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**Mateja Sedmak, Fernando Hernandez-Hernandez,  
Jana M. Sancho-Gil and Barbara Gornik (Eds.):  
Migrant Children's Integration and Education in Europe:  
Approaches, Methodologies and Policies. Barcelona:  
Ediciones Octaedro SL.  
374 p., (ISBN 987-84-18615-37-5), Open Access**

The book's strengths are at the same time what makes it a strenuous read as a whole – the authors write about migrant children's integration in a range of different national contexts including Italy, the UK, Spain, Slovenia, Poland, Greece and Brazil. While jumping contexts throughout the chapters calls for some cognitive acrobatics, the book achieves a wonderful result – a wide and detailed outlook on the "integrational landscapes" across two continents. Despite these geographical ambitions, there are still many moments when one thinks: "Oh, but it is the same everywhere". While these moments certainly help sustain the thread running through the book, they have a downside. The similarities between different national contexts often surface as common conceptual and terminological confusions, shared (unresolved) problems, and shared (unrealised) convictions.

The first similarity, shared conceptual and terminological confusion, leads many authors on a mission to comb through the "multiplicity of academic and political debates" (p. 21). This takes the form of disentangling the terminological duos, trying to understand how one differs from the other, where one "ends" and the other "begins", for example: integration vs. inclusion, integration vs. assimilation, multicultural vs. intercultural education, mostly to the point of siding with one more than the other (integration trumps assimilation), settling on the view that they are almost synonymous (see the "Introduction", p. 22 for a discussion of the interchangeability of the terms integration and inclusion in the European Commission's Action Plan), or transcending them all through a "child-centred approach", which apparently moves beyond the thinking in either model (p. 114). While these debates are valuable, resolving the dubious dichotomies exceeds the book's scope. Therefore, it may have been more sensible to compress the debatable dichotomies into a single chapter (Chapter 2 is the closest at doing this comprehensively) and then leave them as they are – an unsteady, albeit useful descriptive and normative foundation for educational policy and practice.

The second similarity, "shared problems", refers primarily linked to the PISA test results of first-, second- and third-generation migrants, which are persistently lower than their "native" peers. Although underperforming is seen less with each new generation (Schleicher, 2019), this cannot be convincingly attributed to successful educational policies. Other challenges explored by authors in the book are: discriminatory attitudes which affect migrant children's well-being and performance, migrant children's marginalisation at the intersections of families' low socio-economic status, housing and material situation, age, ethnicity, gender, language, legal status. Some authors speak about (unhelpful)

victimisation of children, which frames them as vulnerable and lacking in agency, being mere observers of cultural clashes or contradictions. Many authors present racist and anti-migrant currents in politics and culture, which affect national and local integration policies. They describe the authorities as remaining "suspicious" (p. 286), openly reluctant and xenophobic, or insistently ignorant of the growing diversity in classrooms. These unwelcoming contexts are largely revealed as the insufficient professional training of teachers (Chapter 8) and ineffective policies of placing children in classrooms. The latter sometimes entails being immediately immersed into the regular classes, which leaves migrant students isolated from teachers and classmates they cannot communicate with, and exposed to lessons they do not understand. This type of "sponge integration" is evidently very harsh, futile and leads to children feeling incompetent and powerless. "All these deficits", as authors observe (p. 191) with respect to the Slovenian case, "increase the risk of school failure". At the other end of the spectrum, migrant children are streamed into a parallel schooling system, like what commonly occurs in Greece's refugee hospitality centres. Researchers working in a refugee camp on mainland Greece observed such segregation persisting despite the protests of the parents and children, with the authorities insisting that students would find "mainstream school attendance too difficult" (p. 323). Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive basis for considering these problems through an overview of European policy and legal documents, recommendations and academic articles of recent decades, following the "trends in integrating migrant children through education ..." (p. 63). The chapter thus gives useful tools for exploring, ordering and understanding the lively flurry of problems arising during the educational integration of migrant children in different contexts.

As concerns the similarity of "shared (unrealised) convictions", one of these in particular stands out. All authors share the view that education is an immensely important factor in migrant's integration, "one of the most important and powerful resources promoting participation and inclusion" and schools especially a "major vehicle for inclusion /.../ and promoters of diversity" (p. 71). As such, the institutions and educators within them seem to carry a considerable burden. They are not only responsible for migrant children's language learning and educational progress, but also for the integration of their families (by involving families in school-organised activities), nurturing democratic and cohesive societies, promoting tolerance and respect for diversity or, as the introduction to the book reads: "the integration of migrant children in preschool and school settings has proven to be especially effective in building an inclusive and equal society, avoiding future social exclusion that leads to poverty and exploitation" (p. 18). These goals, while admirable and perfectly defensible, add substantial pressure on educational institutions – it remains unclear how to boost the enthusiasm of pedagogical workers for such grandiose tasks. Research with teachers (Chapters 8, 9, 10, 11) generally showed that professional training has yet to prepare them to tackle the quotidian tasks of including certain migrant children in given classrooms, and only then – possibly – to task them with elevation of social cohesion.

Another firm conviction is uniquely shared by the book's authors and is less common in the integration scholarship generally – the project MiCREATE, which was specifically

based on nurturing the 'child-centred approach' in research, policy and education. These cornerstones resonate throughout the book principally as methodological remarks: the idea is to enhance research methods that hold more resonance for children's lives and those promising to encourage their participation like photovoice, short films, the "draw and write" method, focus groups, narrative interviews and autobiographical stories. A few authors mention the need to remove the power from the adult (researchers) to the children themselves, and provide them with an opportunity to express their opinions and ultimately impact policymaking in relation to themselves and their 'own' integration. References are made to children's voices in various chapters: the insistence that children must be "given a voice" (p. 49), the "challenge of hearing their voice" (p. 303), the researcher's role in enhancing children's voices by "making their views, opinions and desires heard" (p. 114) and, finally, that participatory research has to "include representation of participants' voices" (p. 173). Notwithstanding the promising methodological 'toolbox' and unanimous conviction that research should be (and was) child-centred, hardly any children's voices appear in this book. One exception is in Chapter 5 where children's agency is presented through dialogues with a researcher. While the authors have written articles incorporating several of the children's views elsewhere, this book unfortunately misses its own subjects. It would be valuable to see children's visual contributions or read selected raw data from their interviews. These could prove to be epistemologically enriching or maybe too scattered, too loosely connected to make up a data set. Either way it would be interesting and relevant to read and see children's contributions.

## References

Schleicher, Andreas (2019): PISA 2018: Insights and Interpretations. Paris: OECD.