

Editorial: Adult education and migration: a relational matter

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Introduction

In the wake of the ‘long summer of migration’ in 2015 (cf. Hess et al. 2017) the role of adult education has been on the agenda across receiving countries in Europe and beyond. A central question posed since then has been in what ways adult education can support migrants on their paths towards inclusion in their new country of residence. Another question concerned the knowledge and competencies newcomers are expected to acquire in order to become included in society. Even though these questions and the pursuing debates are shaped differently across geographical locations, what they do have in common is that migrants are predominantly positioned as lacking the necessary knowledge and competencies to become included in the host society. Often such lack is related to knowledge of the language and of the cultural values of the receiving countries (see e.g. Fejes, 2019; Simpson & Whiteside, 2015; Wildemeersch, 2017).

The problem with such debates is not only that they mobilise a deficiency discourse concerning migrants – as people outside of the social community, lacking the necessary competencies to participate in the new society. There is also a risk that other factors than language and cultural values as means for inclusion are neglected, where it is assumed that migrants would become included as soon as they become competent in the receiving country’s standard language and cultural values. (see e.g. Simpson & Whitesand, 2015). Furthermore, these debates are often conducted over and above migrants themselves, without considering their own experiences and meaning-making (Rydell, 2018). Thus, the question emerges not only what role adult education is assigned and takes upon itself in times of migration, but also what knowledge migrants are seen as needing in order to become included.

For this thematic issue we invited articles that engage with such matters. Some articles deal specifically and empirically, with issues partly resulting from the ‘long summer of migration’ in the context of Austria, Finland, Germany, Italy, and Sweden. Other articles that are more theoretically oriented, ask questions on how we can come to



understand and interpret experiences of migration. An overall observation regarding the selected articles is the strong emphasis authors put on dialogue. Good practices of adult education with newcomers pay attention to positive relationships between educators and participants, thereby avoiding to create explicit hierarchies. Knowledge and competencies of newcomers are valued and made part of the educational process. However, this is not easily accomplished. In some cases, a paternalistic/maternalistic attitude is predominant. Sometimes it's also difficult for adult educators to strike a good balance between strict educational/didactic aspects and social work aspects that inevitably deserve attention. The contributions also represent a wide variety of theoretical and methodological orientations. Theoretically speaking there are philosophical, psychological, post-colonial and educational ways of framing the research. Against this backdrop very different, mostly qualitative methods were used to gather data: ethnographic methods, action research, participatory observation, interviewing, questionnaires and document analysis. Finally, in some cases the increasing influence of state policy making on the content of the adult education courses for newcomers has been observed, where increased attention is being paid to employability.

In the next section, we introduce the articles included in this issue.

Thematic papers

In 'Learning democracy in a new society: German orientation courses for migrants through the lens of dialogical education', Tetyana Kloubert and Inga Dickerhoff have chosen Martin Buber's concept of dialogical education to explore the issue of orientation courses for migrants, obligatory to attend as part of the integration courses in the German legal migration system. Their qualitative study, conducted with former participants of orientation courses and with course instructors, focus on this pedagogical encounter that pursues society's call for the teaching and learning of democratic values by those and to those having newly arrived in that society. Using Buber's analytical framework in differentiating the dimensions of dialogic interaction, the authors conclude that dialogue in Buber's understanding might indeed enable a reciprocal and comprehensive approach to teaching and learning of democratic values; however, it seems rarely to happen in this way in the courses under scrutiny. The study points to the pivotal role that adult educators play in providing learning opportunities in the contested terrain of following legal guidelines and curricula, on the one hand, and aiming to enter in an authentic dialogue with newly arrived migrants, their experiences, interests and existing competences, on the other hand.

In his article 'Modernisation of Organisations due to Migration? Mixed Blessings in Adult Education Centres in Germany', Bernd K pplinger used a quantitative program analysis to investigate effects attributed to migration, by drawing on longitudinal data on professional staff, provision and financial resources of these centres. By this, the study shifts attention to organisations as drivers of social transformation, but as also to recipients of education policies and governmental action in view of ensuring a nationwide coverage with integration courses. According to K pplinger, the criteria of expansion and differentiation are key to understand the effects of migration on the context of an adult education organisation. The study's findings point to an overall quantitative expansion of personnel and budgets in contrast with a decrease in the richness of provision concerning the thematic range of course offers. This suggests ambivalent conclusions such as a development of rather monolithic program structures of organisations due to governmental funding structures prioritising integration courses. The author encourages further analysis of these findings, in comparison to other European countries and their

respective fields of adult education provision in the context of migration – and, not the least, in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

In the article, titled ‘Paternalistic Benevolence – Enabling Violence: Teaching the Hegemonic Language in a Double Bind’, Alisha M.B. Heinemann and Saman A. Sarabi used Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s concepts of ‘paternalistic benevolence’ and ‘enabling violence’ to draw attention to the ambivalences of teaching and learning in integration courses, presenting the case of Germany and Austria. The authors refer to qualitative data gained from participatory observations in classrooms, guideline-based interviews with teachers and document analysis of teaching material. The study aimed at exploring the mutual power dynamics between these actors (participants, teachers, didactic material) in reproducing hegemonic norms of integration. The findings presented in this article focus on the interview data with teachers. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, the research presented reveals that there are indeed adult educators who showcase an attitude of paternalistic benevolence towards the learners, thus, re-enforcing the position of migrants as persons in need. Yet, the data also show the attitude of enabling violence, documented in the strategies of dreaming, of providing a toolbox and of telling counter-narratives. The authors conclude that these strategies could serve (adult) educators to establish interstitial spaces in the classrooms as a third way, dealing with the dilemma of a double bind situation between empowerment and normalisation of learners in the context of integration.

In their contribution ‘Mobilising Experiences of Migration, Sofia Nyström, Magnus Dahlstedt, Andreas Fejes and Nedžad Mesic investigate the relationship between leaders and participants in Swedish study circles meant to foster the integration of asylum seekers. They have particular interest in those initiatives where the study circle leader has an experience of migration him/herself. Central questions in this research were: How do study circle leaders mobilise their experience of migration in their work with asylum seekers? How do study circle leaders make use of their experience when approaching the participants? What challenges do the study circle leaders face in such relational work? Answers to these questions were sought through interviews with managers and study circle leaders themselves, through participatory observation and through the gathering of didactic materials. The researchers found that the establishment of the teacher-student relationship is closely tied in with the leader’s capabilities of social perspective taking. Furthermore, it was found that being a study circle leader is a demanding task whereby balancing between pedagogical and social dimensions is difficult. The tendency for the leader to act as a social worker is continually present, given the hard circumstances many of these participants experience in their everyday lives as asylum seekers.

In ‘The Potential of Peer Guidance to Empower Migrants for Employment’ Satu Heimo, Katariina Tapanila, Anna Ojapelto and Anja Heikkinen, focus on the pedagogical approach of peerness. Peerness builds on the idea of “independent and self-motivated equitable relationships between the participants” and is, according to the authors, a common approach to learning in Nordic adult education. The research is based on a follow-up of a project funded by the European Social Fund in Finland in which volunteer migrants were trained to become peer group guides. The aim was to foster employability among migrants through the use of such guides. Based on an action research approach, the authors illustrate how the migrant peer-group guides, found themselves in an ambivalent position between operating as role models for successful integration, while acting at the same time as peers. Furthermore, by implying that experiences of migration in itself make it possible for the guides to act as a role model to other migrants, implies a simple presupposition that migrants are a homogeneous group. The authors conclude that

the project further reinforces current societal and labour market structures in the disguise of notions of empowerment through peerness.

In their article 'Migration, culture contact and the complexity of coexistence', Laura Formenti and Silvia Luraschi present research done in Northern Italy on the way newcomers are trying to find a place in a new society with different traditions, habits, language(s) and living conditions. Based on Gregory Bateson's insights and informed by complexity theory, they argue that such processes can only be successful when there is a certain degree of co-existence between the newcomers and the settled inhabitants of a particular city, village or region. Often, newcomers are isolated in refugee centres, without much opportunity of contacting the locals. The empirical research done was participatory and ethnographic in combination with focus groups, narrative aesthetic workshops and sensobiographic walks. In that context newcomers, in dialogue with native-borns, were invited to imagine a common place and to co-create new meanings of living together. The article documents these processes, whereby the central finding is, that that an embodied relational experience is transformative, when the subjective and embodied is weaved together with the relational and dialogical dimensions.

Also, in Saskia Eschenbacher's contribution 'Transformative learning theory and migration', the notion of dialogue plays a central role. In her theoretical article she investigates how transformative learning could be conceived in the context of migration. She thereby introduces the notion of edifying conversation. Such conversation, between an educator and a participant, supports processes of re-imagining living conditions at the occasion of major individual and collective transformations exemplified in the experience of migration. An intense learning process of migrants cannot only be instrumental. It should also be transformative. Instrumental learning focusses on the competencies and knowledge necessary to adapt to the new conditions. Transformative learning, on the other hand, fosters the ability to re-create one's own autobiography. Such processes of transformative learning are enhanced by transformative conversations. Eschenbacher criticizes the individualizing and cognitivist orientations of Mezirow's theory of transformative learning and focuses on the relationship between the educator and the participant. Not only the migrant as participant in the educational process will have to go through a process of intense transformation. Also, the educator will need to transform her or his self-understanding by becoming a fellow conversationalist, one who has an opportunity to learn deeply from others.

In her article 'Knowledge 'transfer' as sociocultural and sociomaterial practice: Immigrants expanding engineering practices in Canada' Hongxia Shan directs attention towards immigration and knowledge transfer. By focusing on the knowledge transfer taking place in Canada, when immigrants settle into the host society, she aims at disrupting the common notion of the West as epistemic centre. Based on a narrative approach, practice theory and interviews with 22 immigrant engineers in Canada, she illustrates three ways in which respondents contributed to knowledge development: assembling knowledge, mobilizing the capacity of learning to learn, and negotiating being and becoming. In her conclusion the author firstly argues for a more critical gaze towards public discourse as to who are positioned as the major contributors to professional knowledge, and to further question such images. Secondly, she invites professional organisations to play a more proactive role in engaging immigrants within professional communities.

In their article 'Continuity and change: migrants' experiences of adult language education in Sweden' Katrin Ahlgren and Maria Rydell focus on continuity and change in migrants' experiences of participation in state-subsidized basic language training in Sweden called Swedish for immigrants (SFI). Drawing on data gathered 2001/2002 and

2015/2016 respectively they wish to identify changes, similarities and differences in how migrants motivate their participation in language training, how they reflect on their language learning in general and how they relate to their experience of participating in SFI. The result indicates a coherence over time in how migrants found SFI as not sufficient. In order to learn the language social relations outside of the classroom was seen as necessary, while at the same time such relationships were scarce. However, a clear difference was how students interviewed in 2015/2016 to a much larger extent saw their SFI studies as more fragmented. The authors argue that such difference can be explained by the changes in adult education in Sweden since the early 2000s, where students have increasingly become clients on a market who have to choose an educational provider, as well as choose to change providers if they are not happy.

Open papers

In the final article, which was submitted as an open paper, 'Debt, learning and migration in the time of crisis' Piotr Kowzan focuses on learning in adulthood among Icelanders and migrants who were indebted in the economic crisis in Iceland in 2008-2009. Empirically the article is based on field research including interviews with 10 indebted icelanders and 6 indebted migrants in Iceland, as well as interviews with employees at institutions that offered help to those indebted. Drawing on the model of learning as outlined by Peter Jarvis, the author argues that such model fits closely to the experience of learning among the indebted adults. However, the Jarvis model is, according to the author, too romantically focused on the individual reconciliation with reality. Rather, in a crisis situation such as the one in focus in the article, people might choose to abandon reality, in order "to live theory obvious world of lives".

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