

Young Lives in a Foreign Land: Experiences and Roles of Migrant School Children in Australia

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Abstract

In 2010 about 30 percent of all school enrolments in NSW public schools were of children of language background other than English. Despite the significance of this population, little is known about the processes in the lives of these young individuals as the school system standardises their daily practices and their families attempt to hold on to their ethnic backgrounds. Schools are the settings where migrant children first come into systematic contact with the new culture, and for many of these children it is in schools that they first immerse themselves in a foreign language and in a different socialising system. The experiences and knowledge migrant children acquire through school often enable them to become cultural brokers between the new cultural world and their families. During this process migrant children often transit a liminal terrain where their roles and identity become at the same time diverse and ambivalent. How do migrant children –and their parents—experience this abrupt and culturally different enculturation process they go through as children start school in a new country? And, what are the outcomes and implications of this process for the children? This paper will delve into the enculturation and acculturation processes that take place when newly-arrived migrant children start school in NSW.

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