

# Interaction Between Home and School: The Views of Teachers and Parents from Finland and Russia<sup>1</sup>

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This study undertaken as part of the project AHIC (Addressing Challenging Health Inequalities of Children and Youth between two Karelias 2013-2014), aimed to explore the interaction between home and school from a cross-cultural perspective. The study sample comprised 60 parents and 18 teachers from two schools in North Karelia, Finland, and 154 parents and 51 teachers from two schools in the Republic of Karelia, Russia, in May 2013 using questionnaires. The results indicated that teachers on both sides of the border had quite similar views about the interaction between home and school. Parents' views, instead, differed more between the countries, since Finnish parents viewed the characteristics of home-school collaboration more positively than Russian parents did. Comparisons within the countries reveal that parents and teachers in both countries held several contradictory views about home-school collaboration, mainly in the areas of communication and parents' participation (Finland), and in the areas of parents' role and participation in the school community (Russia). The findings underline that in-service training for teachers is recommended to help them recognise the different characteristics for efficient home-school collaboration and include them into their everyday work. School procedures involving parents in the school community needs to be clarified.

*Keywords:* home-school interaction, parent, teacher, cross-cultural perspective.

## Introduction

The relationship between home and school and its core components have been under discussions for many decades (e.g., Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Mac Iver, Epstein, Sheldon & Fonseca, 2015; Swallow, 1957), at all school levels (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Deslandes & Barma, 2016; Hirsto, 2010; Zhao & Akiba, 2009), and in different countries and among different ethnic groups (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Wingard & Forsberg, 2009; Yahua, 2016; Zhao & Akiba, 2009). This relationship has been viewed from

different stakeholders' perspectives (Pyhältö, Pietarinen & Salmela-Aro, 2011; Sormunen, Tossavainen & Turunen, 2011; Stringer & Hourani, 2013; Yahua, 2016) and explored among typically performing pupils, or pupils with special needs (Dobbins & Abbott, 2010; Ollison-Floyd & Vernon-Dotson, 2009; Russell, 2008). In addition to the discipline of education, a variety of scientific fields have been interested in the characteristics and nuances of this relationship (e.g., Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004; Cox, 2005; Jarvis & Stark, 2005; Ozcinar & Ekizoglu, 2013). An ample amount of evidence reveals the advantages of strengthened collaboration between home and school, partnership, and parental involvement, and many ideas and improvements have been launched through such findings. However, it has been noticed that the knowledge collected does not easily transfer to daily practices, nor is it acknowledged equally among countries or cultures. For example, Finland, despite its success

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in international educational comparisons, is not a forerunner in terms of highly developed home-school collaboration infrastructure (Sormunen, Tossavainen & Turunen, 2011; 2013b). A neighboring country, the Russian Federation, has traditionally been strong in children's academic education, but no major emphasis has been placed on home-school interactions (Kosaretskii and Chernysova, 2013).

Finland is a Northern European country of approximately 5.5 million inhabitants. It is divided into 19 regions, of which the North Karelia is the sixth smallest with 164,755 inhabitants (Official Statistics of Finland, 2017). North Karelia is situated in the south-eastern part of Finland and has 296 kilometres of the common border with Russia, the Republic of Karelia. (Regional Council of North Karelia, 2016.) The Russian Federation is a country in Eastern Europe and North Asia with a population of 146.5 million people (Surinov et al. 2016). According to the Constitution, the Russian Federation is divided into 83 subjects, 46 of which are called "oblast," and 21, including Karelia, are republics. The population of the Republic of Karelia is approximately 629,900 people (Surinov et al. 2016). Both countries have an educational system where a child starts the comprehensive, compulsory school at the age 6 - 7, and continues it until the age of 16. Both countries also have highly educated teachers and a culture where education is valued.

In the present study, the phenomenon of home-school interaction will be investigated from the viewpoint of parents and teachers of primary school-aged children. The cross-cultural project AHIC (Addressing Challenging Health Inequalities of Children and Youth between two Karelias 2013-2014) aimed to promote the health and wellbeing of children and adolescents and to influence differences in health in the long-term between North Karelia, Finland, and in the Republic of Karelia, Russia. The project included multiple data collection points from pupils, their parents, teachers and school nurses. Based on the findings, the intervention activities were spread to four participating schools and results disseminated nationally and internationally. North Karelia and the Republic of Karelia were selected as target areas to find out some possible cultural nuances. These two areas have a long-lasting collaboration, and an opportunity to exchange knowledge and good practices between the two neighbour countries.

### **Finnish and Russian education systems**

Compulsory education starts in Finland the year the child reaches 7 years of age. The duration of basic education is 9 years, and 93% of those completing basic education continue their studies at the upper secondary level (OKM, 2014). Comprehensive schools can be situated either under one administration (integrated comprehensive schools including grades 1-9) or in separate schools, usually divided into lower grades 1-6 (elementary or primary school) and upper grades 7-9 (middle school or lower secondary school). Private schools are rare, less than 3% of compulsory education-aged pupils study in one.

Finland has a national curriculum for basic education, which is compulsory and guides the education process (FNBE, 2014). Teachers in comprehensive schools are either classroom teachers (grades 1-6), or subject teachers (grades 7-9), both having a minimum of a Master's degree (university degree in higher education) in Education. There are also other specialists working at schools, such as school health nurses, school psychologists, social workers, and special needs assistants.

Public education in Russia is compulsory for a child from the age 6 - 7. Comprehensive schools, as a rule, have united organisation for grades 1 to 11 (grades 1 to 4 are elementary general education, grades 5 to 9 are secondary general education, and grades 10 to 11 are secondary (complete) general education). However, educational institutions can be divided into the following types according to their educational purposes: grammar school (an educational institution with a deeper approach to basic subjects), with the period of education from 1st to 11th grade, and lyceums (an educational institution with a focus on a particular subject and an agreement with an institution of higher education), with the period of education from 5th to 11th grade. Over 64% of Karelian students who finished basic general education continue it in higher forms of secondary school, lyceums or secondary professional education institutions (colleges, training and technical schools). There are also non-state educational institutions in Russia and Karelia.

Teachers of Russian comprehensive schools have diplomas as teachers or educators (if they have university degrees in higher education) and can be either elementary school teachers (grades 1 to 4) or subject teachers (grades 5 to 11). There can be psychologists and social care teachers in

schools if principals decide to employ them. There are curricula that correspond to the existing requirements for educating and teaching (federal-state programs).

### **Home-school collaboration in Finland and in Russia**

Traditionally, *Finnish* teachers have had a great degree of independence in their profession (Tirri, 2014). They have been highly valued professionals with vast responsibility for the academic development of their pupils, and parents have been genuinely pleased with the school's share of the role in educating their children. Gradually, as parents' level of education has risen, among other changes in society, their interests regarding their children's academic attainment have also risen. This has placed parents and teachers in a new situation in terms of their relationship. Similar observations related to parents' changed position have been made in other Nordic countries (Bæck, 2015). In recent years, issues related to the home-school collaboration have led to critical discussions in Finland among policymakers, educators, the media, and parents, who all look at the same phenomenon from their own viewpoints. The weekly time available for home-school collaboration is defined in the Finnish municipal collective agreement for teachers as three hours a week in comprehensive schools, including also other duties (KT, 2017). According to the recently revised National Core Curriculum of Basic Education (FNBE, 2014), parents/caregivers are offered opportunities to familiarize themselves with school environments and to participate in planning, evaluation, and development of school activities and child development aims together with school personnel and pupils. The curriculum points out that collaboration between home and school increases the wellbeing and safety of pupils, classes, and the whole school community (FNBE, 2014). Still, variety of methods and practical solutions are needed to engage the parents in their children's educational processes effectively (Oinas, Vainikainen & Hotulainen, 2017; Sormunen, Tossavainen & Turunen, 2011).

According to the Finnish Ethical Advisory Board of Education (OAJ, 2007), a part of teachers' professional skills is getting parents to support their children's learning. Schools' role in building home-school collaboration has been recognized as essential (FNBE, 2014), and similarly to what Anderson & Minke (2007) indicate, teachers in particular have a big role in building parent

involvement. Teacher education and supplementary education, however, do not currently meet the needs of teachers in terms of learning about teacher-parent interaction, or, more generally, about home-school collaboration (Pyhältö et al., 2011; Sormunen, Tossavainen & Turunen, 2011). Additionally, a clear structure for developing and maintaining collaboration in school curricula is rare, reflecting the need for developmental work (Rutonen, 2010).

Over the last decade of the 20th century and in the beginning of the 21st century, scholars have been faced with the growing interest in the issue of the culture of home-school interaction *in Russia*. When analyzing the development of relationships between home and school in contemporary circumstances among the experience of the past, scholars approach the issue of home-school interaction at the level of interaction of social institutions of child development in the interests of preserving the health and well-being of children and shaping a child's interests with regard to their age. (The Constitution of the Russian Federation, 1993; Family Code of the Russian Federation, 1995; Russian Federation, 2012.)

In the circumstances of a modern Russian school, a new organisational structure that pays special attention to the 'organisational culture' of a school as a basis for the culture of home-school interaction is rapidly developing. The concept of the federal special-purpose programme of development of education for 2011 – 2015 defines the role of education and thus, of each educational institution in solving the problems of socioeconomic development of Russia, which persists in creating the conditions for raising and creating human capital. Family issues have also been touched upon in the following state documents: Education Act, the law "Of the basic guarantees of the rights of children in the Russian Federation," the Presidential decree "On additional measures of support of educational institutions in Russia," the Russian Government decree "On the adoption of the preliminary regulation on the board of guardians of a general education institution," the laws "Of public associations" and "On charity work in charitable institutions" (The Constitution of the Russian Federation, 1993; Family Code of the Russian Federation, 1995; Russian Federation, 2012; The Russian Federation Law on Charitable Activities and Charity Organizations, 1995; The Russian Federation Law on Public Associations, 1995). The scale of

partnership is of equitable conditions achieved through group forms of interaction of parents and teachers, not only via parents' associations but also via parents' groups that organise congresses, associations, societies, assemblies, presidiums, clubs etc. (Eliseeva 2008; Russian Federation, 2012). Such associations have their own regulations that are in compliance with the regulations of the state and an educational institution as well as remuneration. Educational enlightening remains one of the main goals of a parents' association, which provides for partnership, psychological comfort of students, their creative fulfilment, identification and satisfaction in the interests of both sides. The central focus of this work is deep respect for one's personality. (Eliseeva, 2008; Kevlya, 2003; Stepanov, 2006.)

### **Aim and objectives**

The aim of the present study was to examine the views of parents and teachers about interactions between home and school in Finland and Russia. The following research questions were addressed:

1. How do teachers describe the interaction between home and school in Finland and in Russia?
2. How do parents describe the interaction between home and school in Finland and in Russia?
3. How do parents and teachers inside the countries differ in their views about interaction between home and school?

### **Method**

#### *Setting and participants*

Two Finnish schools in North Karelia and two Russian schools in the Republic of Karelia participated in the study. Finnish schools had class grades from 1 to 6, while Russian schools had class grades from 1 to 11 and from 5 to 11. Participants included fifth-grade pupils' (aged 10-11 years) parents (n=214) and schoolteachers of lower grades (n=69). The schools were selected by purposive sampling. The schools' principals and head of the education sector in municipalities were contacted for schools' participation in the study. Finnish participants were informed of the study via e-mails and letters, while Russian participants got additional information through teacher meetings and parent meetings.

#### *Instrument*

The questionnaires used were derived from a school health intervention, which was executed in Eastern Finland from 2008-2010. In addition to previous studies and questionnaires (e.g., Epstein, Salinas & Connors, 1993; Cox, 2005; Poutanen, Lahti, Tolvanen & Hausen, 2006), national documents related to the study topic (e.g., FNBE, 2004; FNBE & Finnish Parents' League 2007) guided the questionnaire development process, and the content validity was confirmed by a pilot study protocol. (Sormunen, Tossavainen & Turunen, 2013a; 2013b.) The questionnaires were first translated from Finnish to Russian, and then back to Finnish. After this, the international research team met in Petrozavodsk, Russia, and went through the questionnaires from question to question. Cultural issues were discussed and clarified during the translation process. After mutual agreement on questionnaire content and form, the pilot tests were executed in Finland (parents n=12, teachers n=10) and in Russia (parents n=37, teachers n=31). Minor revisions were made to questionnaires after the pilot study.

In addition to the background questions, the teachers' and parents' questionnaires were structured by four main themes: 1) *home-school collaboration* (14 five-point Likert-scale items; "totally agree-totally disagree"; two items in the scale were "yes-no-I do not know / partially yes"), 2) *health learning and guidance, and health collaboration* (13 five-point Likert-scale items; "totally agree-totally disagree" and three items in the scale "yes-no-partially yes"), 3) *health worries* (two items with closed options and open space for answers), and 4) *health guidance tasks between home and school* (19 items with a continuous scale from "task of school – task of home" and open space for specifying if it is someone else's task). Twelve variables that were common for teachers and parents from theme 1 were selected for further examination in this article.

#### *Data collection*

The *parents' data* were collected in May 2013. In Finland, the pupils delivered the questionnaires to their parents in envelopes; one questionnaire per parent. After completing the questionnaire, their child brought the form(s) back to school in a sealed envelope, and one teacher sent the forms to the Finnish research group. In Russia, the parents received the questionnaires at school at parents' evening, and the absent parents through their child. Parents filled in the questionnaires at

home, after which their child returned the completed questionnaires to school in sealed envelopes. The research group members in Finland received all Russian parents' responses when the Russian research group members visited Finland at the end of May 2013.

The *teachers' data* were also collected in May 2013. In Finland, the researcher took the questionnaires to both schools, where the teachers completed them individually within two weeks, put them in a sealed envelope and sent all forms to the Finnish research group in one big envelope. In Russia, the teachers completed the questionnaires in joint teacher meetings in both schools, which were organised by the research group and the school. Researchers took the completed forms to Finland. All data are saved and stored at the University of Eastern Finland.

#### *Data analysis*

All computations were performed with the statistical software SPSS (version 19). In the parental data, the background variable gender ("mother," "father," "caregiver") was summed up into two classes ("mother" and "father"), embedding caregivers (one respondent in Finland, seven in Russia) in either group based on their gender. It was considered reasonable to embed caregivers, because the aim was not to determine the difference between biological and non-biological parents.

The data were first analysed using one-way analysis of variance with Tukey-Kramer multiple-comparison test. P-values <.05 were considered statistically significant. For means, a five-point Likert scale was converted as -1.00 to +1.00, and further described as: -1.00 full disagreement, 0.00 neutral attitude, and +1.00 full agreement. Exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring was used to identify the factor structure, which was determined by Eigen, values greater than or equal to 1. Variables exceeding values 0.4 were included in the analysis. The factors were labelled according to areas of home-school interaction, and further used in two-way analysis of variance to explore the impact of country (Finland/Russia) and respondent group (teachers/parents) on each factor.

## **Results**

### *Sample characteristics*

One hundred and four (104) Finnish parents received the questionnaire, resulting in a 58% response rate (n=60). In Russia, 247 parents received the questionnaires, with a 62% response rate (n=154). In both countries, more mothers than fathers participated in the study. Most parents were born in the 1970s, although almost one-third of Finnish parents were born in the 1960s compared to Russian parents (14.8%). Russian parents were more highly educated than Finnish parents (Table 1).

Twenty-five teachers in Finland and fifty-one teachers in Russia received the questionnaires. The response rate of the Finnish teachers was 72% (n=18) and was 100% (n=51) for the Russian teachers. The majority of the teachers in both countries were females, had over 20 years' experience as teachers, and had no in-service training about issues related to home-school collaboration. Most Finnish teachers were born in the 1960s while Russian teachers were more evenly distributed over several decades. All teachers had a higher education degree.

### *Teachers' views about interaction between home and school in Finland and in Russia*

Teachers on both sides of the border agreed that they aim to discuss with parents in an understandable way, are willing to invite parents to the school to participate in their child's school day and also at other times, and that it is easy for parents to talk with the teachers (Table 2). Furthermore, many teachers either disagreed or were not sure, if parents gladly participated in school events, or if children were welcome to parents' events at school. Nearly 30% of Finnish teachers and 20% of Russian teachers indicated that they do not contact homes regularly.

A one-way analysis of variance revealed only one statistically significant difference between the teacher groups. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey-Kramer test revealed that Finnish teachers less frequently thought that their school had clear signage compared to their Russian counterparts. The actual difference between the groups with remaining variables was quite small, indicating that teachers in Finland and in Russia had quite similar views regarding the elements of collaboration between home and school (Table 3).

*Table 1.*  
Background characteristics of parents and teachers

Variable	Parents			Teachers		
	Finland (N=60) N (%)	Russia (N=154) N (%)	Total %	Finland (N=18) N (%)	Russia (N=51) N (%)	Total %
Gender						
Male	26(43.3)	57(38.5)	40.9	5(27.8)	2(4.0)	15.9
Female	34(56.7)	91(61.5)	59.1	13(72.2)	48(96.0)	84.1
Year of birth (decade)						
1940	1(1.7)	1(0.7)	1.2	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0.0
1950	3(5.1)	1(0.7)	2.9	4(23.5)	11(22.0)	22.8
1960	18(30.5)	22(14.8)	22.7	10(58.8)	17(34.0)	46.4
1970	31(52.5)	101(67.8)	60.1	3(17.7)	12(24.0)	20.8
1980	6(10.2)	24(16.1)	13.1	0(0.0)	9(18.0)	9.0
1990	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0.0	0(0.0)	1(2.0)	1.0
Education						
Basic education	2(3.3)	9(6.0)	4.7	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0.0
Secondary education	34(56.7)	56(37.3)	47.0	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0.0
Tertiary education	24(40.0)	85(56.7)	48.3	18(100.0)	51(100.0)	100.0
Continuous education (home-school collaboration)						
Yes	-	-	-	4(23.5)	6(14.6)	19.0
No				13(76.5)	35(85.4)	81.0
Teacher experience						
Less than 2 years				1(5.9)	3(6.5)	6.2
2-5 years	-	-	-	0(0.0)	6(13.0)	6.5
> 5 years, < 20 years				5(29.4)	8(17.4)	23.4
20 years or over				11(64.7)	29(63.0)	63.9

*Parents' views about interaction between home and school in Finland and in Russia*

Parents' views were more diverse than teachers' views. Parents on both sides of the border agreed that the school organises enough events, and that it is easy to discuss with the teacher. Parents were equally not sure or disagreed regarding whether their children were welcomed to parents' events and many parents were not able to tell if the teacher had invited them to school at other times than parents' evenings. Russian parents had unclear views about whether teachers had encouraged parents to take an active role in the school community, or if parents are even welcome to go to school. Finnish parents, in turn, were not able to indicate whether the teachers' language is understandable while discussing issues with them (Table 2).

Several statistically significant differences were found between the parent groups. Finnish parents were more critical about the clarity of school signs, felt more welcome at school, were more positive in participating in their child's school day, and indicated that their teacher welcomed parents to the schools more often than their Russian counterparts. Moreover, they were more at ease contacting school with problems or questions and were happier participating in school events. The actual difference between the groups with remaining variables was average, indicating that

there was some variation in parents' responses when comparing countries (Table 4).

*Differences between parents and teachers inside the countries: interaction between home and school*

Inside both countries, a few statistically significant differences were found: compared to Finnish teachers, all of whom were positive towards the idea of parents' participation in the school day, Finnish parents were less eager to participate in their own child's school day ( $p < .05$ ). Parents were also less positive than teachers regarding whether the teacher discusses issues with them in an understandable way ( $p < .05$ ). Generally both parents and teachers were unsure about whether the families' children are allowed to participate in the parents' evenings, agreed that the school signage was not very clear, and were positive about the issue that discussion between parent and teacher is easy.

Russian parents considered the school signs less clear ( $p < .001$ ), were less eager to participate in their own child's school day ( $p < .001$ ) and were less positive about the statement that teachers have encouraged parents to take an active role in the school community ( $p < .001$ ) than were Russian teachers. Parents and teachers equally agreed that parents' do not participate very gladly in school events, were both quite positive about the

issue that discussion between parent and teacher is easy, and both agreed that teachers had invited parents to the school at times other than parents' evenings.

Figure 1 presents a comparison of the views and experiences of respondents in both countries. On a scale of -1 to +1, no responses were situated below 0, indicating that all views were positively weighted. A few variables, for example, related to

teachers' views of their clear language, reached a value of +0.67, which can be interpreted as a very strong positive agreement. Controversially, few variables, for example, related to parents' participation in school events, remained near a value of 0, indicating a neutral attitude. No variables reached strong agreement within all respondent groups.

*Table 2.*  
Teachers and parents' views about home-school interaction (%)

	Teachers' views			Parents' views		
	FI (N=18) %	RU (N=51) %	Total (N=69) %	FI (N=60) %	RU (N=154) %	Total (N=214) %
<i>There is clear signage at the school area</i>						
Agree	77.8	100.0	88.9	64.4	86.9	75.7
Cannot say	0.0	0.0	0.0	18.6	9.8	14.2
Disagree	22.2	0.0	11.1	17.0	3.3	10.1
<i>Parents readily contact school with problems or questions</i>						
Agree	83.3	88.2	85.8	96.6	81.6	89.1
Cannot say	16.7	9.8	13.2	3.4	11.2	7.3
Disagree	0.0	2.0	1.0	0.0	7.2	3.6
<i>Parents are encouraged to take an active role in the school community</i>						
Agree	83.3	88.2	85.8	78.0	59.9	68.9
Cannot say	11.1	9.8	10.4	11.9	30.3	21.1
Disagree	5.6	2.0	3.8	10.1	9.9	10.0
<i>Parents are welcomed at the school</i>						
Agree	88.9	80.0	84.5	96.6	68.6	82.6
Cannot say	11.1	14.0	12.5	3.4	23.5	13.5
Disagree	0.0	6.0	3.0	0.0	7.8	3.9
<i>Families' children are welcome to events for parents</i>						
Agree	55.6	68.6	62.1	44.0	58.8	51.4
Cannot say	5.6	19.6	12.6	40.7	24.2	32.5
Disagree	38.9	11.8	25.3	15.3	17.0	16.1
<i>The school organises enough events for parents</i>						
Agree	72.2	88.2	80.2	93.2	85.0	89.1
Cannot say	5.6	5.9	5.8	5.1	5.2	5.2
Disagree	22.2	5.9	14.0	1.7	9.8	5.7
<i>Parents gladly participate in school events</i>						
Agree	61.1	45.1	53.1	72.9	49.7	61.3
Cannot say	11.1	33.3	22.2	16.9	24.5	20.7
Disagree	27.8	21.6	24.7	10.2	25.8	18.0
<i>It is easy for the parents to discuss with the teacher</i>						
Agree	88.9	90.2	89.6	86.2	84.9	85.5
Cannot say	11.1	7.8	9.4	13.8	9.2	11.5
Disagree	0.0	2.0	1.0	0.0	5.9	3.0
<i>Teacher tells about school work in an understandable way</i>						
Agree	88.9	100.0	94.4	76.3	86.9	81.6
Cannot say	11.1	0.0	5.6	20.3	7.8	14.1
Disagree	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.4	5.2	4.3
<i>Parents could sometimes participate in their child's school day</i>						
Agree	100.0	88.2	94.1	61.0	50.7	55.9
Cannot say	0.0	7.8	3.9	25.4	23.7	24.4
Disagree	0.0	3.9	2.0	13.6	25.7	19.7
<i>Teacher contacts homes regularly</i>						
Agree	72.2	74.0	73.1	69.5	74.8	72.1
Cannot say	0.0	6.0	3.0	20.3	13.2	16.8
Disagree	27.8	20.0	23.9	10.2	11.9	11.1
<i>Teacher has invited parents to the school at other times than just parents' evenings</i>						
Agree	88.9	94.1	91.5	57.6	78.4	68.0
Cannot say	11.1	2.0	6.5	27.1	20.3	23.7
Disagree	0.0	3.9	2.0	15.3	1.3	8.3

Table 3.

Finnish and Russian teachers' views about home-school interaction (Means and standard deviations) and the differences between the teacher groups (*p*)

	Finnish teachers			Russian teachers			<i>p</i> *
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
There is clear signage at the school area	18	0.47	0.58	50	0.94	0.16	<.001
Parents are welcomed at the school	18	0.69	0.35	50	0.55	0.43	ns
Families' children are welcome to events for parents	18	0.19	0.75	51	0.44	0.53	ns
I could sometimes ask parents to participate in their child's school day	17	0.76	0.26	51	0.61	0.42	ns
I contact all the homes regularly	18	0.31	0.62	50	0.37	0.50	ns
I aim to tell about school work in an understandable way	18	0.86	0.33	51	0.79	0.25	ns
I have invited parents to the school at other times than just parents' evenings	18	0.64	0.48	51	0.77	0.36	ns
Parents are encouraged to take an active role in the school community	18	0.44	0.34	51	0.68	0.37	ns
Parents readily contact school with problems or questions	18	0.50	0.30	51	0.67	0.37	ns
The school organizes enough events for parents	18	0.56	0.64	51	0.66	0.42	ns
It is easy for the parents to discuss with me	18	0.75	0.35	51	0.59	0.33	ns
Parents seem happy to participate in school events	18	0.22	0.60	51	0.15	0.47	ns

\* Tukey-Kramer, ns = non-significant

Table 4.

Finnish and Russian parents' views about home-school interaction (Means and standard deviations) and the differences between the parent groups (*p*)

	Finnish parents			Russian parents			<i>p</i> *
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
There is clear signage at the school area	59	0.33	0.49	153	0.67	0.39	<.001
I feel welcome at my child's school	58	0.86	0.26	153	0.42	0.47	<.001
Our children are welcome to parents' events	59	0.24	0.51	153	0.31	0.57	ns
I could sometimes participate in my child's school day	59	0.34	0.55	152	0.16	0.56	<.05
The teacher contacts home / us regularly	59	0.47	0.52	151	0.50	0.56	ns
Teacher tells about schoolwork –related issues in an understandable way	59	0.56	0.43	153	0.67	0.43	ns
Teacher has invited parents to the school at other times than just parents' evenings	59	0.35	0.59	153	0.62	0.42	<.001
Parents are encouraged to take an active role in the school community	59	0.46	0.44	152	0.39	0.51	ns
It is easy to contact the school with problems or questions	59	0.77	0.28	152	0.56	0.48	<.01
The school organizes enough events for parents	59	0.74	0.34	153	0.59	0.49	ns
It is easy to discuss issues with the teacher	58	0.76	0.37	152	0.64	0.45	ns
I gladly participate in the school's events	59	0.47	0.47	151	0.15	0.54	<.001

\*Tukey-Kramer, ns = non-significant

Exploratory factor analysis suggested retention of three factors. The factors include 9 variables of 12, and two of the three factors had Cronbach's alphas greater than 0.70 (0.78 and 0.73; explained variance 54%), and thus, were further examined. The first factor was named as "Teacher Activity," and included four variables: teacher contacts home / parents regularly; teacher discusses school work related issues in an understandable way; teacher has invited parents to the school at times other than just parents' evenings; and it is easy to discuss with the teacher. The second factor was named as "Parent Inclusion," and included three variables: it is easy to contact the school with problems or questions; I feel welcomed in my child's school; and parents are encouraged to take an active role in the school

community. Based on a two-way analysis of variance with these factors, statistical significance was reached with the factor "Parent Inclusion." The interaction effect ( $p=.003$ ) indicated that the differences in the attitudes of parents and teachers were not similar in the two countries. The means of these respondent groups were: 0.71 FI parents, 0.55 FI teachers, 0.45 RU parents and 0.63 RU teachers. That is, in Finland the attitudes of parents were more positive whereas in Russia, the attitudes of teachers were more positive. Also notable is that the variances between Finnish and Russian teachers and Finnish parents were equal, but unequal with Russian parents, showing that their responses were much more dispersed (Table 5).



Table 5.  
Factor solution of home-school collaboration

Item	Factor loadings		h <sup>2</sup>
	1	2	
<b>Teacher activity (α=0.78)</b>			
Teacher contacts home / us regularly		.75	.64
Teacher tells about school work in an understandable way		.74	.59
Teacher has invited parents to the school at other times than just for parents' evenings		.59	.39
It is easy to discuss with the teacher		.53	.44
<b>Parent inclusion (α=0.73)</b>			
It is easy to contact the school with problems or questions			.78
I feel welcome in my child's school			.65
Parents are encouraged to take an active role in the school community			.52
% of variance explained (overall, 54.17)	40.20	13.98	

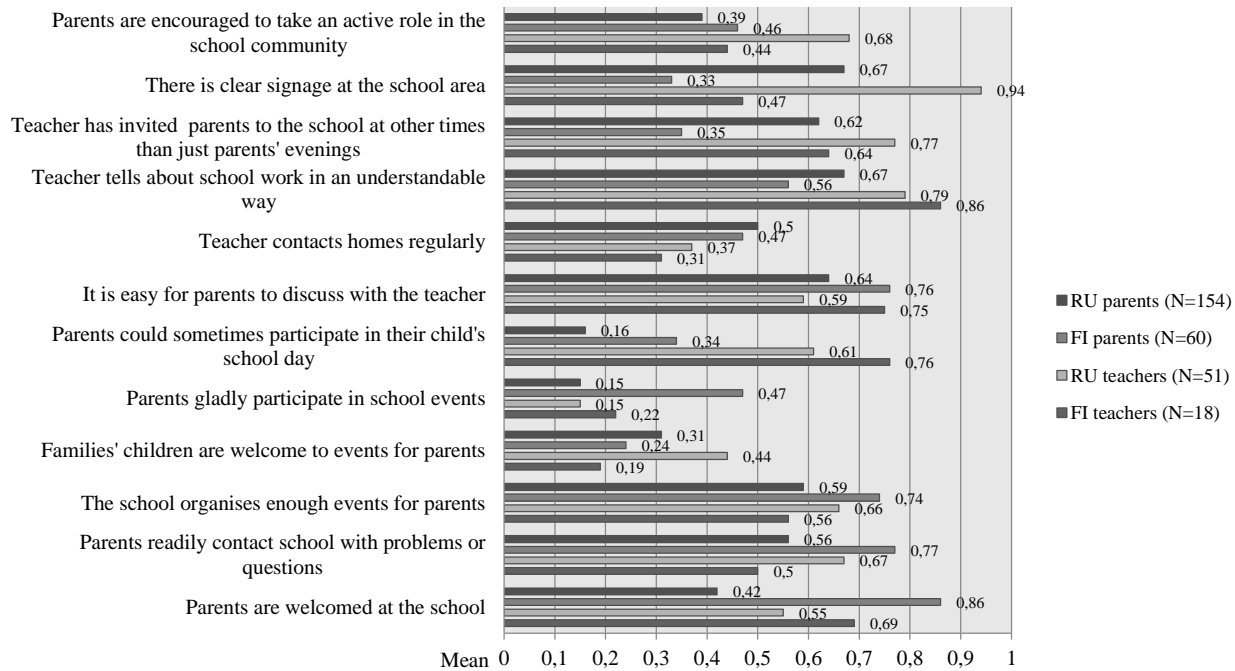


Figure 1.  
Finnish and Russian teachers and parents' views about home-school interaction (Means; -1.00 full disagreement, 0.00 neutral attitude, and +1.00 full agreement).

**Discussion**

According to the findings, Finnish and Russian teachers had quite similar views about interactions between home and school. Most of them invited parents to the school environment and thought that the communication between teachers and parents was successful, containing the elements of an understandable language and being easy for parents. Teachers also had similar views about the participation of smaller children in parents' events, and about parents' willingness to participate in school events.

Parent participation in school is a complex issue, depending on, for example, the school's ways to invite parents to the school community and keep them in close contact, even as the child moves to the upper grade. We already know many reasons why parents are not participating very eagerly at school events, such as, they do not know how they can be involved, or, they do not feel themselves welcome in the school (Young, Austin & Grove, 2013). These issues should be relatively easy to overcome, if the schools are willing to do so. For example, as previously mentioned, one way to increase parent

participation is to provide a possibility to take the families' smaller children to parents' events, or even provide childcare at school while parents and school personnel discuss issues together. Especially with the younger parents, as most of the Russian respondents were, this possibility to engage parents could be useful.

Teachers on both sides of the border also indicated that regular contact with homes was not actualised in every teachers' work. The regular teacher-parent contacts are, however, extremely important, and schools have the responsibility to initiate the collaboration (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Sormunen, Tossavainen & Turunen, 2011). The aim should be that teachers could be able to talk *with* parents, not only *to* parents (Symeou, Roussounidou & Michaelides, 2012, see also Oostdam & Hooge, 2013). Two-way communication includes not only teachers' notes to home but also parents should be encouraged to communicate actively with the school and be active in listening to the school and the child's needs (Young et al., 2013). As Symeou et al. (2012, p. 82) point out: "It is well-trained teachers' task to offer *all families* the proper types of information and to communicate this information in the most appropriate manner for each particular parent so that all parents depart from the school knowing what they need to do to support their child and how they can do it." Communication skills can and should be learned to enhance effective interaction between parents and teachers (Symeou et al., 2012; Young et al., 2013). Also notable are new methods of parent involvement using available technology developments. E-communication for example, illustrating the use of technical devices for interaction between parents and teachers, can be used in various ways. The most common forms of this are use of emails, schools' own e-programs allowing communication along with other information transfer, and text messaging via the mobile phone. More advanced methods are also available; for example, Ozcinar and Ekizoglu (2013) introduced a blog-based parent involvement approach (BPIA), which they found effective in supporting parent involvement, and especially improving home-school communication. In Finland, e-communication with parents is the daily work of teachers (Oinas et al., 2017), and teachers and parents are proficient users of technologies; in Russia, on the other hand, problems with connection quality, lack of time, lack of skills of teachers, and additional fees have

been reported as obstacles for teachers' use of the Internet. Also parents seem to prefer direct face-to-face contact than e-communication. However, the development of information technology is rapid in the Republic of Karelia, having the second highest use of the entire Russian population, indicating also that parents have access to the Internet, and communication channels with teachers are already available. (Kosaretskii & Chernysova, 2013.)

Contrary to teachers' congruent answers on both sides of the border, Finnish and Russian parents had more variation in terms of their views on home-school interaction. Generally, Finnish parents had more positive views towards school than their counterparts in Russia. This finding is interesting, and may reflect cultural differences, both generally, and related to education systems. According to Kosaretskii and Chernysova (2013), Russian teachers do not spend much time communicating with parents, whereas Finnish teachers' collaboration with homes is a considerable part of their daily work (Sormunen, Tossavainen & Turunen, 2011). In Finland, relationships between home and school have had quite a lot of media visibility recently both negative because of single unsuccessful incidents at school, but also positive visibility because of successful outcomes from developmental activities. Both of these aspects, may contribute to more intensive relationships between home and school. In this sample, it seems that parents were more positive than negative towards school.

When comparing responses *inside the countries*, several interesting findings were found. It seems that Finnish teachers tend to think that they communicate clearly with parents, while parents state the opposite. Easiness of conversation, however, was not questioned by either side, which is a good sign regarding the interaction. Teachers and parents both agreed that school signage was not very clear. Similar to Finnish parents and teachers, Russian parents indicated that school signage was not clear; all Russian teachers, instead, agreed about the clarity of signs. School environments as a whole can also contribute to the fact that parents' either are or are not feeling welcome to school events (Epstein, 2011).

Although teachers in this study almost unanimously agreed that they involve the home in children's educational processes, few enter their profession knowing how to develop an effective and rewarding home-school relationship. As

previous studies indicate (Sormunen, Tossavainen & Turunen, 2011; Symeou et al. 2012), training for home-school collaboration during teacher qualifying studies has been minimal. Therefore, starting work with parents when entering the school, had done been by mainly following the others' example. Most teachers in this study had over 20 years' experience in their profession, illustrating that many issues have also been changing in school procedures during their careers. Therefore, also in-service training covering issues of interacting with parents is needed. It is also essential to understand, as Young and others (2013) disclose, that successful parent-school partnerships are integrated with the school's overall mission, not simply discussed separately or implemented by separate programs.

In conclusion, teachers in North Karelia, Finland, and the Republic of Karelia, Russia, had similar views regarding home-school interaction. Their views towards reciprocal communication and parent participation were mostly positive, reflecting their own schools' policies and procedures, and their own practices as educators. Parents' views on both sides of the border were more diverse; Finnish parents were generally more positive towards the components of home-school interaction than Russian parents were. These findings may reflect the fact that teachers, as trained professionals, view issues through their professional "glasses", having a common ground, regardless of their cultural origin. Parents, in turn, have a different orientation, which may reflect the cultural traditions of raising children, the traditions and current practices of home-school collaboration, as well as visions of their children's academic success in their views. As Bæck (2015) concludes in her study, the relationship between parents and teachers could benefit from clarification of roles; discussion or their expectations of each other is much needed. This is

important now, but will be essential in the future, when Finland and the Russian Federation face increasing cultural diversity (see Tirri, 2014).

### Limitations

As this study is a part of a larger cross-border development project, the target population was selected beforehand. The results of the present study are therefore limited to a certain extent, and therefore may not reflect the entire population of parents and teachers of North Karelia and the Republic of Karelia. The findings, however, are important, since they have given a good starting point for developmental activities, which have been implemented in study schools. Not a limitation but a notable issue is that two questionnaires were delivered to children's homes in order to obtain responses from two caregivers, who were then treated as single persons (parents) in the data analysis. Hence, some families may have completed two questionnaires, some one questionnaire, and some none. Another limitation would be the fact that one (Russian) school was clearly larger than the three other schools. Since the schools were not examined separately, the results of Russian schools, therefore, may reflect the views and experiences of respondents of a bigger school. Furthermore, two cultures were examined and compared, and there are likely some differences in the educational system that may reflect the responses. Finally, the survey instruments, whilst tested and used previously, and developed further for this study by collaborative work of experts from both countries, may contain some questions that were not fully adaptable in both cultures. Validating the questionnaires with additional interviews would be recommended, especially in multicultural research projects.

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