

STELLA STRZEMECKA
Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Poland*

SCHOOL INTEGRATION IN THE EYES OF MIGRANT CHILDREN. BASED ON THE POLISH MIGRATION TO NORWAY¹

Abstract

In the context of the contemporary wave of migration from Poland to Norway and the growing interest in research on child migrants, this article focuses on children's experiences, their opinions, and the practices by which Polish migrant children growing up in Norway engage in school life in their receiving country. School integration is examined through 32 semi-structured interviews with the children aged 6 to 13, born in Poland and living permanently in Norway. In this article, migrant children are treated as experts on their school integration. Such an approach will help us to better understand their needs, and thus to develop an appropriate educational policy in Norway based on migrant children's experiences and their opinions about their school life. The aim of this article's is to fill the knowledge gap pertaining to the integration of Polish children in Norway, seen from the missing perspective of the children themselves. The argumentation is based on the assumption that Polish children in Norway are "temporarily visible". When a migrant child does not manage to adapt to the school environment, regardless of the support he or she receives

* Institute of Sociology, e-mail: stella.strzemecka@uj.edu.pl.

¹ Empirically, the article is based on the Work Package 5 study: *Children's experience of growing up transnationally*, conducted under the auspices of *Transfam* project titled *Doing family in transnational context. Demographic choices, welfare adaptations, school integration and every-day life of Polish families living in Polish-Norwegian transnationality*. The research leading to these results received funding from the Polish-Norwegian Research Programme operated by the National Centre for Research and Development under the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014, within the framework of Project Contract No Pol-Nor/197905/4/2013.

from school, family and peers, then the costs of inclusion and integration increase and the difficulties multiply.

Key words: children, migration, school integration, research with children, Poles in Norway

INTRODUCING RESEARCH ON POLISH MIGRANT CHILDREN²

The sociological framework of migration entails a change of social environment (Biernath 2008:192), which has both a dark and a bright side (Nowicka 2011). For a child, migration is a turning point from his or her life-course perspective (Wingens et al. 2001) and constitutes an event that allows for gaining unique knowledge and experiences which would otherwise be unavailable (Gober 1993). Regardless of the weighing of costs and gains incurred by a child in a migration process (Burchinal & Bauder 1965), it must be underscored that it was only at the end of the 20th century that we witnessed an increased interest in migrating children. The shift has taken place as a consequence of the paradigmatic change in sociology of childhood (e.g. James et al. 1998)³.

As a result, the number of studies treating child migrants as significant social actors has increased. Contemporary literature has started to adapt a more ‘child-centred approach’, giving voice to Polish children’s own notions of mobility, family and school, as well as emphasizing children’s agency (e.g. Ni Laoire et al. 2011, Moskal 2014, Sime & Fox 2014, Pustulka, Ślusarczyk & Strzemecka 2015, Slany & Strzemecka 2015).

Norway has for many recent years occupied top places in most ranking listing the best, richest, happiest, or most prosperous country in the world (e.g. LI 2014). One of the reasons for its high ranking is its model of socio-economic policy (Aniol 2009). The main features of the Norwegian model – classified by Gøsta Esping-Andersen (e.g. 1990) as a social democratic model – is a developed social policy, in particular its social security system. This is important in the migrant family context, as settled foreigners may make use of the extensive support system, for

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³ Under “the new sociology of childhood”, children are treated as active subjects, capable of having and expressing their own opinions and views on their private realm (e.g. family) and public lives (e.g. school) (e.g. Ni Laoire et al. 2011).

instance the *child benefit*. According to estimates, Poles form the largest group of immigrants living in the Kingdom of Norway (91,000), followed by Swedes (37,000) and Lithuanians (35,000) (SSB 2015). Since 2007, work and family immigration have become the most common reasons for immigration (see also Iglicka & Gmaj 2014)⁴. It is worth noting that only 793 children of Polish origin lived in Norway in 2004, a number that grew significantly, to 5,939 in 2013 (Slany & Strzemecka 2015, forthcoming, cf. Dzamarija 2014: 35).

In general, school is recognized as a crucially important socialization environment for children, and this is particularly true for children with a migration experience (Reynolds 2008; Nowicka 2011). A review of the sociological literature shows that the issue of school integration seen from the perspective of Polish migrant children is a topic rarely covered in the research. Especially in the Norwegian context, there is a dearth of research dedicated to Polish children growing up there as migration research subjects (e.g. Pustulka, Ślusarczyk & Strzemecka 2015, Slany & Strzemecka 2015). The migrant family studies usually focus on children, but frequently through the lens of their parents (e.g. Ślusarczyk & Pustulka forthcoming), educational experts, as well as educational policy (e.g. Ślusarczyk & Nikielska-Sekuła 2014, Nikielska-Sekuła forthcoming). There are a number of reasons for this gap in the literature, i.e. (1) difficulty in accessing migrant children of an early age; (2) the need to keep strict ethical guidelines and obtaining parental as well as the child's consent; (3) the need to find a suitable place for conducting a study; (4) skills and knowledge about research methods appropriate for children are also important, not to mention the risks and psychological costs of a study; as well as, crucially, (5) in the Polish-Norwegian context it has become very popular nowadays to conduct a public discourse about Norwegian institutions, especially *the Child Welfare Service of Norway (Barnevernet)* (Bivand Erdal 2014). Many Polish migrants have trouble understanding and trusting the Norwegian state, which plays a strong and an important role for social integration in general, and more precisely, enters into the homes of residents through its institutions of

⁴ Polish immigrants have become the largest group of foreigners in this country over a relatively short period of time. The contemporary mobility of Polish citizens to Norway can be described as three waves of movement: (1) the political refugee in 1980s; (2) the seasonal worker in the 1990s, to the Polish family after Poland's accession to the EU in 2004, (3) Poland's accession to the EU and the European free movement of labour (Friborg et al. 2012).

support and control. In the eyes of parents, the Norwegian state may sometimes appear to play the role of a “family-policeman”⁵.

Research conducted by Norwegian researchers, for instance Randi Waerdahl (forthcoming), suggests that Polish children are relatively invisible in Norwegian schools (the term “invisible immigrant child” is sometimes employed). This is explained in part by the visible similarities, i.e. similar racial features and similar clothing – which make Polish children indistinguishable from their Norwegian peers. Waerdahl (*ibidem*) also notes the connection between the relative invisibility and a lack of statistical data on Polish children, which seem to be included and attempted to be integrated in a non-problematic way – “in the true spirit of Norwegian egalitarianism”. Waerdahl further argues that this obscuring of the differences and incorrect attribution of individual problems and challenges may impede Polish children’s opportunity structures and their ability to do well at school, as well as hinder trust between family and school realms⁶. Consequently, even if a child of Polish migrants is viewed as “invisible” by academics or teachers in their school or division, the child remains “visible” for himself or herself, needing to tackle migratory experiences that affect school performance and peer relationships.

The argumentation is based on the claim that Polish children in Norway are “temporarily visible”. When a migrant child does not manage to adapt to the school environment, regardless of the support he or she receives from school, family and peers, then the costs of inclusion and integration increase and difficulties multiply.

INTERSECTING MIGRATION AND EDUCATION IN NORWAY

Every child staying in Norway for a period longer than three months is allowed to partake in education. Children aged 1 to 5 can attend kindergartens (*barnehage*). Pre-school in Norway is organised on a voluntary and fee-paying basis. If parents

⁵ Some behaviors which are legally and culturally acceptable in the parent-child relation in Poland (e.g. public displays of emotions, a child’s crying or screaming) may be treated as an abuse of children’s rights in Norway. Any potentially inappropriate parental acts are referred to Barnevernet in Norway by public/social service employees, school personnel, neighbors, nurses, doctors or other persons. Child’s statements can also serve as grounds for initiating a formal procedure (MSZ 2015).

⁶ Randi Waerdahl’s article (forthcoming) focuses on one of the findings from Work Package 7 – *Integration and re-integration of Polish children in school*, conducted under the auspices of the *Transfam* project. The examples are from the set of data that comprises the Norwegian case, and deals predominantly with the understandings of Polish parents and from the Norwegian teachers’ point of view.

cannot afford the additional costs, they may benefit (for a small fee) from the services of “open pre-school” (*åpen barnehage*). Unlike pre-schoolers, children are required to attend obligatory schooling for 10 years (*grunnskole*). *Grunnskole* comprises seven primary school grades (*barneskole*) and three years of middle-school education (*ungdomskole*). Compulsory school education for children aged 6 to 15 is free. In addition, children learning in the first to fourth grades can benefit from an afterschool program, actually offered both prior to the commencement of classes and when the lessons are done in the afternoon. Enrolment in the afterschool program – SFO (*Skole Fritids Ordning*) requires paying a fee. Following middle-school, children can begin an elective, but free of charge, high school (*videregående skole*), which is supposedly tasked with preparing students for higher education (*studie kompetanse*) (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2007, IOM 2014). Importantly, Waerdahl argues that the dominant perception of the Polish inflow as an intra-European labour migration obscures the need for introducing family-centred laws or regulations. Unsurprisingly, this means that neither nation-wide standards nor municipal solutions for handling Polish children’s issues are featured in public, institutional or national debates (Waerdahl forthcoming). Pupils with an insufficient skill level in the Norwegian language are entitled to special assistance, which in practice means more Norwegian classes, aimed at quicker learning and more rapid integration. An educational entity has an obligation to examine the level of Norwegian language competence and to evaluate which learning strand a student should be assigned to (regular or with assistance). The school headmaster has the final say on the matter. Students can attend separate school divisions in the so-called welcoming classes (*innføringsklassen*) (Tomczyk-Maryon 2014). The primary goal behind the educational offer for the newly arrived pupils originating from ethnic minorities is to attain a level of fluency in Norwegian, which is supposed to allow children to benefit from educational activities and contact with peers. Participating in such activities is free and voluntary (IMO 2014)⁷.

⁷ The limited scope of his article does not allow for an extensive coverage of the Norwegian education system and programs aimed at integrating children of immigrants into the Norwegian school environment. More details can be found in Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2007, Mańkowska 2014, Ślusarczyk & Nikielska-Sekuła 2014, Ślusarczyk & Pustulka forthcoming, Nikielska-Sekuła forthcoming.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this article I analyse the opinions of the children of Polish immigrants on the subject of how they function and feel in Norwegian primary schools. Since the study concerns an interpretation of integration process of Polish immigrants' children with a direct migratory experience (meaning children born in Poland who migrated to Norway with their parents), a conceptualization of culture shock was selected to be applied in the analysis (Obeg 1960). In the context of changing one's social setting, which clearly applies to the migration experience, it is assumed that culture shock is a phenomenon occurring in the space where two cultures collide. It entails a clash of previously internalized norms and values with the surroundings of the receiving country. Culture shock encompasses the physical, psychological and social situation of a person and is linked with negative emotions, impeding well-being and lessening general life satisfaction (*ibidem*). It is argued herein that the level of culture shock is not influenced only by the starting level of social, economic and cultural capital of migrant families and by their awareness and desire to acquire/make up for deficiencies in the cultural competences and cultural codes (Rapaille 2007) of the host society, but also by the nature of social borders in the destination society (Alba 2005). In the examined case of school integration of Polish children, the culture shock level and the degree to which values conflict are also dependent on the requirements that Norwegian schools impose on children of immigrants.

The conceptualization of culture shock is here paired with the processual/dynamic approach to integration, which is a notion marked by ambiguity and ambivalence. In spite of certain problems with the integration concept, I follow Aleksandra Grzymała-Kazowska's approach (2008: 49), which defines it as a dynamic process rather than a desired state of stability. The article draws on an understanding of integration which presumes a transnational character/dimension of migration (Kindler 2008: 51). Transnationalism accentuates individual agency, while developing a theoretical framework indispensable for explaining the situation of migrants who live "dual lives" in two countries – "here and there" (Vertovec 2010: 7). Honing in on an array of relations that transgress nation-state boundaries and their impact on migrating individuals and groups, transnationalism underlines a multitude of adaptation options and is seen as a strategy that allows for the "inclusion" of a migrant, rather than delaying/hindering the processes (Vertovec 2007). It is assumed here that the integration process of migrants, including at schools, not only differs across immigrant groups but is also marked by diversity within a given ethnic minority (e.g. a group from a single country)

(Grzymała-Kazłowska 2008). Researchers (Chiswick 1978, Ni Laoire et al. 2011) believe that the costs of integration incurred by an individual during the early phase of their stay abroad are high. However, if a migrant invests in the oftentimes difficult process of “inclusion” into the new society quickly, then the costs of integration will begin to fall. Analogously, when an immigrant fails to engage in efforts connected to adaptation in the receiving society, then the costs and possibilities of “inclusion” become both higher and scarcer, respectively (Gordon 1964).

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this research with children, I used the paradigm of the sociology of childhood (e.g. James et al. 1998, Ni Laoire et al. 2011)⁸. I look at the process of integration from children migrants’ point of view and treat them as experts on their experiences. Within this theoretical and methodological framework, I conducted participatory research with children of Polish immigrants in Oslo and bordering communities within a radius of 200 km, from January to May 2014. During this period of two weeks, I was supported by two field researcher assistants⁹.

In this article, a sociological analysis of the school integration of Polish children in Norway from the perspective of migrant children is explored through: (1) semi-structured interviews with children aged 6 to 13 (a total number of 30),

⁸ This paradigm comprises several main components, such as: respect for children’s competences, according them subjectivity, considering diverse contexts over the course of the entire research process (e.g. social, cultural, economic and historical), the assumption that a child is an expert in terms of his/her life and, last but not least, is an actively involved participant in research. The researcher is therefore obliged to negotiate his/her role with young participants (Dockett et al. 2011).

⁹ The participants were children aged 6 to 13, born in Poland, Norway, as well as the UK and living permanently in Norway. The children come from Polish-Polish and Polish-Norwegian couples, currently attend primary schools and speak Polish (at least at a level that allows for a good communication flow). During the research encounters with children we used the following methods and research tools: (1) semi-structured interviews with children (a total number of 50), (2) drawings (a total number of 60), (3) observations accompanying the interview (children’s rooms), and (4) Sentence Completion Method issued to older children (24 tests total, SCM was available in three language versions – Polish, Norwegian and English). The main issues, in the questionnaire of a semi-structured interview combined with drawing/s and SCM, were as follows: (1) family and leisure, (2) school/learning and friends/peers, (3) national identifications, belongings, choices and future plans. The situation of children from mixed (inter-ethnic) families is not analyzed in this article. Due to the specificity and distinction of this group, separate and more in-depth analyses are planned, and in the future comparisons will be made between children from nationally homogeneous and non-homogeneous families.

(2) and 19 Sentence Completion Tests filled in by children aged 9–13, born in Poland to intra-ethnic couples¹⁰. It is important to note that the analyzed 30 interviews actually encompassed 32 participants (20 boys, 12 girls), as two group interviews with sibling pairs (four children in total) were conducted in addition to the 28 individual interviews. More than half of the children in the respondents' group arrived in Norway at the kindergarten age of between 3 and 6 (18), while seven children moved when they were older than 7 years. Seven children moved in early life (from birth to 2 years of age). The children come from a variety of socio-economic levels of their families.

According to an earlier-conceived research scheme, each meeting with a child started with obtaining the written consent of a parent and the verbal consent of the child who was to participate in the study. The researcher presented the goal of the study, asked for a permission to audio-record the meeting, and answered any questions the parents and/or child/children had. After the consent was obtained, a child would usually invite a researcher into her/his room. At that point the research meeting began with either drawing and/or interview probing. The initial warm-up task was aimed at building a rapport and often entailed a request for drawing of child's family and/or school and conversation about these topics. At the meetings the children also suggested various activities, for example looking at family photographs, playing board/console games, or eating a meal together. During these activities, we talked about life in Norway and links with Poland (see also Slany & Strzemecka 2015).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Between the sending and receiving country: children in a “social stride”

The research yielded the conclusion that migrations to Norway have a rather definite character, i.e. are not circular or fluid – the members of the respondents' families are reunited/reunified and have made a decision to settle down and live together in the new country. The findings conclude that most barriers connected with the process of entering the school community in a different cultural sphere are faced by children born in Poland to Polish-Polish couples, who emigrated aged 6 and over. Though all children from this group were strongly affected by beginning their schooling in Norway, the experience was particularly difficult for children who attended Polish school prior to migration. This result confirms

¹⁰ The following sentences were analyzed for the purpose of examining school integration: (1) My school is..., (2) My friends are...

earlier suppositions about the problems of the “1.5 generation” – the migrants born in the parents’ country of origin and at least partially raised in the sending country (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2008: 50). The key importance of the demographic indicator of age results from the fact that a relatively large portion of social capital is gained in the early years, meaning that the younger the migrant, the higher the probability of successful integration in the new society (Elder 1990).

School integration in the context of family background and support

Research suggests that the family situation (economic standing, language skills of family members, awareness of the importance of school-home communication, which is an absolute essential base for participation in Norwegian school life) highly impacts on school satisfaction. Two cases, of Honorata and Nina, are presented below to illustrate how two children of the same age and gender coming from different families represent totally different patterns of entering and functioning in the school environment¹¹.

The case of Honorata (10)

Honorata’s father, who is a language teacher by training, engaged in seasonal work in Norway between 2004 and 2012, taking care of a wealthy man and his estate. In 2013, the entire family – father, mother (also a language teacher), and three children settled in Norway for good, following a carefully scheduled migration. The planning took into account that the children should arrive in time for the beginning of a new school year in order to start education in the foreigners’ division, and then move to regular Norwegian system schooling after completing this step. The parents also secured a contract with an employer, consulted teachers, and signed their children up for school after careful research. As a result of meetings with a headmistress, each of the three children was placed in a different division to minimize their contact and foster learning the Norwegian language. Both the parents and children revealed that they were content with schooling in their community during the interview, mainly reflecting on the excellent system of “inclusion” and the prime system of school-home communication. According to Honorata’s parents, the preparatory class constituted “a bridge” that a child can smoothly cross and enter the Norwegian school system, without suffering any dangers to emotional stability after migration. The parents admitted that Honorata “blossomed like a flower” and was growing up quickly. They supported the process by having only Norwegian and English television, buying Norwegian

¹¹ The names of all children have been coded.

books and subscribing to the *Aftenposten Junior* daily, all in order for the children to blend in with the Norwegian society. Honorata's family treated migration as a project, which they prepared and consequently executed in accordance with their "submersion" strategy.

The interview with Honorata shows that she likes her new school very much and likes being there. She admits that there is nothing she doesn't like in Norway, respects her teachers and says they "are nice (...) always accompanying us outside (...) I asked when I could not understand during the first days (...) but I do not need that much help". According to the children who attended a Polish school before emigrating, Norwegian schools have "different rules and principles". Honorata lists what she considers to be the three most important rules, and explains what they entail:

- (1) "there's a great rule that you go outside whatever the weather. And in Poland you could only go out in spring and summer";
- (2) "we have a rule that if someone is teasing you or doing something to you, you say "stop";
- (3) "in Poland when I had maths for example, they (the teachers) taught me differently, with different rules. But here (in Norway) they teach you calmly. If you don't manage to do something, then (the teachers) don't tell you what the answer was, but you have to think yourself".

The case of Nina (10)

A completely different account of her school experience is given by Nina, who has lived in Norway with her mother and brother since 2010. Nina's mother finished a vocational training in Poland and works as a cleaner in Norway. She's a single parent, whose ex-husband remained in Poland and seasonally works in the UK. Interestingly, it is Nina's grandmother who was a pioneer migrant to Norway in the 1980s, followed by mother's brothers in 2004. Nina's mother claims that the fact that the girl did not go to Norwegian kindergarten left her without certain knowledge and affects her generally weaker academic performance in the primary school. She underlines that Nina initially did not want to go to school at all, and even threw herself at the car to stall departure when leaving for school. Early on, the family enlisted help from a tutor (English lessons, for example, were given by the mother's friend from the neighbourhood and an uncle). Today the girl no longer takes private lessons but still has problems at school, which resurfaced when she was diagnosed with dyslexia at the end of third grade. In order to attract attention, Nina often told teachers that she had headaches, nightmares, and trouble sleeping. As a consequence, teachers called her mother to school several times,

although they did not take further measures. It is noteworthy that the mother and daughter do not attend integrative meetings for families – the so called *familie gruppe*, neither does Nina frequent social events – like birthday parties of her friends from school. In response to problems, the mother wants to use the school's psychological assistance (PPT – *Pedagogisk-Psykologisk Tjeneste*), but she is afraid of the institutional consequences, especially fearing the intervention from *the Child Welfare Service of Norway (Barnevernet)*, which could even recommend taking her child away and placing her in foster care. It is clear that Nina's family is generally settled in Norway with work and schooling, but that they do not trustingly partake in the social life in the country. This behaviour influences Nina's educational attainment and her level of satisfaction with life and school.

Nina admits that she has encountered “problems” in her contacts with her teacher, but her mother does not speak sufficient Norwegian and is therefore not involved in solving her daughter's “problems”. As a result, her grandmother has to go to the school. Nina's assessment of the situation is as follows:

(...) I have fairly serious problems with her (the teacher) and it is very hard to make myself understood to her and sometimes we've had some big problems, that people, that just grandma at least, is always on my side. She always comes to school and speaks to the teacher. Mum can't quite protect me from that, because firstly she doesn't speak too much Norwegian, and secondly she most of all doesn't feel that she can kind of protect me strongly, but Grandma is more like that, that she'll always protect and always look out for me most of all. I have a feeling that the teacher always gives me more homework. I have this thing where it is harder for me to read, different letters get mixed up. The teacher knows it because they gave me a test, she knows but she still gives me more homework. And it is difficult and I tried talking to her and she says that it's “so I learn more” (...) I am scared to talk with her, generally to talk about anything. Often I do not manage to get homework done and then she calls my mum, because, well, I haven't done homework, or they are compli... I, I can't explain to my mum, because I already talked to the teacher (...) I know I do many things wrong (...) I would even change my group, maybe repeat a year, calmly. The teacher does not understand that I need more help and more time.

Going beyond the two cases of Honorata and Nina, it is noteworthy that children who are more satisfied with school (grades, contact with teacher, peer group memberships) are more engaged in practices linked with school/peer life. Conversely, children who do not do so well at school and feel (even a partial) sense of non-belonging to peer groups, have a tendency to focus more on their family life. More specifically, they tend to intensively practice the transnational family and what Olena Nesteruk and Loren Marks call “emotional transnationalism” (2009: 77).

Children's relations with teachers and assessment of support from school

The interviews highlight that Norwegian classrooms usually comprise 21 to 26 pupils, with a generally even distribution of boys and girls. School administration appears to be assigning children to divisions in a way that does not allow for too many children from one nationality to learn together, though this rule is not a standard for all schools in the country.

The children interviewees often pointed to a teacher as a very important person in their school experience, impacting on how they do and how they feel (especially in the early stages of living in Norway). The teachers' assessments were predominantly positive and underscored their appropriate preparation for working with children and their capacity to give different types of support, even if they sometimes "yell". Overall, 47% of children gave a positive opinion of their teachers, 9% shared some ambivalence, and only 6% expressed a negative evaluation. Many children – 38% – did not articulate their views on this matter¹².

An example of a positive view

We came here when I was six years old. And I did not know Norwegian at all, but the very next day after we arrived I had to go to school, (...) but I had a teacher who was also Polish. She taught me (...) She is very nice (...) she helps to understand (...) She goes to a different room and explains it. And then an assistant watches the other children who are in the class (Aneta, 9, in Norway since 2010).

An example of a negative view

I don't like them (teachers) and especially (name of a teacher). No, I do not like her, she's mean (Adrian, 10, in Norway since 2008).

An example of an ambivalent view

(...) It's not that I don't like it, it's my duty to go to school and learn, but the teachers here, they sometimes have different characters, like my sibling, (brother) is nice, has patience, but I have a different temper, no patience, hot-head (Wojciech, 12, in Norway since 2007).

Language skills

In the context of language skills and preferences, it is notable that among the 19 respondents who completed Sentence Completion Tests (11 filled in by girls and 8 by boys), the children chose the Norwegian version 11 times, the Polish version 6 times (though one was filled in in a combination of Polish and

¹² In these interviews the conversations moved towards other topics, like hobbies and paid extra-curricular activities.

Norwegian), and the English version twice. The most common explanation of the choice was a desire to showcase one's knowledge of the local language, and a second component was a difficulty with (mostly written) Polish¹³.

Ten-year-old Adam, who has lived in Norway since 2008, recalled his early school days by saying that first two years were the hardest due to language skills and peer contacts. This emerges from other children's narratives, including those who began Norwegian school at the standard time, entering the first grade at the age of 6:

First grade went fine, second grade went better, always better, and by the third, fourth, I spoke Norwegian fluently then. In first and second grade I had some small problems.

Oliwier (11, in Norway since 2011) draws attention to the crucial importance of having a Norwegian accent and touches upon the still viable stereotype of a migrant, which accompanies him even in the virtual world:

If I had started school now, no one would have ever guessed that I was from Poland. They would take me for a Norwegian because I have a Norwegian accent, very similar to a (Norwegian) friend of mine. (...) This is very important for me because then... and sometimes my (Norwegian) friend asks (online) 'Ok, where are you, you Pole?' Just for fun, not in a serious manner but just jokingly when she is trying to find me in the (online) game. Because we have this one very popular computer game (Minecraft).

During the interviews, children often shared their tricks for learning Norwegian. For instance, 13-year old Katarzyna, who came to Norway in 2011, advises intensive learning of Norwegian words by watching Norwegian television channels (NRK), reading "interesting" and "engrossing" books from the school library (e.g. children's crime stories), and maintaining "moderation" in contacts with Polish friends at Norwegian school. As a result, children can complete the transition class for foreign children before the end of the school year and "find it easier" at primary school or lower secondary school. Katarzyna has the following to say about her initial strategy in contacts with her Polish friends in *innføringsklassen* and about her linguistic progress:

All the girls who were Poles spoke to me in Polish, and I for example didn't want to. I just kind of isolated myself from them, so I could be with those and talk in Norwegian. As a result I completed the integration class a lot earlier.

¹³ An analysis of grammar and orthographic knowledge would be outside the scope of this article.

Assessing peer groups and networks

Being accepted by peers, which often signifies relatively close participation marked by mutual approval, remains a key issue for migrant children. In the post-transnational phase (family reunification) (Muszel 2013), children usually feel a detachment from certain models of daily life and lifestyle, a loss of status, and the specific position which they held in their country of origin. This leads to a temporary sense of loss of security and a sense of otherness or non-belonging to the peer group (Ni Laoire et al. 2011: 161), as demonstrated by the following extract from my interview with 11-year-old Kacper. Kacper has lived in Norway since 2013 and began schooling directly in the regular Norwegian school, without prior stay in the preparatory division for foreigners. This was simply due to the fact that the community where his family lives does not implement this introductory educational measure. For this reason, the family plans to move within Norway, specifically seeking a residential area and a community where a special division for foreigners is available. At present, Kacper feels sad and isolated from his school environment and peer groups. The language barrier prevents him from initiating friendships at school and maintaining them outside of the institution. Moreover, the boy does not stay in touch with his friends from Poland. He tried to contact an ex-class member through social media, but this friend did not want to maintain a relationship, explaining that he has forgotten his profile password and cannot log-in to chat. Kacper was so engrossed in migration preparations that he did not manage to say goodbye to his friend. Besides, he underlines that he has many friends online (for instance at the *nasza klasa.pl*, social media platform) and they play network games together. The world of games available online across social media platforms constitutes an important social setting for Kacper. He uses virtual reality to navigate through his current initial difficulties at school and mitigate his temporary feelings of loneliness and non-belonging among peers.

S: (author): So this is an online game with... Where you can play with someone you do not know? Or you play alone?

K: (You can play) with friends, for example... you can visit a friend's garden (...) you can play with everyone all over the world.

S: Oh, and what do you do during the breaks? I heard you go outside a lot?

K: Sometimes when one hides, one can stay inside.

S: Oh.

K: Under a table of something.

S: Oh. So you play football or what do you guys do?

K: Honestly you can do whatever you like during the breaks.

S: Oh, so what do you do?

K: Nothing special, I just walk alone.

Once again linking integration with its processual character (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2008), interactions with peers begin to secure emotional safety, self-confidence and group belonging. Several things have to be noted here. First, the group dynamics, or more specifically the changes within the functioning style of a child migrant in a group generally move away from an isolating style toward a participating one, and result in the fact that local peers are ready and interested to make room for newly arrived foreign children in their ranks. Secondly, the process can have various degrees of intensity – lesser (Wojciech's case) or greater (Katarzyna's case):

I mean I like it (at school) but sometimes, it's just, when I started first grade I did not have so many friends in first grade. (...) One could still hear that I am not from Norway. Then in second grade it sounded like I was in Norway, so all was good, and, well, I still did not have friends and I got into fights a lot. I mean they fought with me, they made fun of me, that happened maybe up until fifth grade. Actually these were difficult times for me, when they like excluded me from their group, I was alone (...). And then now with people from school we made nice, we are friends more, we are closer than before. (...) here in Norway children are interested in different things from me. They have their own different behaviours, different food. Different (sometimes) means same, but still they have their own. They have their national holiday on May 17th, it is therefore different. (...) (Norwegians) have different rules. They believe that everyone should be friends. (...) In Poland it is different: you have one best friend, one favourite friend. There's no requirement for everyone to play with everyone else, like here in Norwegian school (where teachers) say that this is how it must be. They (Norwegian peers) talk about things differently. They ask how much your dad makes, and how much your mum does (...) Norway is a very rich country. I understand that this is a very rich country, and that it is good that there are not only poor countries but also rich countries. Even though – come on! – talking about money in school is too much (...) This is what I think, but well, my mum now says that children in Poland are also changing (...) But luckily my parents raised me well enough to not ask you how much money your father makes." (Wojciech, 12, in Norway since 2007).

Earlier, during the first year, I was really mad that we moved because I already had friends in Poland (...) and here when we came (to Norway), then all that I have somewhat built there (in Poland) was lost and I had to start everything all over from the beginning (...). In Norway there is no such thing that they call you names at school. It does not happen that they criticize you. They do not say that you study too much. I mean it was maybe at the beginning because it happened a few times that I was better than Norwegians attending first grade. And that could have annoyed them. I know I was better sometimes and that is the truth. But after some time, when I was here for one year already, after completing sixth grade, it became normal at the end. They had finally (...) gotten used to it, so there were no more problems like at the beginning, for instance. (...) You could call me an expert. I'd advise them (migrant children) definitely not to be ashamed when it comes to borrowing something at the start (...). Because

here everyone is just (open), it's different (from Poland). Not to be scared to invite someone and ask, "do you want to go out somewhere with me?" (Katarzyna, 13, in Norway since 2011).

Despite the limited national and ethnic diversity in Polish schools¹⁴ the findings show that Polish children after migration do relatively well in the generally high level of national and ethnic diversity in Norwegian schools. However, taking into account the child's length of stay abroad, it must be underlined that children who have been in Norway for a shorter period of time (less than 12 months), tend to initiate and maintain contact mainly with other Polish children (as long as other Polish children attend the same grade). The research suggests that engaging in interactions with other Polish children is the result of having a common language (Polish), not of ethnic or racial prejudice against other children at school. Creating bonds of friendship with people that one can communicate with at a given time is a kind of temporary adaptation strategy, as language is one of the main "identity matchers" (Reynolds 2008: 12). Over time, as the process of attaining competence in the Norwegian language progresses, the child's circle of friends begins to grow and diversify through a strategy of entering relations with nationally heterogeneous groups. When the child's self-esteem improves, he or she starts to feel proud of being able to establish a relatively strong position in the group. What's more, the research results indicate that at the same time such a child concurrently weakens his or her interactions with children from Poland, who might be less popular in the peer group for a variety of reasons (e.g. due to uncertainty, worse knowledge of the Norwegian language, differing interests, or being less focused on physical appearances)¹⁵.

CONCLUSIONS

Every migration has its "brighter" side (e.g. improved economic standing of a family, gaining unique competences) and "darker" consequences (e.g. temporary or permanent feeling of non-belonging). Success in integrating the children of immigrants is of enormous consequence for the receiving society, and the education system plays a crucial role in this process. The findings suggest that the majority of barriers in the process of entering school community in a different cultural sphere are faced by children born in Poland to Polish-Polish couples, who

¹⁴ Bożena Muchacka (2015: 23) states that: "The population of foreign children in Polish educational facilities is not significant. In 2011 there were 1,258 children in nursery schools, 2,876 in primary schools, and 1,104 in lower-secondary schools".

¹⁵ This issue will be analyzed in an upcoming article.

emigrated aged 6 and over. In the post-migration phase, the children usually feel a detachment from certain models of daily life and lifestyle, and a loss of status and of the specific position which they held in their country of origin. This leads to a temporary sense of loss of security and the sense of “otherness” in school.

The findings show that Polish children in Norwegian schools are temporarily “visible” – treated as different/visible by their peers and feel themselves as such. The egalitarian and increasingly multicultural Norwegian society is generally open to diversity. At the same time, the integration process in Norwegian schools poses specific (obligatory, or at least desirable) requirements to the newly arrived children and their families (e.g. competence in the Norwegian language, regular home-school communication, sex education linked to other subjects like Norwegian, Biology, etc., and the integration of children and parents within family groups).

As a consequence, both sides – the school and Polish families – can be caught in a state of value-related conflicts and distrust for an extended time period. When a migrant child does not manage to adapt to the school environment, regardless of the support he or she receives from the school, family and peers, then the costs of inclusion and integration rise and difficulties multiply. Research points to the fact that the first two years in Norway are crucial for a potential relatively-quick adaptation, especially for children who had previous school experiences (kindergarten/primary school) in Poland. During this two-year period, every effort should be made for including a child in the Norwegian school life, concurrently neutralizing the effects of culture shock (Obeg 1960). Linking school integration with its dynamic character, Polish children will feel better in the Norwegian environment and subsequent education levels (middle-school, high school, university), therefore benefiting from social life.

I posit that conclusions and recommendations pertinent to Norwegian integration policies (including education) that delineate the frame of migrant children’s school integration should include not only the opinions of experts or parents, but also take the experiences and views of children into account, ensuring polytonality. Based on my interviews with the children, I can state that the children are submerged in the world full of co-dependencies and relations between them, their families, school, peer groups and social settings (Poland and Norway). The image of their world resembles a transnational spider web, in which all items are connected to one another. Based on their experiences, they can give advice as to how to function in the new school environment. In this way, they can play the role of experts on their school integration. I suggest that migrant children’s

views can be useful for: (1) children of immigrants and their families (to help with understanding what it means to be a child of immigrants and improve communication between the family, peers and teachers); (2) Norwegian school staff (to help them in understanding what it means to be a child of immigrants and improve communication between teachers, peers, the child and his/her family); (3) the Norwegian government (e.g. Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion), welfare institutions (e.g. Child Welfare Service of Norway) and/or academic/research centres (e.g. Norwegian Centre for Child Research (NOSEB) – NTNU (to help build policy-focused measures for migrant children, responding to their current and future needs).

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Stella Strzemecka

INTEGRACJA SZKOLNA OCZAMI DZIECI MIGRANTÓW. NA PRZYKŁADZIE POLSKIEJ MIGRACJI DO NORWEGII

Streszczenie

W kontekście współczesnej fali emigracji z Polski do Norwegii oraz rosnącego zainteresowania badaniami z dziećmi migrantami, artykuł skupia się na doświadczeniach, opiniach i praktykach, przez które polskie dzieci dorastające w Norwegii włączają się w życie szkolne w tym kraju przyjmującym. Analiza integracji szkolnej opiera się na 30 pół-ustrukturyzowanych wywiadach z dziećmi w wieku 6 do 13 lat, urodzonymi w Polsce i mieszkającymi na stałe w Norwegii. Dzieci migrantów będą traktować jako ekspertów w dziedzinie swojej integracji szkolnej. Taka perspektywa przyczyni się do lepszego zrozumienia ich potrzeb, a tym samym do tworzenia adekwatnej polityki edukacyjnej w Norwegii, bazującej na doświadczeniach i opiniach dzieci migrantów na temat ich życia szkolnego. Celem artykułu jest uzupełnienie niedostatku wiedzy na temat integracji szkolnej polskich dzieci w Norwegii z punktu widzenia dzieci. Wiodącą tezę artykułu jest twierdzenie, że dzieci polskich imigrantów są „tymczasowo widoczne” w norweskiej szkole. Jeśli dziecko migrant nie podejmie wysiłków, aby przystosować się do środowiska szkolnego, bez względu na wsparcie które otrzymuje od szkoły, rodziny oraz rówieśników, to wraz z upływem czasu koszty integracji wzrosną i stanie się ona trudniejsza.

Słowa kluczowe: dzieci, migracja, integracja szkolna, badania z dziećmi, Polacy w Norwegii