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What can a Polish Saturday School learn from its students?

The CMR foundation has once again awarded the [Joanna Matejko Prize](#) for Best PhD and MA theses on migrations to and from Poland. The prize for best PhD thesis went to Paulina Szydłowska-Klakla for her thesis written at the Jagiellonian University, Institute of Psychology, under the supervision of dr hab. Halina Grzymała-Moszczyńska, prof. Marisol Navas Luque and dr Weronika Kałwak. In this issue, Paulina presents her work.

The prize for best MA thesis went to Julia Sojka for her thesis „Decentring transnational identity in the conceptualization of a diaspora: The case of ‘Women’s Strike’ and Polish migrants’ feminist collectives”, written at the London School of Economics and Political Science, Department of Social Policy under the supervision of dr Isabel Shutes. Congratulations to both Authors!



Figure 1: A picture showing a Polish woman and a Spanish woman through the eyes of a 14-year-old girl. Source: material collected by Paulina Szydłowska during her study.



What can a Polish Saturday School learn from its students?

Paulina Szydłowska-Klakla

Introduction

This article presents an excerpt of a study conducted for my PhD dissertation titled "The Acculturation Process of Polish Parents and Their Children Living in Spain: Perspective of the Extended Relational Acculturation Model (RAEM)". The focus of my research was to explore the acculturation experiences of children from families of Polish origin living in Spain. To investigate this topic, I utilised the Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM, Navas et al., 2004). In addition, I examined various themes related to acculturation, such as discrimination, grief, developmental context, health, and identity. This article specifically delves into the acculturation experiences of Polish children attending Polish Saturday Schools (PSS) in the school domain and provides recommendations based on these experiences. It is important to note that this research was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theoretical Framework

The RAEM model, developed in Almeria, a region with a significant immigrant population in southern Spain, proposes that individuals can adopt different acculturation strategies (separation, integration, assimilation, and marginalisation) in

different areas of their lives, experiencing them in both the real and ideal plane. When studying children and adolescents, the model acknowledges the existence of central areas (family, values, and religion) and peripheral areas (social relationships, school, and economy) of their lives (López-Rodríguez et al., 2014).

Previous quantitative studies using this model among children and adolescents primarily indicate an assimilation strategy in the school domain, where they tend to adopt the host country's culture (López-Rodríguez et al., 2014). A qualitative study reveals that immigrant families in Spain adopt a wide range of acculturation strategies, highlighting differences between the strategies of parents and children. Parents often perceive their children as more immersed in Spanish culture, causing concern for them (Navas et al., 2019).

Implementation of acculturation strategies in the school domain can vary depending on the education system. In line with Polish law, Polish children residing abroad attend school according to the legislation of their host country. This may imply systemic support for assimilation. However, Polish Saturday Schools, supported or established by the Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad, offer complementary programs teaching the Polish language and culture (Skałbania, 2017). Consequently,

Polish children in Spain have the opportunity to attend PSS alongside Spanish schools, allowing for a comparison of experiences and shaping the acculturation process in the school domain in both the real and ideal plane. Differences, such as power distance, can be observed, with Poland and some Polish schools having relatively higher power distance compared to Spanish schools (Hofstede, 2007).

Methodology

For this research, I used a qualitative approach, employing a field research strategy with a focus on multiple case studies. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews and field observations. To facilitate children's active participation and co-creation of the research process, visual methods were used during interviews, serving as an icebreaker (Bagnoli, 2009). Nineteen families, comprising 23 children, 19 mothers, and two fathers, representing diverse parental origins, participated in the study. Additionally, workshops and meetings were conducted for parents and children in PSS within the metropolitan area of Madrid. Template analysis (Langdrige, 2007), initially based on the spheres of life mentioned in RAEM, was employed to analyse the collected data.

Results

The acculturation strategies adopted by children in the school domain are influenced by parental acculturation processes and the

children's age. Younger children tend to follow their parents' strategies, while older children, facing the developmental task of gaining autonomy (Havighurst, 1981), increasingly rely on the influence of their peer environment, leading to differentiation in their acculturation orientations compared to their parents.

Most children's experiences indicate assimilation and integration strategies. The preference for the Spanish educational system and reluctance to attend PSS classes can be attributed to various factors, such as tiredness, inaccurate age group qualification, difficulties in understanding Polish texts, challenges in learning history and geography due to contextual knowledge gaps, a formal atmosphere, and limited opportunities for close relationships (caused by distant residences and limited playtime in PSS). Children also express a desire to communicate in Spanish during classes to better understand instructions given in Polish. These needs are particularly evident among second-generation migrant children.

Integration-oriented behaviours include a motivation to learn about Poland, sharing their cultural background in Spanish schools, or expressing a preference for both educational settings. However, mere attendance at Spanish and Polish schools may not always reflect a genuine integration strategy, as it often results from parental decisions, and children themselves may have a reluctant attitude, indicating a more assimilationist orientation in the ideal plane.

Some children mentioned separation experiences related to preferences regarding teaching methods and rules at Polish schools, such as no uniform requirement, different approaches to mathematical calculations, or the inclusion of patriotic themes. These preferences are more commonly observed among children from the first generation of migrants who previously experienced the Polish education system in Poland.

Marginalisation strategies were not observed in this domain, likely due to compulsory schooling and systemic conditions that either support or hinder the manifestation of behaviours associated with specific acculturation strategies.

The research revealed **diverse acculturation experiences within the school domain** among migrants, including assimilation, integration, and separation behaviours. Furthermore, **individual experiences often encompass a combination of these strategies** e.g., simultaneous assimilation behaviour related to preference toward the atmosphere in a Spanish school and separation behaviour related to preference toward the presence of patriotic themes in the educational program in Poland. Many experiences **manifest a combination of acculturation and social development processes within families and among peers.**

Recommendations for PSS from Children and Parents' Perspectives

Based on conversations with children and their parents, I propose the following

recommendations for PSS, particularly addressing the assimilation experiences faced by children in adapting to Polish schools. These recommendations focus on language learning and teaching methods, class organisation, and children's self-esteem.

Language learning and teaching methods

Observations indicate that children are more motivated and enthusiastic about learning when teachers employ active teaching methods. Pair work, such as character descriptions, and tasks utilising multimedia boards, quizzes, and interactive techniques, enhance the assimilation of knowledge. Since Polish is often a second language for these children, employing varied techniques, such as Formative Assessment (feedback, peer assessment, defining success criteria), active methods (discussion, brainstorming, project work, drama), or methodologies for teaching Polish as a foreign language, can facilitate their language acquisition. Defining success criteria and reinforcing reading comprehension through an activity such as drama, movie-watching, comic strip creation, visual illustrations or prepared instructions (Pamuła-Berhens & Szymanska, 2017) can further enhance learning.

Considering the mathematical vocabulary gap and differences in teaching approaches, introducing maths lessons tailored to Polish students might be beneficial. Utilising resources like the Method JES-PL Mathematics textbook (Pamuła-Berhens &

Szymanska, 2018) could support this idea. Additionally, various methodological training programs, currently available online through Wspólnota Polska, offer valuable resources.

Organisation of classes and the teaching process

The research indicates that children rarely interact with their PSS peers outside of school hours. Allowing more time for free play could potentially increase their motivation to participate in classes. This may involve reorganising break times or providing additional care, such as a daycare centre.

Assigning students to classes based not only on their proficiency level in the Polish language could positively impact motivation. For instance, a teenager starting to learn Polish might benefit more from being placed in a group of older children, even if their Polish proficiency level is not on par with the group, rather than being grouped with much younger children. Such assignments could be facilitated by experienced students who can provide guidance and explain instructions in Spanish. Implementing a rotating "guardian angel" role could foster friendships within the class and reduce student dropout rates.

Self-esteem

For ambitious children who value achievement, experiencing failure in Polish school classes can negatively impact their self-esteem, particularly among second-

generation migrant children. When children feel overwhelmed by excessive demands they cannot meet, their motivation to attend classes diminishes. Stress, in turn, impairs cognitive functioning and exacerbates feelings of insecurity. On the other hand, participating in PSS classes can enhance the self-esteem of children who have recently relocated and face various challenges in the Spanish education system. PSS offers an environment where they can communicate in their first language and experience success. First-generation migrant children also serve as valuable sources of information for Spanish-born children who are unfamiliar with Polish educational practices.

Conclusions

Acculturation strategies within the school domain among Polish children in Spain predominantly involve assimilation and integration behaviours. Children's preferences for Spanish schools regarding rules, atmosphere, and teaching methods stem from spending more time there, fluency in the language of instruction, and reduced fatigue in the regular school routine rather than work during the weekends. Implementing the aforementioned recommendations could enhance children's sense of agency in learning Polish and foster lasting relationships, ultimately motivating them to actively participate in PSS classes.

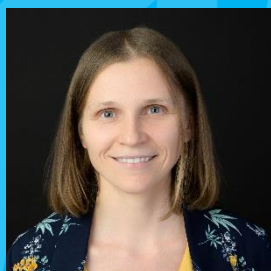
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