Getting in and getting on: Isolated bilingual children's experiences of schooling in primary schools

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This interpretive, mixed methods study examines newly arrived, isolated bilingual children's experiences of schooling in primary schools. Using a theoretical stance that draws on a sociocultural and socialization framework as a process of change, involving the complex interplay between identity, agency and power, the study explores the factors that contribute to bilingual children's experiences of schooling, how their experiences change over time, and how the children seek ways to strategically manage their situation. It also explores whether or not experiences of schooling differ between bilingual and monolingual pupils.

Questionnaires generating quantitative data were completed by 29 bilingual children from various ethnic backgrounds and 162 monolingual, White British children from 12 schools. Qualitative data were generated through questionnaires with the 29 bilingual pupils exclusively. The voice of the children is central, through interview based case studies involving the perspectives of five bilingual children, their parents, teachers and monolingual peers.

The findings reveal a complex picture because, although there is a sameness between bilingual and monolingual pupils, there is a distinctiveness about the bilingual group. However, a variety of experiences are noted between individuals within this group as factors interplay in complex ways. Therefore, bilingual pupils can not be considered to be a unitary group.

The socialization trajectories, which include transition into school, highlight that children's experiences vary and change over time, and are evidently affected by their relationships at school. By choosing strategic management approaches children are seen to shape their own socialization process.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of the implications for gaining greater insight into the schooling experiences of isolated bilingual learners through: categorisation of children, the unitary nature of bilingualism, difference and access. Recommendations are made including policy development, teacher development and further research focusing on the voice of the isolated bilingual child.

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