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Proposal by

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Panel

Title Migrant Children in child-centred perspective: Theoretical and empirical considerations

Abstract Over the last few decades, there has been a growing recognition of the need for in-depth knowledge of child migration research. The panel focuses on research on migrant children's experiences of integration by adopting a child-centred perspective. Within this perspective children are perceived as relevant social actors, (co)creators of their own and social lives as well as agentic individuals whose perceptions should be integral to research and interpretations that concern them. Child-centred methodologies are often multi-method and recognise children's perspectives and knowledge. Additionally, common characteristics of child-centred methodologies include a focus on children's lived experiences, the participatory nature of the process where children are valued and recognised as experts in their own lives, and the reflexive, relational, and dialogical nature of the research. The presentations derive from the research project Migrant Children and Communities in a Transforming Europe (MiCREATE) funded by the EU Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme, running from 2019-2021. The aim of the project is to study how adopting a child-centred approach can stimulate inclusion and integration of migrant children at an educational and policy level. In the symposium the focus will be on discussing experiences and challenges of child-centred approach in researching migrant children. We will reflect on the use of child-centred methodologies as a tool for gaining knowledge about migrant children, various aspects of "ethics in practice, researcher positioning, power relations, challenging situations and research dilemmas. Additionally, theoretical considerations of child-centred perspective and empirical data in theoretical perspective will be discussed. The discussion will draw upon the presentation of case studies from Austria, Denmark, Greece, Spain, and UK.

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Paper #1

Title Child-centred approaches, racialization and researcher positioning

Abstract According to a child-centred perspective in line with the Article 12 in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, children are seen as active and competent participants in their own lives. This presentation will discuss some challenges in using such a perspective when doing research with migrant children in order to study their experiences of well-being, participation, etc. Drawing on fieldwork with migrant children (newly arrived as well as with a longer experience) in Denmark, main findings from the fieldwork will be presented. Furthermore, it will be discussed how the empirical data can be seen in a theoretical perspective inspired by approaches critical to processes of rationalisation and whiteness. Hence, the presentation will aim to further reflections on how to relate researcher positioning in fieldwork to researcher positioning in the research field with a special focus on methodological considerations which appeared during the fieldwork and analysis phases in the Danish context. Firstly, how to prevent that the understanding of children as active and competent leads to problematizing of child informants who do not come across as 'active participants' in the research project regarding willingness and ability to communicate, etc. This leads to the second question on whether and how children's narratives become means in 'happy stories of diversity' (Ahmed, 2007) when we do research on integration, and whether such considerations can contribute to qualify the child-centred perspective in research on migrant children.

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Paper #2

Title Who is the Other in the child-centred approach?

Abstract The influence of logical empiricism in the social sciences (St. Pierre, 2016) and the constitution of students as 'incomplete' beings without capacity for action (agency) (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Smyth & McInerney, 2012), have led to a tangential consideration of children and young people experiences and knowledge in educational research. As argued by Smyth & McInerney (2012, p. 1), "young people in schools are treated with pathological and forensic detachment in diagnosing what is allegedly wrong with them and how they got to be that way". However, they are not "inert materials to be prodded, poked and pontificated upon-they are active, live agents that have viewpoints, aspirations and designs for their futures, which they are not at all reticent in speaking vociferously into existence" (Smyth & McInerney, 2012, p. 1). Because of these shortcomings, the proposal of the MiCREATE project, on which this paper is connected, was planned from a 'child-centred approach'. Within this framework, three case studies we have carried out in three primary schools in Barcelona. In these studies, the notion of 'voice' and 'giving voice' has been problematised as epistemic and ethical references, to consider the knowledge, experiences, and visions of immigrant students from decolonising positions. From the research carried out with 75 children from 10-11, three school's life dimensions which are especially significant for them emerged: socialisation and care, relationship with teachers and to play. These contributions reinforce the need for research that focuses on children's and young people's knowledge from perspectives that avoid imposing views on research and schooling.

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Paper #3

Title "I have a dream": Refugee children's aspirations from a child-centred perspective

Abstract A child-centred perspective starts from basic children rights. A child-centred approach is a participatory approach that recognises children as active participants within the social interactions to act as autonomous individuals, able to communicate information about their own lives. This paper describes the first mapping of the intercultural trip of refugee students who arrive in Greece. We present some of the findings of an ethnographic research study focusing on 21 (N) refugee children. In the frame of this research, we conducted interviews (semi-structure type of protocol). The sample consists of 4 boys and 17 girls between the ages of 10 and 17 years old, conducted in an urban camp in Athens, Greece. The axes of the interview protocol explore refugee children's reactions and feelings towards their "journey" from home country to Greece as well as their socio-educational experiences. The research presents a structural framework for implementing thematic and critical discourse analysis in order to understand how refugee children subjectively perceive their transition to a new linguistic-cultural environment, in order to give meaning to their social reality and adaptation process. Refugee children's aspirations predominantly focus on their personal lives, on their attitudes to-wards education. Refugee children desire to have the protagonist role in their lives. Also, their wishes for quality, safe and proper education are prevalent; consequently, it is important to support refugee children to reach their full potential and pursue their dreams.

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Paper #4

Title The long wait for asylum: Conditions and experiences of waiting for asylum-seeking children in Austria

Abstract Even though the number of asylum applications has decreased after 2015 and the new Austrian government program envisages a "reduction of the duration of the asylum procedure to an average of six months" (Government Program 2020-2024), the asylum procedure in Austria is still rather slow. A report by the Children's Rights Network (2019) mentions a decision time for asylum procedures in Austria of currently 15 months. It can be assumed that waiting for an asylum decision in any case involves a lot of uncertainty – and this uncertainty grows the

longer the waiting time takes. This paper aims to explore the waiting conditions and experiences of asylum-seeking children while waiting for asylum in Austria. Based on a secondary analysis of legal and policy measures as well as on ethnographic fieldwork with asylum-seeking children, this paper analyses how waiting conditions and experiences are shaped by various factors such as the conditions of housing and schooling and the interaction with Austrian authorities. We argue that it is important to listen to children, to include them, to recognise them as "competent meaning-makers" (Clark 2006), and to see them as active participants in the construction of knowledge – that is to use a centred approach – both in policy and in research. Austria is an interesting case, as the country has adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but at the same time is progressively limiting the right to asylum. Our data analysis shows that legal and policy measures lack a centred approach and thus fail to address the needs of asylum-seeking children.

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Paper #5

Title Mediating role of gender in integration processes of migrant children in Britain
Abstract This paper explores migrant children's experiences of integration into the British society. Researchers have argued that migration is a socio-cultural process that is mediated by gendered ideologies. Although, it is extensively researched and documented in literature on migrant adults it is largely overlooked in research on migrant children. Gender is an important concept to study in relation to integration experiences amongst children as it can shed light on differing experiences and needs of the two groups. Exploring the role of gender may also help to highlight the intersecting inequalities within this marginalised group. This paper will therefore also explore the role of gender in children's experiences of integration in British society. Experiences of Integration were examined through child centred methods of research including 51 unstructured interviews and 6 focus groups with children aged 10-13 and 14-17. Data was gathered from newly arrived, long term migrants and local children. Interviews and focus groups were of a participatory nature wherein children were treated as experts in their own experiences of migration and were encouraged to take the lead. Themes related to living conditions, inclusion in peer groups, involvement in leisure activities, family, friends, social networks and perception of possible changes were

explored. Results of this paper will provide valuable insights into factors influencing integration and if and how these may vary according to gender.

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Related SC, RI and topic

SC/RI SC Reflexive Migration Studies
Conference topic Theories, concepts and methods in migration research

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