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Bio:

Dr Olena Gundarina has recently acquired her PhD from the School of Education, University of Leeds. Before undertaking her PhD she worked as an English and Russian Languages Instructor in Zhejiang Yuexiu University of Foreign Languages from 2011. From September 2018 until June 2019 she was a Research Assistant for the project: 'Fostering Effective Parent-practitioner Partnerships in Character Education' at the School of Education, University of Leeds.

Learning of migrant pupils as a transformative experience

This paper discusses the findings of an enquiry into Russian-speaking linguistic minority migrant pupils' experiences in English state-funded primary schools at Key Stage Two (7-11 years old). Research into this area is pertinent to schools given the percentage of newly-arrived EAL (English as an Additional Language) pupils with Russian as first language in the UK state-funded primary schools has more than quadrupled in the past ten years. Research related to this has been undertaken abroad but to date there is no known L2 (second language) study of this in English primary schools. By drawing on Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 2005) as well as the Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978) this research highlights the ways the learning of migrant pupils becomes a transformative experience, comprising a disorienting dilemma, an exploration, and a reintegration phase.

The following research question provides a focus for this study – What issues/experiences do Russian-speaking migrant pupils face in the English state-funded primary schools at Key Stage Two? The methodology includes a qualitative longitudinal ethnographically informed multiple case study research approach with five embedded cases. The evidence is based on 79 interviews with creative techniques and seven months of participant observations. The findings revealed manifold outcomes of the immersion in the L2 school, at times traumatising in their intensity and deeply transforming, an immersion which was ineffective and exclusive in some cases, causing well-being issues, leaving gaps in L2 literacy, and thus overall learning, particularly when the right to L1 (first language) was denied. The experiences impacted, directly or indirectly, on children's motivations and social relations. Namely, migrant pupils preferred more accessible subjects (mathematics, art), as opposed to English; pupils exhibited silence (quietness, submissiveness, or reticence) in class but not outside of class, which was an adopted pattern of behaviour rather than 'silent period'. The implications of the findings for EAL specialists and policymakers are discussed.

References

- Mezirow, J. 1978. Perspective transformation. *Adult Education Quarterly*. 28(2), pp.100–110.
Vygotsky, L.S. 2005. *Psychology of human development*. Moscow: Smysl.