

Migrant children in education

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SUMMARY

Migration is undoubtedly a hot topic internationally but debates rarely focus on the impact and experience of migration on education. My research in this area has examined the changing ethnic and demographic profile in schools in Ireland over the past fifteen years. A core focus has been identifying policies and practices in schools in newly multi-ethnic contexts, and the challenges and opportunities that arise from rapid social and cultural change. A specialist focus has been exploring these issues through the lens of children's voices, highlighting dynamics of inclusion/exclusion, power and in/equalities as migrant children traverse between home/community and school. In addition my work has explored how teaching and leadership practices evolve in newly multi-ethnic contexts, and the wider impact of increasing ethnic diversity in a predominantly (Catholic) faith-based state funded education system.

This research examined the impact of the changing ethnic and demographic profile in schools in Ireland over the past fifteen years.



DESCRIPTION

Much of the research into ethnicity and schooling has emerged in countries with a long history of immigration. Such research consistently highlights the relative under-performance of migrant children into the second and third generation in schools. My research is part of a growing interest internationally on research in newly multi-ethnic societies, as well as research that prioritise the role of children, as key social actors in society. Most recently I have built on this through research with migrant children in schools in New York.

Drawing predominantly on ethnographic and micro-analysis of the life worlds of children in schools, I have explored the meanings which children attach to their experiences and how this contributes to their evolving identities and their position as learners, and as persons of value in the education system. Through a deep analysis of how migrant children experience their friendships, teaching and learning, I have shown how the foundations for inequalities and differences in learning are reinforced through practices of misrecognition in schools.



DESCRIPTION contd.

The research also documents the resilience and determination of migrant children and the differing resources that they and their parents bring that mediate their capacity to navigate the Irish education system. It also highlights children's key role in the settlement of immigrant families in society.

Combined with similar in-depth analysis of the perspectives and practices of parents, teachers and school leaders, this research highlights the central role of education in wider processes of inclusion/exclusion, and the re/production of inequalities in society. Some of these issues are currently at play in debates over school patronage and the structural segregation of children on the basis of faith in schools. This connects to wider state policy and the role of the state in safeguarding the rights of all children in education, independent of ethnic, social and faith backgrounds.

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DETAILS OF THE IMPACT

At policy level I have worked with the Department of Education and Skills on their Strategy for Interculturalism, and with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, as well as the Immigrant Council of Ireland and the Children's Rights Alliance. I am a Ministerial nominee to the National Children's Advisory Council, which is advising on the implementation of the national strategy for children from 2015 - 2020: 'Better Outcomes - Brighter Futures'. My work with the Immigrant Council of Ireland contributed to the development of a Toolkit for Schools to support immigrant parental involvement in their children's schooling. The project was funded by the European Programme for Integration of Migrants (EPIM). The toolkit was circulated to schools throughout Ireland in 2011 to be used as a resource by them in facilitating the integration of immigrant parents into school life. I have been invited to seminars and conferences including the Educational Studies Association of Ireland and the English Language Support Teacher's Association.

Internationally this work has been presented at conferences including the American Education Research Association, the European Conference of Education Research, European Sociological Association and British Education Research Association. Most recently, I have been invited by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences to speak at a symposium "Learning for the newly arrived" in May 2016. The work has been published in international journals, including as guest editor for special issues in the journal 'Children & Society' entitled 'Children and value - education in neo-liberal times' and in the journal Irish Educational Studies entitled 'Race, Migration and Education in a globalised context'.

Informing public and media debate

This work has critically informed public debate as well as the work of advocacy groups and NGOs, including the Immigrant Council of Ireland and the Children's Rights Alliance. It includes reporting findings in The Irish Times (February 2008, April 2011, February 2015, August 2015) and in the Irish Examiner (August 2015) focusing on issues related to racism in schools, ethnic segregation in schools and how schools can be inclusive and respectful of children from immigrant backgrounds. Examples include headline pieces such as 'Concern school divestment policy causing ethnic segregation' (The Irish Times, February 2015) and opinion pieces including: 'Schools must not segregate by choice of faith' (August 2011); 'Education must be at the heart of the debate on immigration' (The Irish Times, February 2008) and 'The austerity generation: it's a perilous time to be a child in Ireland' (The Irish Times, March 2015).

I have also been interviewed on The Pat Kenny Show (RTE Radio 1) and The George Hook Show (Newstalk).

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