bad. You don't really need to put A or D or C. (T4)

The parents, though, have a completely different understanding of the issues - they highlight the need of parents to know the grade of the child for being informed about child's level of knowledge and development:

I think, to be honest, that we need grades. I, for example, have no idea what is the level of my son now - what is going good and what is going bad for him. A grade is an indicator of what the child knows and understands and what does not. (P4).

I want to see a clear picture of the progress of my child, which is confusing right now. (P8)

There is another tendency among parents of connecting grading practices with motivation of the children. Many parents generally criticize the existing schooling methods as failure in the term of motivation and stimulation. Those parents also view grades as a catalyst of the pupil's interest in the schooling process (P5). Additionally, the participant P9 explained her positives attitude toward grades with concern about the future of the child, which full of competition. She claims that grading helps to motivate children through challenging and creating competitiveness:

> *Grades are good for competing, challenging, because society is always in competition. People compete for jobs; compete for positions at companies so this is how the real world is. It is good if they start to learn a little, but do not come to an extreme (P9)*

> *I think it is very good that they have grades now starting from 6th years - it was too late from 8th. I tend to believe it would be even better from 4th. It is very good for those who are not so interested in studying. It would be some kind of motivation. (P5)*

The teachers do not seem to agree on this worldview and prefer to help children not to compare themselves with others, as "*the competition should be with myself*" (T1). Despite the attitude towards competitiveness in the classroom, their responses show that the teachers can agree on some positive sides of giving grades, but never from the early age.

6   CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

The following chapter presents the findings of the research in the relation to the theoretical and analytical frameworks. The chapter starts with presenting the findings related to the cultural mismatch between school and Russian families in the school settings and its impact on the teacher-parent communication. The next subchapter is dedicated to the analysis of parents' cultural identities displayed in the data. It is followed by the discussion of trust issues and importance of intercultural awareness in the relationships between teachers and parents. The chapter ends with the analysis of similarities between the participants from the perspectives of the boundary objects theory.

6.1   Cultural mismatch and communication

All of the responding teachers expressed a strong belief in the importance of the dialogue between school representatives and family. Both teachers and parents in most cases can easily reach each other. The teachers can be characterized as competent communicators who are aware of significance of good communication between teachers and parents. All of the parents admitted feeling very well informed by their schools and feeling free in contacting their child/children's teachers if they have any questions or concerns. The communication between teachers and parents normally spins around the child, his/her development, upbringing, etc. A substantial part of this communication consists of the teachers giving advices and recommendations to the parents. It is especially important, according to all participants, when parents have origins in a foreign country. Nevertheless, despite the willingness of both teachers and parents to communicate, misunderstandings and conflicts occur time to time. Most of the parents who were interviewed and experience any difficulties interacting with school representatives report the problems to be due to the different perspectives of teachers and parents on various school practices and teaching/learning process, etc. Those differences, however, are not always based on cultural mismatch, according to the participants just as in similar situations teachers face lack of understanding with Swedish parents as well. Nevertheless, there are certain communicative patterns in Swedish teacher-Russian parent communication, which appear to be related to their cultural backgrounds. However, it is important to remember that these patterns are not shared by all families with Russian origin, nor are shared by all participants of the research.

The complexity of culture often makes it hard to grasp and analyze it, especially when studying immigrant's culture. In the ethnically diverse society an individual exists under the overlapping influences of various cultures. In the case of this research, the immigrant parents with origins in Russia accommodate the communicative patterns that can be common for both Swedish and Russian cultures. While some of the participants of this study showed a high level of acculturation and acceptance toward the values and beliefs that are generally considered as common Swedish traits, other participants can experience a clash of cultures in particular areas of social life. It is important to notice that according to the results of this research those clashes can appear even with persons who have been living in Sweden for many years, master Swedish on a high level of proficiency, have

occupation and are generally integrated in the society. The analysis of data revealed several areas of cultural mismatch between participants as well as areas of overlaps. As the bounding element of the teachers and parents and the reason for occurring communication between is a child, all of those areas are connected with child development.

One of the most significant mismatches is connected to valuing child's achievement and understanding of child's success. The majority of Russian parents tend to evaluate the child's success through learning outcomes and child's level of knowledge, and child's achievement in the schooling process is highly valued. The parents' high concern about learning outcomes results in the positive attitude toward evaluation and grading system in the school (in some cases even from early age). This attitude fits well in the context of Russian school, where grading of pupils traditionally started as early as the first grade. Even though according to the new school policies in Russia teachers are obliged to evaluate pupil's work from the second grade, many teachers still prefer to use some kind of informal grading system already at the first year of schooling. Therefore, the Russian parents raised in the Russian Federation or the USSR, find grades as the easiest way to understand and control their children's learning achievements. Additionally, both grades and competition that can come with grades are considered to be the drivers of motivation for the pupils. From the perspective of Hofstede's cultural taxonomies (1986; 2001) those parents are carrier of the traits typical for Masculine cultures, where achievements, success and competitiveness are highly appreciated, despite the fact that according Hofstede's studies Russia has quite low score in Masculinity. In this case, validity of the Hofstede's classification of the countries can be questioned. The interviewed teachers, on the countrary, possess the characteristics, which are considered to determine Feminine society, such as concern of the weak, interpersonal relationships, valuing of the harmony and viewing the success as quality of the life. This is especially clear when the teachers highlight that social development and interaction is a priority in the schooling process, and learning though important takes a secondary place. As a result, according to the Swedish teachers, the task of teachers is to create as comfortable environment for children as possible without pressure and with room for fun. The Russian parents, from their side, may perceive this approach as too soft and lowering the expectations of quality of school education. That is where the cultural mismatch appears and can affect both relationships between teachers and parents and teachers and pupils. In this situation, the cultural mismatch leads to a great risk of misunderstanding and communication failure. What the teachers viewed as an unnecessary pressure, the parents viewed as an important component of the child's success and future happiness. However, there is a common ground for the teachers and parents whose worldviews differ - both parents and teachers care for the child and concerned about his/her well-being. Even though Swedish teachers sometimes might think that the parents put too much pressure on the child with, for example, a supplementary schooling, all of the respondents strongly agree that the parental participation in the child's schooling life is very important and the cooperation between teachers and parents is an significant element in child's development.

Another area of a possible cultural mismatch is the perspective of teacher's role and a figure of teacher. The majority of interviewed parents view a good teacher as a role model, authority and guru. If looking at the Hofstede's taxonomies and cultural comparison,

Russia has a relatively high power distance. In Russia, a good Russian teacher has to be an authority for the pupils and their families. Both during the USSR time and in the modern Russia, teachers are commonly respected and viewed as carriers of a special mission in the society. They are always addressed in a polite and official form by both pupils and their parents whether they meet in formal or informal context. This also affects the way teacher dress - normally school's policies include a strict dress code for teachers. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of the interviewed teachers mentioned that the appearance of teachers matters and has an impact on the schooling process. However, most of the Swedish teachers do not see themselves as "gurus" and do not believe that their appearance and the way they dress can has any kind of impact on teaching outcomes. Although it is hard to understand if the teachers see themselves as role model or not, since hardly any of them mentioned it (probably out of modesty), generally the Swedish society is famous for its belief in equality and equal distribution of the power (Hill, 1995; Warner-Søderholm, 2012; Barinaga, 1999). High value of equality and egalitarian ideas reflect in the informal atmosphere on the workplace, including school institution. Therefore, Swedish teachers are not perceived as high authorities within the society as in some other cultures. School teachers are not addressed by the title or in any other special way. It should not, though, lead to a lack of respect toward both teachers and parents. The idea of equality is echoed in the fact that teachers are not addressed by the titles or in any other special way supporting their status as in my other countries. In Russia, on contrary, teachers are always addressed by combination of their name and name of their father – polite and formal way of addressing people who are considered to be either superior in the status or deserving respect. In the environment of Russian school teachers are expected to be highly respected by pupils: for example, when a teacher comes in the class, all of the pupils have to stand up and stay in this positions till the teacher lets pupils sit. This would not happen in the modern Swedish school. The status of the teacher also affects the way teacher dresses. Russian teachers in compulsory school are usually tied by strict official or non-official dress code. Swedish teachers have less pressure on them and free to look according their personal choice. This can be explained by both equality and believe in importance of individual freedom (Barinaga, 1999, p.5). That is where the clash of the believes about teachers and their status can occur between those two cultures. Other researchers also highlighted the social position of teachers and pupils in different countries as possible area of cultural mismatch (Hofstede, 1986). Despite some differences, however, both the Russian parents and the Swedish teachers perceive a teacher as an important figure in their child's life and as an educator who both gives knowledge and acts as a carrier of child's social and mental development.

The appearance of the cultural mismatch often leads to the communication failure based on the misunderstanding and disagreement. Those parents who experience some kind of cultural mismatch when interacting with school, often have a very critical position toward entire schooling system with accusation in a low quality of education in Sweden, flawed teaching methods and, in some cases even in unprofessionalism. In the end, it may lead to the acculturation stress and high level of dissatisfaction, which was clearly indicated in the cases of the participants P1 and P7. The emotional state of the parents who have the most severe dissatisfaction, especially bound with feeling of frustration or/and irritation toward the schooling methods, may have negative effect on the child's well-being and damage his or her positive attitude toward the school. The negative impact of the cultural

mismatch have been pointed out by many researchers (Rogers-Sirin, Ryce & Sirin, 2014; Vedder, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Nickmans, 2006). It can lead to the poorer communication between teachers and parents and, in the end, to the pooper performance of the child or even behavior problems. Acculturation stress, negative emotional attitude, dissatisfaction, poor communication, as some of the outcomes of cultural mismatch, greatly damage the link between the most important systems influencing child development – school and family (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Since a child exists and grows constantly interacting with teachers and parents, as the main components of school and family systems, and get affected by them, the cultural clash between school and family endangers child's healthy and harmonic development.

6.2 Influence of the cultural identity

As Allwood (1985) states, cultural identity and the feeling of belonging to a particular ethnic group/groups determines the way we behave and think to a large extent, though it is not necessary the most dominant characteristic of an individual. Regarding immigrants, the feeling of belonging to a specific ethnic group can be boosted in the foreign environment, where cultural differences are salient. Nevertheless, immigrants of both first and second generations often become carriers of multiple cultural identities and possess overlapping patterns of several cultures. In application to the thesis research the degree of belonging of the Russian parents to Russian culture determinates the level of cultural background influence.

The results of the study show that some of Russian parents have stronger feelings of their ethnic/cultural identity than others. Generally, it is hard to determine which conditions influence the dominance of cultural identity over other factors, considering that all participants can be considered as well integrated in the Swedish society. In the case of two participant (P6, P5), however, it was clear that the parents' occupation had much bigger influence than the ethnicity. Those parents work as teachers in Sweden, therefore, when talking about the topic related to professional interests, they look at the issue from both parent's and teacher's perspective and the feeling of being a foreigner is reduced. Therefore, their professional and education background, even though they are not elementary teachers, have stronger impact on their worldview than their cultural background. Influence of the participants' occupations, besides participants P6 and P5, was not recognizably indicated – in these cases, however, the cultural identity dominated in their self-perception as they frequently referred to their cultural background or experienced gain in Russian schools and, often revealed the traits generally accepted as typical for Russian culture (for example, appreciation of achievement). Another factor that could influence an immigrant parent's cultural identity is the amount of time her or she have spent in Sweden. Nevertheless, the connection between length of the parents' migration in Sweden and their attitudes toward schooling was not indicated. According to the responses of the parents, they might accept or do not accept Swedish values and believes weather they are newcomers or have been living in Sweden for many years.

It is suggested that those parents who frequently address to themselves as *Russian* and *foreigners* and/or in any other way regularly mention their cultural backgrounds have

likely their cultural identity as a dominating characteristic. Thus, they have a higher level of cultural background influence. Another support for this assumption is the observed fact that those parents who more than others highlighted their origin in the interviews had a deeper disagreement with and dissatisfaction of the schooling practices and methods in Sweden. Therefore, if the cultures of immigrant parents and the Swedish teachers possess different patterns of thoughts and behavior in relation to a particular phenomenon, the risk of cultural clash and conflict may be higher, especially if the parents have a strongly dominating cultural identity. The comparison of the Swedish schooling system, teaching methods and practices with the Russian system, methods and practices occurred in the interviews of an overwhelming majority of the parents. Those parents who generally showed satisfaction and acceptance of the Swedish schooling practices used the example of schooling practices in Russia as defective. At the same time, many of those parents who expressed their dissatisfaction with the Swedish schools, comparing them with the schools in Russia, presented the Russian models as more successful.

6.3 Trust

The results of the data from the interviews reveal an important issue in the relationships between parents and teachers, namely trust. The degree of trust between teachers and parents largely determines whether there is a strong link between home and school. The cooperation and connection of the school representatives and parents are the necessary conditions for child's well-being and development. While some of the teachers mentioned the importance of trustful relationships between educators and families, the responses of parents show that achieving a high degree of trust is not always easy.

All of the parents who experienced stress and dissatisfaction interacting with their schools also had lack of trust toward educators and school system in general. Lack of trust is one of the reasons for the negative experiences of the Russian parents. If the parents and teachers fail to improve their communication, the level of trust can drop even lower. Those parents who did not trust teachers normally refused to follow their advice or take their recommendation seriously; moreover, they expressed the critical attitude toward teacher's professionalism and ability to carry out their responsibilities adequately (for example, participants P1, P4). Additional problems that parents face when not trusting enough the Swedish teachers is a doubt whether their opinions would be heard, which might hinder them from an open expression of their opinion. In this study, a lack of trust was greatly affected by clashes of opinions and worldviews between the parents and the teachers – in many cases parents have experienced inconsistency of their expectation and a real situation. For example, the participant P1 refuses to rely on the teacher's opinion after she experienced disappointment in the quality of school education and teaching methods in Sweden. Those expectations and believes about school practices and teachers that are posted parents are often affected by a cultural background and personal experience. Therefore, it is suggested that a lack of trust is usually result of cultural mismatch, however, this process goes in the both directions – if there is not enough of trust between school and family, it can boost the cultural differences and conflicts.

The parents who displayed positive attitudes toward the educators in their school also showed a high level of trust in the teachers. Their perception of schooling in Sweden and teachers is contradictive to the examples presented above. Those parents openly say that they rely on teachers as professionals, follow teacher's advices and grateful to get them. Also neither of them admitted to experience any communication failure talking to teachers. While having the same cultural origins as the rest of the interviewed parents, they do not share the same beliefs and attitudes recognized as the typical ones for Russian parents, therefore, they have not experienced a cultural mismatch in the school context. It supports the assumption that the level of trust decreases with cultural mismatch.

6.4 Awareness and acceptance

The teacher's approach toward a multicultural environment while working with non-Swedish parents is characterized by their focus on the similarities rather differences, something which is advised and supported by many (Vedder, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Nickmans, 2006; Carlson, Rabo & Gök, 2007). These researchers highlight that cultivation of the differences can lead to prejudices and stereotyping. To understand the similarities between different cultures gives a common ground for cooperation and mutual understanding. The clear tendency among the teacher to not focus on cultural differences contradicts the revised critiques toward the teacher education in Sweden, which claims that intercultural pedagogy in Sweden is concentrated on the differences instead of similarities in the school environment (Carlson, Rabo & Gök, 2007). It can be suggested, that teachers education have been improved in terms or intercultural communication during the past years. Accordingly, the interviewed teachers can be characterized as rather intercultural competent. Nevertheless, as intercultural competence could be seen as process of learning, a few remarks and improvements could be made to further boost of their skills. For example, it is suggested to improve their awareness regarding the risk of misunderstanding based on the cultural mismatch and flexibility toward other's values and believes.

As the results of the study show, the Swedish teachers, from the first sight, have a high level of awareness regarding the risk of misunderstanding or lack of understanding when communicating with non-Swedish parents. Nevertheless, their concerns usually tend to be based only on language barriers. Moreover, there is a chance that differences in cultural patterns could be misinterpreted as language issues. For example, the interviewed teachers connected difficulties in understanding time among immigrant parents with language problem, although in some cases it might be more related to different conception of time in these two cultures. One phenomena can be interpreted differently by the representatives of different cultures, which is largely dependent on the level of mutual pre-understanding (Allwood, 1984). As we have already discussed, the cultural mismatch and, therefore, certain level of misunderstanding can occur even if the immigrants have been living in Sweden for a long time and master the Swedish language very well, although a level of common pre-understanding between teachers and parents is higher in this circumstances. In this case the communication failure is based more on the clash of in-rooted values, believes and attitudes, rather than misunderstanding based on the wrong interpretation of the language codes. As a solution, to avoid this kind of misunderstandings, researchers

suggest high level of awareness of other cultures and potential risk of misunderstanding (Alwood, 1985). An educator should, therefore, be aware of pupils' and parent' cultural background and understand that consideration of the language barrier is not always enough for avoiding misunderstanding.

While the teachers, as any participants in intercultural encounters, should be aware of the possibility of cultural influences, it is important to also keep the main focus on similarities among cultures (Vedder, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Nickmans, 2006). Awareness of a potential cultural mismatch should not turn into cultivation of differences, as cooperation between parties becomes more difficult or even impossible once they are concerned only about divergence. Therefore, teachers have to build their relationship with families based on similarities and commonalities while being aware of possible misinterpretations on the base of different cultural backgrounds. Additionally, it is very important for educators to try to avoid stereotyping and prejudice.

Awareness of risk of communication failures between carriers of different cultural background goes together with the readiness to be more flexible and accepting toward others' values and beliefs. According to the researchers (Eberly, Joshi & Konzal, 2007) teachers' flexibility is one of the core elements in the process of building open and trusting relationships between school and families. Although the openness of the Swedish teachers toward parents' questions and dialogue with parents is showed in the results, it is not absolutely clear whether most of the teachers are flexible and understanding towards parents' worldviews. Even if the teachers present themselves as very open for understanding other's values and beliefs, it is hard to conclude basing only on the interview data if it is applied in practice. However, as one of the teachers (T1) showed relatively high level of non-flexibility toward some of the parent's beliefs (for example, reviling negative attitude towards parents' disagreements on some of the school practices, confidence in the own values and believes as professional and right ones), while admitting the importance of trusting and open relationships with the family. It can be suggested that some of the teachers might need to improve their flexibility for creating a stronger bound with parents and try to gain deeper understanding of their values and beliefs in order in order for building a solid ground for cooperation.

6.5   Similarities as ground for cooperation

As it was stated above, strong relationships between teachers and parents should be built on similarities, even though awareness of possible differences is necessary for avoiding potential misunderstanding or lack of the understanding. The similarities between parties can be constructed from the overlapping and matching values, beliefs and attitudes. Even when the participants are under strong influence of the different cultures and possess divergent patterns of thoughts and behavior, the common ground and similarities between them can always be defined. Both the interviewed teachers and the parents show an overwhelming individuality in their responses and display unique personal experiences, suggesting that there is a strong heterogeneity within the group of participants. Despite the heterogeneity, they share many similarities in attitudes and most of them go beyond culture. These similarities can though act as a "glue" affording communication and

cooperation between groups which without these similarities probably would experience more communication difficulties.

In general, the similarities, which are rather broad, shared by the teachers and parents are connected with their mutual interest and desire to improve and maintain the process of child development. Both parents and teachers aim to create the best environment for child development and well-being. All participants understand the importance of cooperation between school and parents as well as importance of the parental involvement and participation in the schooling of their children. This common goal could act as a platform for cooperation. The schooling process can be seen, in this case, as a boundary object, contrasted in its definition by the heterogeneous constellation being part of its organization (Star & Griesemer, 1989). By confirming that the schooling process is a boundary object the reason for acceptance and communication, despite heterogeneity and different worldviews, can be understood: the participants see the school's practices, teaching and learning methods in different ways but still they collectively strive for its efficiency and quality in relation to the child development, while possessing different views. If there is no acceptance or flexibility between teachers and parents toward each other's values, beliefs and attitudes regarding the schooling process and phenomenon related to it, and a single perspective is enforced on all participants of the interaction – cooperation and successful communication cannot take place.

7 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARH

This chapter presents a summed up answer to the research question and general overview of the main finding of the conducted study. In the end the suggestion for the further research and improvement are given

The main aim of this study is to analyze how the cultural background of parents with origins in Russia can influence their communication with teachers in the Swedish elementary school and preschool classes. In order to achieve the aim of the research the communication between Russian parents and teachers in the Swedish school as well as their perspectives on school practices, child-rearing, teaching and learning processes have been investigated through the empirical qualitative study.

The study has shown that there is no a universal script of cultural influence on communication between the parents and teachers. The combination of personal characteristics and particular circumstances greatly shape the degree to which the culture influences interaction between the school representatives and families. Among those characteristics can be occupation, education, the level proficiency in Swedish language, etc. While in some cases, the level of cultural influence can be minimal, in another it results in cultural mismatch.

Shaped by their cultural background, the Russian parents experience the following clashes in communication with the Swedish teachers: 1) Value of child's achievement and success 2) Learning outcomes as a priority vs social development as a priority; 3) The attitude toward evaluation and grades; 4) The attitude toward teacher's role and appearance. When cultural mismatch occurs the risk of the communication failure based on the misunderstanding or lack of the understanding occurs. Additionally, those parents who have faced cultural mismatch in the school of their children often feel dissatisfied with entire schooling system and teaching methods. In general, understanding of the potential areas of cultural clashes, as well as understanding of similarities, between educators and families can improve teacher-parent communication and relationships.

Those parents who are characterized with strong feeling of belonging to the Russian cultural group, have stronger influence of the cultural background on their perspectives and attitude toward schooling and child rearing. However, parent's identity is not necessary constructed on the dominance of the cultural belonging.

One of the central issues in relationships and, therefore, communication between teachers and parents is a trust. The degree of the trust determinates the strength of the link between school and families as well as success of their communication. The lack of trust easier appears when there is a clash of values and beliefs between educators and families. Those parents who displayed a high level of trust toward the teachers also revealed the general satisfaction with schooling practices and teaching methods as well as they have never experienced recognizable cultural mismatch with the Swedish teachers. On the contrary, the parents with severe lack of trust toward the school teachers possess signs of dissatisfaction and time to time face misunderstanding or disagreement based on the

cultural influence. Therefore, the higher level of trust between parents and teachers, the less damaging and recognizable an impact of different cultural backgrounds.

Another important component of communication between teachers and parents is the awareness of cultural differences. All respondents are generally shown as competent intercultural communicators, however, their awareness is limited to consideration of the language barriers and do not cover the area of deeper and more rooted cultural patterns. Additionally, the teachers expected to be relatively open toward interaction with parents and possess a certain degree of flexibility when they face values, beliefs and attitudes that differ from their own. However, the conducted research indicates that in some cases teachers should train more flexible and accepting attitude toward the parent's worldviews. This tactic would help in building better communication and cooperation between the groups, as it is important to strengthen the mutual acceptance between the parents and teachers of different worldviews in order to continuously enable intercultural communication in the school environment.

One of the main suggestions for the further research is to conduct similar study with parents and teachers who have experience of interaction with each other and connected through a child engaged in the schooling process. This will help to investigate the differences and similarities between teachers' and parents' worldviews regarding the same situation and give the opportunity of the close look on the particular cases of teacher-parents relationships.

While this study provides the deep analyses of the particular cases of communication between parents with Russian origin and teachers in the Swedish school it does not let to make generalization and limit the breadth of the research. Therefore, one the suggestion for the further research is conducting the empirical investigation of the phenomena using the mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches with larger number of sampling for the quantitative study. Additionally, it is not always clear if the responses of the participants reflect the reality in objective way and if they apply on practice their theoretical assumptions. Thus, the next step for this research could also include ethnographic studies based on the observation in the school settings.

As the Swedish society is very heterogeneous and a group of immigrants of Russian origins is only one ethnic group among many others existing in Sweden, the further research can be focused on others immigrant groups. It is also suggested to conduct a cross-cultural study where communication between Swedish teachers and few groups of parents with different cultural backgrounds would be compared and analyzed.

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