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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

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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 Käpplinger 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 Käpplinger, 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 Nedzad 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 indepted in the economic crisis in Iceland in 2008-2009. Empirically the article is based on field research including interviews with 10 indepted icelanders and 6 indepted migrants in Iceland, as well as interviews with employees at institutions that offered help to those indepted. 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 indepted 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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Learning democracy in a new society: German orientation courses for migrants through the lens of Buber's dialogical education

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Abstract

Migrants, coming to Germany, must attend integration courses in order to obtain a residence permit. These courses are comprised of a language section as well as an orientation section. The latter's purpose is, according to the German Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), the transmission of knowledge of the German legal system, culture, and history and especially of democratic values of the German political system (BAMF, 2017, p. 6). This article examines the challenges that instructors and participants of those courses face when it comes to the teaching and learning of democratic values, based on a qualitative research conducted in 2018. As the theoretical lens, this article incorporates the concept of dialogue by Martin Buber.

Keywords: Buber; civic education; dialogue; integration courses; migration

Introduction

Teaching and educational programs can often be seen as oriented towards a specific goal. On the other hand, learning processes in adulthood are circular and take place in the form of dialogue and exchange. It is a common maxim in adult education that we learn from and with each other based on our own experiences and interpretations. Learning in the framework of integration courses for migrants (in Germany, as it might be in any other country) is per definition goal-oriented: it aims to help migrants to find (new) orientation and integrate migrants into a new society (and community). How do the participants experience the learning process within these courses and to what extent can (and should) the principles of a dialogical education be implemented in the learning process? The paper will examine these and other questions related to learning in the German orientation courses of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF).

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Our basic assumption is that education within the orientation courses is (or should be) designed based on central principles of adult education such as participant orientation, reference to life and experience, self-determination, and humanistic values. As the theoretical framework for the paper, we use Martin Buber's concept of a true encounter and dialogical education, where the dialogical principle - the I-Thou relationship – is placed at the centre of pedagogical activity.

Based on Buber's thoughts, this article examines the degree to which education is designed and experienced in the orientation courses as an "opening up for" democratic values (Buber: *Erschließung*) - as opposed to imposing democratic values (Buber: *Auferlegung*). The focus here is on different dimensions of dialogic interaction: authenticity, recognition of otherness, recognition of autonomy and the drive/need to create (*Urhebertrieb*).

The orientation courses as designed by the German BAMF curriculum have not yet been systematically addressed in the research on adult education. The focus of the literature is mostly on the structures of the integration and orientation courses, as well as on the guidelines set by the BAMF. The perspectives of the participants and instructors were included in the research with a focus on language acquisition, as can be read in Hentges (2013) and Heinemann (2018). In his article, Käpplinger (2016) argues that adult education research has so far failed to critically examine the teaching and learning processes in these courses. This will be addressed in the context of this paper.

Buber's concept of dialogical education[1]

Martin Buber (1878-1965) is considered one of the greatest Jewish philosophers, thinkers, and educators who dedicated his life to facilitating encounter, dialogue, and learning for people in situations of transition and crisis. In Germany, he and Franz Rosenzweig established in 1920 the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* (Free Jewish Academy), the most famous and important educational institution that, even after the Nuremberg Laws (1935), provided education for Jews who were excluded from all spheres of social life and from all educational institutions in Germany. Later he became director of the Office for Jewish Adult Education in Germany. After his migration to Palestine in 1938, Buber became professor of social philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and, after the establishment of the State of Israel, he was commissioned to launch the Institute for Adult Education with the purpose to train teachers to work with immigrants (Guilherme & Morgan, 2017, p. 6-9). In the newly founded state of Israel, the question of integrating immigrants from a wide range of origins into a whole was no less acute than in today's migration society. The topic of migration was thus crucial for Buber's life, and also for his writing. Buber was concerned practically (as founder and head of the Institute for Adult Education) and theoretically with the integration of people from different countries into a new (Israeli) society. Buber saw a particular role for adult education in the process of integration. In this role, adult education was considered, not as a continuation of vocational training, but rather as "education of character", as a way of promoting a certain "type of person", which is required by a specific historical situation. He considered this task difficult, but also crucial for the development of a democratic Israeli state:

> It is hardly necessary to emphasize how great are the problems and difficulties which confront the teacher in Israel who must educate thousands of adult immigrants so that they may become mature enough to participate fully in the life of a democratic state (Buber, 2005a/[1952], p. 360).

His approach to training teachers for immigrants was not limited to the dissemination or appropriation of a certain knowledge. Rather, Buber devised an education that encompassed the person as a whole and was aimed at a respectful living together in a heterogeneous society: ‘Its result should do much to foster mutual respect and understanding among the citizens of the country‘(ibid., p. 364).

Buber focused on promoting the dialogical skills of the teachers and the learners. He emphasized the need of responding to people individually, of openness to learners’ experiences and opinions, and of personal contact:

> What is sought is a truly reciprocal conversation in which both sides are full partners. The teacher leads and directs this conversation, and enters it without any restraint. The teacher should ask genuine questions to which he does not know the full answer himself, and the student in turn should give the teacher information concerning his experiences and opinions. Conversely, when the teacher is asked a question by the student, his reply should proceed from the depths of his own personal experience (Buber, 1950, p. 117 f.).

Buber describes some forms of education as an "evil of modern human being" (Buber, 2005c/[1922], p. 128), when a person is seen as an object, as a means to an end. A human being is thus perceived and used with regard to his/her special abilities and aptitudes, “as a bundle of tangible, influenceable, manageable, exploitable properties” (ibid.). Buber contrasts this logic with a dialogical education that explicitly treats people as subjects.

For Buber, a true dialogue between individuals is a rare phenomenon. He developed a taxonomy to exemplify two kinds of relationships in which people enter: I-Thou and I-It. The I-Thou-relationship describes the core of the dialogical attitude, which Buber describes as the willingness to be addressed and answered by the Other. Through this type of encounter, people are perceived and addressed as individuals, then it is upon the human being to answer, which includes being attentive towards the dialogue partner, taking responsibility for the moment, for "living life", and for the presence of the inter-human relationship. In such a moment, “a newly created world concretion has been put in our arms; we are responsible for it" (Buber, 1979c/[1930], p. 163).

In contrast to the singularity and mutuality of the I-Thou-relation, the I-It-relation is the expression of how we experience the world in its structure and regularity and how we use this experience to understand the order of the world. The I-It experience is always indirect and mediated, perceived as an element of a structure and is classifiable, understandable only in connection with a purpose and does not have a meaning in itself. The Thou, in contrast, is not classified in space, time and causation. Buber recognizes the necessity of the I-It-relationship in order to have an orientation in the world, but warns against the “increase of the It-world” – i.e. the expansion of the objective world and the logic of structure and usefulness at the cost of a “decrease of the relational strength of the human being” (Buber, 1979b/[1923], p. 41). Only through turning to the other while respecting the dialogical principle, we can create “a joint fertility that cannot be found anywhere else” - because only through “the inter-human relationship something can be opened up that would be otherwise undeveloped” (Buber, 1979a/[1954], p. 295). Guilherme & Morgan point out, however, that Buber rejects any sort of sharp dualism between the I–Thou and I–It relation: “there is always an interplay between the I–Thou and the I–It, rather than an either/or relation between these foundational concepts” (Guilherme & Morgan, 2009, p. 567). Any relationship can therefore be transformed in the educational process into its opposite.

Buber defines three conditions or “elements” in the behaviour of people facing each other in the conditions of dialogue and true inter-human-relationships (Buber, 1979c/[1930], p. 287):

(1) "uprightness" / authenticity ("not appearance, but being"),
(2) awareness of the other and his/her otherness,
(3) being cautious not to impose oneself onto the other.

The first basic characteristic (1) implies that the individual truly communicates with the other, allows the other to participate in his/her being in the world, and opens him-/herself up to the other. The second (2) includes a special form of perception of the other person: in his/her entirety, unity and uniqueness. The other person must not be perceived as being analysable ("dissectable"), reductive (disregarding the diversity of the person) or derivative (summarizing "the becoming of a person” from a genetic formula). Otherwise, this would lead to a "radical de-secretiveness" between people, whereby "the personality, the relentlessly close mystery, once the motivation of the quietest enthusiasm [...] will be levelled" (Buber, 1979a/[1954], p. 285). One of Buber's attitudes is called "personal awareness", which is described as "real fantasy" - a creative imagination that focuses on the concrete person in the encounter. Real fantasy is more than just watching and perceiving the person, it is "a swinging into the other, which demands the most intense stimulation of my being, just as it is the kind of all real fantasy, only that here the area of my deed is not all kind, but that I am confronted with a special concrete real person […]”(ibid., p. 286).

Buber warns (3) for the imposition - an intrusive appearance, an inappropriate effect on an individual’s attitude and lifestyle. He juxtaposes this phenomenon to a natural development, an opening up (*Erschließung*), which he describes as an influence that is not characterized by instruction, but by encounter, “by existential communication" (ibid., p. 287). In the process of imposition, the counterpart is not seen as a person in his/her uniqueness. The person who has been imposed with attitudes and opinions is seen through the lens of his/her usefulness for a certain purpose (ibid., p. 288).

Friedman, one of the best-known researchers on Buber, provides a distinction between imposition (*Auferlegung*) and development (*Erschließung*), between propaganda and a legitimate influence as conceptualized by Buber:

> Genuine conversation, like every genuine fulfilment of relation between men, means acceptance of otherness. This means that although one may desire to influence the other and to lead him to share in one’s relation to truth, one accepts and confirms him in his being this particular man made in this particular way. One wishes him to have a different relation to one’s own truth in accordance with his individuality. Influencing the other does not mean injecting one’s own ‘rightness’ into him, but using one’s influence to let that which is recognized as right, just, and true take seed and grow in the substance of the other in the form suited to his individuation (Friedman, 1956, p. 102).

According to Buber, the essential element of a real dialogue is seeing, recognizing that the other is different. In order to meet the “other”, you have to deal with him/her as someone who is different from yourself, but at the same time as someone with whom you can relate. Buber sees a dialogue as a process of pursuing human nature and human development. In this process a human being needs a constant orientation (and re-orientation) through learning – in terms of positioning his-/herself to others and to the world with regard to certain norms and values (Friedenthal-Haase, 1991, p. 32).

Buber lays an emphasis on the role of the teacher in the education process: Education cannot develop where the teacher is moved by *Eros* (for Buber: selection based on affection or inclination) or the will to power (Buber, M. (2005e/[1926], p. 145-6). The teacher who is moved by the will to power is a simple transmitter of the "secured, hereditary values"; his educational approach is rigid and non-dialogical (Kloubert, 2020). Eros and will to power give the teacher the feeling of supposed omnipotence, reducing the learner to an object.

The dialogical educator, on the contrary, directs his/her actions towards an "updating of the forces" of the individual: he believes "that the right and the true is laid in every person in a unique and uniquely individual manner; no other way can be imposed over a human being" (Buber, 1979a/[1954], p. 289). Guilherme & Morgan (2018) describe a teacher as a builder of community "who prepares the ideological framework, while the members of the group receive the idea that binds them as a community" and who helps the learners to "enter into the dynamics of I-Thou relations with each other" (p. 787). This practice is "fundamental for understanding the importance, the ethical weight, of being a moral being" (ibid.). Adult education in this sense is aimed at "fulfilling a life task in her community in the given historical situation" (Buber, 2005d/[1949/1950], p. 240). It is based on:

> Dialogue of questions and answers, mutual questions and mutual answers, dialogue in the mutual consideration of a reality, nature or art, or joint exploration of a life problem, dialogue of real togetherness, where the pauses of the conversation can be no less dialogical than the speech (ibid., p. 241).

This attitude has implications for education, which, according to Buber, must not allow itself to lapse into relativism, but must progress through dialogue with the other - "an attempt that must be made over and over again" (Jacobi, 2017, p. 666).

A human being cannot fully grasp the world, but he/she can do his/her best to seek truth in a dialogue: "We are not allowed to possess the truth; but whoever believes in it and serves it builds on its empire" (Buber, 2005b/[1935], p. 282). This "service to the truth" can only succeed if people live in "constant self-reflection and willingness to repent, to revise views and judgments, which counteracts the widespread tendency to see other people only as members of an ideological 'camp' and to reduce them to the ideological [factor]" (Meilhammer, 2005, p. 172). In this sense, education is a process of individual maturity by overcoming the "fictitious mind" (in the sense of false, non-real attitude: *Fiktivgesinnung*) and by resisting collective ideologies.

Concept of the orientation courses

Against this backdrop, the concept of the nationwide orientation course is described in order to explicate the goals and implications inherent to it, compare them with the results of the study, and interpret them according to the principles of Buber's humanism and dialogue.

In 2004 the Federal Agency for Flight and Migration (BAMF) presented a concept for a nationwide integration course (cf. Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge [BAMF], 2004); a curriculum was published three years later (BAMF, 2007), and in 2017 it was readjusted (BAMF, 2017). These documents follow essentially the same principles and visions and differ only in that the revised version is much more detailed and the scope of the lessons has been increased from 30 to 45, then to 60 and finally to 100 hours. The curriculum specifies topics, goals and learning content, as well as the

number of teaching units per topic or module. The importance and relevance of the orientation courses for the integration process is explained as follows:

> Knowledge of fundamental values of society as well as knowledge of the legal system, history and culture as well as the political institutions in Germany make it easier to find your way in the new society and create opportunities for identification. (Integrationskonzept, cit. in: BAMF, 2017, p. 7)

The stated goals are:

- Awakening understanding of the German state system,
- Developing a positive assessment of the German state,
- Imparting knowledge of the rights and obligations of residents and citizens,
- Developing the ability to orientate yourself further (methodological competence),
- Empowering to participate in social life (competence to act),
- Acquiring intercultural competence (ibid.).
- The content of the orientation course consists of three modules:
- The module "Politics in Democracy" (35 hours) deals with the principles and fundamental rights of the constitution as well as with the constitutional organs and political parties.
- The module "History and Responsibility" (20 hours) deals with the German past (dictatorship of National Socialism and the GDR) in order to develop an understanding of the "German and European present" and "responsibility and appreciation for democratic principles and fundamental rights in the Present from knowledge of the consequences of the Nazi dictatorship" (BAMF, 2017, p. 32).
- The module "Person and Society" (38 hours) aims at religious and cultural tolerance, the acceptance of different opinions as well as gender equality.

The remaining seven hours are divided into an introduction of three hours and a four-hour final unit, which serves to prepare for the (standardized) test. The pool for the orientation test consists of a catalogue of 300 multiple choice questions, of which 33 are asked in the test.

The curriculum for the orientation course is determined by the integration course regulation. The courses themselves are carried out by various public and private adult and youth education institutions on behalf of and in accordance with the guidelines of the BAMF. These are, for example, adult education centres, supra-regional private providers, such as the German Employee Academy (DAA) and Kolping Academies. The institutions that organize the courses are regularly monitored by the BAMF to ensure that the content, organizational principles, and educational design have been followed.

Methods and data collection

This qualitative study consisted of semi-structured interviews with former participants of orientation courses and of a written questionnaire administered to course instructors.

There were twelve interview participants (7 male and 5 female, from 22 to 48 years). The interviews took place in August 2018 in an established adult education facility in Middle Franconia, a region in Bavaria. The interviews were based on a guideline that structured the interview but allowed for flexibility to adapt to the respective interview situation. It ensured that participants gave answers to the same

questions. The guideline prompted participants' perceptions of the following thematic areas: expectations of the course, what they learned, disappointments about what they hoped for but did not learn, German democracy, the role of the teachers, consideration given toward their own experiences during the learning process, their role as learners, and the teacher-student relationship. If requested, a translator was available during the interviews, so that the participants had the opportunity to give their answers in their native tongue. Participants were guaranteed that all of their answers would remain anonymous. It was also assured that the research aimed to assess neither the performance of the participants during the course nor the educational institution.

In addition to the interviews with the participants, an anonymized, written, qualitative questionnaire was completed by ten course instructors from the same educational institution in June and July 2018. The course instructors were asked to answer the questions independently, i.e. without consulting their colleagues and without tools such as the curriculum of the orientation course. In terms of the content, the questionnaire explored the motivations and interests of orientation course participants from the course instructors' views. Furthermore, the course instructors were asked to self-assess their role as teachers and to reflect on the teaching process. Their evaluation of the importance of the orientation course for the living environment of the participants was also asked.

Analysis of the data collected from the interviews and the written questionnaires was based on the following questions: (1) How did the participants describe the learning process and the role of the instructor? What roles did the instructors attribute to themselves? How authentically do they believe that they behave towards the participants? (2) How did the participants feel about their respective individual living environments and life experience in a new society? How should / could those be approached from the instructor's perspective? (3) How and to what extent did the course participants feel supported in their ability to autonomously think and act in the new democratic society? To what extent was the intention of the instructors to promote participation and action skills? The answers are obviously not generalizable, as it is a qualitative study, but they give insight into narratives, structures, and processes of meaning-making in the given educational setting.

These questions relate to the nature of educational processes: Is civic/political education, as part of which the orientation course considered to be (see BAMF 2017, p. 9), designed and conducted in accordance with its core principles of dialogue, autonomy, empowerment and critical (self-) reflection? Or, rather, does it resemble an effort to transmit an uncritical acceptance of information? These questions are approached at the micro level through analysing the educational relationships between instructors and participants, as well as the learning content and formats from the subjective perspective of the respondents. Specifically, it is about how learning processes were viewed and described - as an orientation in the sense of empowerment and the promotion of self-discovery or rather as an orientation in the sense of one-sided control, regulation and imposing from the outside.

All the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and content analysis (Mayring, 2000) was used to code and categorise the data from the interviews and from the written questionnaires into themes. We used Maxqda, a software program for computer-aided qualitative data analysis, to enhance consistency and transparency. The initial codes were derived from the theoretical framework as described above (inductive codes). In the process of analysis, new themes emerged; they were generalized to a code and described using relevant examples from the text (deductive codes). We compared our

initial codes with emergent codes in order to cluster the connected categories together and construct a list of themes and sub-themes.

Findings

Three primary themes of the teaching-learning process are presented below: (1) the role of the instructors in facilitating an encounter; (2) recognition of the other; and (3) promoting autonomy and the ability to judge and act. These three dimensions can be indirectly assigned to the three above-mentioned requirements for dialogical education according to Martin Buber: the demand of being authentic and present in the moment ("uprightness"), of being open to the dialogue partner, of recognizing and appreciating the otherness of the other without judgement ("acknowledging the other"); striving to not impose oneself over the other, but to support and foster the uniqueness of the other in terms of her own power ("avoiding imposition").

"Uprightness" / authenticity and possibility of an encounter

The question of authenticity and "uprightness" is related to teachers as well as to learners. It can be assumed that the teachers have a responsibility to launch an encounter and a dialogue, so we start with findings on the perceived roles of the teacher in the classroom.

The questionnaire completed by the instructors showed consistently that they aspire not only to impart knowledge to course participants so that they can reproduce it on the multiple-choice-test, but also to have deep conversations about societal values and principles of living together in a society. Some instructors emphasize the need to talk about such fundamental values as freedom of expression and to experience these values with learners during the course, and thus allow the values to be exemplified and examined together. One of the instructors explains: "Often I referred to the basic value of freedom of expression and I try to explore together, how one can endure the co-existence of different opinions"" (Questionnaire 8, p. 3).[2] Values are perceived here, not as a subject to transmit, but as phenomena that can and should be experienced together. This line of reasoning is also visible in the following quotation: "Democracy should not be an abstract value, but should be lived [in the classroom]" (Questionnaire 3, p. 2).

Some instructors, however, point out that their aim is to follow the curriculum exactly in terms of the content to be taught; their focus is therefore on preparing their learners to pass the exam at the end of the course. The interaction in these cases is reduced to the minimum; students' mental efforts are concentrated on memorizing. Memorizing of the content can, however, hardly be equated with the development of one's own worldview and authenticity. In this case, Buber's category of fictionalism (as opposed to the real and genuine attitude) could be useful to understand the potential danger of this kind of teaching and learning. We can illustrate it using a description by Adam, a course participant:

> The teacher, for example, she also gave us topics of the orientation course on paper, and she said is not a specialist about the laws or about the rules […] and she also didn't understand these laws and rules well, so she only reads what is on paper without more details (Interview Adam, #00:12:44#).

However, we can also find the contrasting statements showing how instructors develop deep discussions about democratic values: "They [the teachers] explain the different

opinions and why is so and so or if there is something that is not obvious, logical for us they explain it" (Interview Nadiya, #00:20:51#).

The reason for the didactical choices of the instructors can be guided by personal preferences, but also by the general framework of the courses. A response from one of the instructors illustrates that the circumstances and conditions prescribed by the course design by BAMF are pivotal and often do not allow for a more dialogic educational design. A course instructor describes the teaching process as follows:

> Actually, we always impose our point of view on the participants. We, the instructors, do not have the time to explain the meaningfulness of what we teach. Ergo you learn everything by heart to pass the exam. Very few learn why the content is important. That's not how good integration works (Questionnaire 3, p. 9).

From the perspective of the students, the discussions were also perceived as a distraction from the main goal (of preparing for the exam). Learning is in such a case goal-oriented, whereas discussion and dialogue are perceived as a "waste of the time":

> There was a lot of discussion: We discussed, maybe criticized each other, but then we either found a solution or left the problem as it was and no longer spoke so that we wouldn't waste even any more time (Interview Fatima, #00:16:28#).

The transmission of information (knowledge about Germany) is considered highly important for integration – not only in the curriculum text of the BAMF, but also by some instructors. Encounter and dialogue remain a pleasant, but not necessary addendum. If, however, in the dense plan of the course provided by BAMF, the possibility of a true authentic encounter arises, this experience is crucial for some learners, as we can see in the example of Fatima. She reports about her experience of feeling seen and recognized by the instructor:

> At the end of the course, for example the last day, I have found a very good impression of our teachers. She gave such a letter for each of us about what she learnt to know about each of us and from us. Yes, I did, I really liked that, yes. (Laughs) (Interview Fatima, #00:19:14#).

Another aspect of authenticity/uprightness relates to the possibility and/or necessity of the teachers' neutrality. According to the interviews, the instructors seemed to have a high reputation among the participants, so it is reasonable to assume that what the instructors say can influence the opinion formation of the participants. The instructors in this study seem to be aware of their possible influence. In the questionnaires, they report that they either do not express a direct statement on a controversial question at all (in an effort not to steer the opinion-forming process) or they do it only with an explicit indication that this is a personal opinion on a controversial issue. When the second option is chosen, then it is justified by the wish to develop a capacity for providing reasons for one's own argument.

> Yes, if the participants ask, they will get my answer, but with the indication that this is only my personal view. 'You shouldn't feel influenced in any way.' However, they should learn how to justify or defend their own views and how to stand by them (Questionnaire 6, p. 4).

An instructor points out that with articulation of her own principles and beliefs she aims to encourage an exchange of opinions in the classroom. She added, however: "[I want]

the participants to reflect upon their own, often very dogmatical believes" (Questionnaire 1, page 4).

One instructor recounted a conformist behaviour by students that complicates the use of dialogue: "The participant tries to copy the teacher's opinion in order not to get any difficulties, but often the content cannot be grasped linguistically and intellectually" (Questionnaire 4, page 9). The power imbalance (knowledge / non-knowledge) in the learning situation and the fact that the participants are existentially dependent on passing the exam makes it difficult to achieve a real encounter: "The participants know exactly which answers from they are 'expected'" […] (Questionnaire 1, page 2).

Based on Buber's dialogical principle, it can certainly be stated that education that is free of expressing one's own authentic position is not possible. On the other hand, the process of searching for truth is a dialogical one where everyone is asked to truly articulate their own position and worldview. This requires, however, appropriate skills of the instructors and appropriate course design from BAMP.

Acknowledging the other and respecting pluralism

Do the participants feel addressed by the instructors in their uniqueness, as Buber demands in his second principle of dialogue? Buber states that educational processes only comply with the principle of freedom if there is a dialogue: the world can be experienced and opened up by a "salutation", by being addressed, and this is the only way to generate an answer (cf. Buber, 2005e/[1926], p. 144). This salutation implies the principle of encompassing the dialogue partner in her wholeness/entirety.

The question then arises whether the participants are recognized in their unique being and whether their potential is acknowledged? It seems obvious that a real encounter can hardly happen when the instructor uses a frontal teaching method. In one interview, the participant mentioned that the lesson was limited to reading aloud the questions and answers from the catalogue of test questions:

> She [the teacher] reads the question and each question has an answer, the answer is exactly like that, she didn't ask us about our opinions or anything. Just the question, the answer, the question, the answer (Interview Adam, #00:16:47#).

Looking at the findings, it can be said that most of the courses are based on lecture-style teaching. The attempt at a dialogic interaction was mentioned in very few cases: instructors pointed out that they ask participants to provide some examples of their experience that could be related to a content of the lesson (e.g. a legal regulation in the country or school system). However, the interviews with course participants showed that their experiences and contributions were only seldom queried and sometimes even explicitly prevented due to the short time available to present the content: "Yes, we could say something, but not long, because of the short time, one cannot speak much (laughs) yes, but we were allowed to, yes, to tell a little" (Interview Samira, #00:00:53#). To the question about which roles the life-stories of participants play in the course, one instructor responded: "Homesickness, the lack of family members often leads to weaknesses in concentration, which, however, are usually gone after a few hours / days" (Questionnaire 1, page 5). This answer might imply that the personal experience of the participant had been considered as distractive from the actual content, so it is beneficial when distractive moments are "gone" after a certain period. For another instructor in the study, negative experiences, especially connected to students' flight from their home countries, are an issue to consider. He acknowledges that difficult and even tragic life events tremendously influence the learning process and

describes his strategy to deal with them in terms of giving space to those stories: “The participants must first get settled in Germany, feel good, feel accepted and understood” (Questionnaire 6, page 5).

In most of the interviews, instructors speak about conflicts between the different participants as a challenge. If they come from countries with different or even contradicting beliefs and cultures, an encounter and dialogue between participants can be difficult: “Gender roles and religion are the most explosive topics. The participants perceive the remarks of others as offensive […] The discussion is very loud” (Questionnaire 1, page 3).

Some instructors try to stifle discussion with the remarks such as: “In Germany, it is this way, and no other” (Questionnaire 9, page 3). Others, however, recognize challenging discussions as an opportunity to speak about value pluralism and freedom of expression. They try to show the variety of perspectives and to encourage controversial discussions (which is required as a didactic principle in the curriculum of BAMF):

> I allow discussions. I collect reasons with the participants for why something is like this, I collect arguments for and against. I compare and try to show the participants that there is not always only one fixed solution (Questionnaire 6, p. 3).

The study clearly shows that the task of integration into democracy is hampered by the strict course design requirements (as prescribed by BAMF), the resulting didactic teaching method, and sometimes by the need for instructors to facilitate conflict situations. The pedagogical efforts of the instructors rarely focus on recognizing participants as thinking and acting subjects with their own unique experiences, developmental paths, and interpretative patterns. Buber’s principle of true human encounter calls for the recognition of the uniqueness and individual development. Therefore, striving to mould students into a predetermined type of person is problematic if the inter-human interaction is to be based on I-Thou-Relationships. Accordingly, in the context of migration and orientation courses, integration does not mean assimilation, however perfect the envisioned role models might be. In the book The Hasidim's Tales, Buber illustrates that it is more important to be authentic than it is to even emulate a role model. In it, the character Rabbi Sussja explains: "In the world to come, I will not be asked: 'Why have you not been Moses?' I will be asked: 'Why have you not been Sussja?'" (Buber, 2014, p. 337).

Avoiding imposition: Social norms and individual lifestyle

One purpose of our study was to investigate participants’ perceptions of the connection between course content (aiming to acquaint them with the German state and culture) and their own living environment/lifeworld (either from their own country or their unique individual experience), as well as whether and how the instructors facilitated this connection. Adherence to the rules of the host society was a recurring theme in the interviews; some participants even described the course as an "introduction" to the rules of German society. This aspect of integration is thus equated with the strict pursuit of the norms and principles learned in the course. Accordingly, in some interviews the idea was expressed that failure to observe certain established rules and norms would imply exclusion from the new community. "We have to keep them, and if I keep these rules and these laws, that means I am now a part of this society" (Interview Adam, #00:25:53#).

It becomes clear from the interviews that disagreement as a legitimate act in society and the discursive nature of social norms are not reflected in the course. In an interview with Adam, he replies to the question of whether there was any content about which he had a different opinion than the instructor: “No, the laws in Germany are what I think - how they should be. I have no right to question the law” (Interview Adam, #00:08:51#).

From the interviews with the course participants, it can be concluded that the instructors did not, or at least not sufficiently, encourage disagreement in the classroom. Some of the course instructors felt that they were not competent enough to speak about legal regulations and limited themselves to distributing information for participants to memorize, as Adam described in response to the question about course discussions and his ability to contribute an opinion (Interview Adam, #00:16:47#). Consequently, rules were memorized as verses, without making them comprehensible through discussion: "There was not much discussion or anything in this course, very little, and we were told that these are the laws and the rules are like this" (Interview Adam, #00:16:12#).

Additionally, Ibrahim addressed self-censorship as a crucial hindrance that results from life in a dictatorship. Even if freedom of expression is allowed and citizens are given the opportunity to participate, it is a habitual attitude of, for instance, immigrants from Syria, not to interfere in the politics of the country in which they live and not to speak about the politics of the country:

> Because in Syria we are always far from politics. I don't need that and a lot of people also not, because I can't speak about politics badly without punishment or so. But maybe in Germany is different, and we know it after a year or two, yes, but it's difficult in Syria, yes (Interview Ibrahim, #00:24:12#).

According to the course objectives, the orientation courses’ aim is to foster participants’ ability to reflect on and act in their new society (see above). Accomplishing this objective would require, however, practicing reflection and action during the course itself. This practice would require the instructor to have professional pedagogical skills in the areas of moderation, conflict resolution, and mediation, as well as didactically appropriate teaching-learning arrangements, which are often not given, as can be seen in the responses of the instructors. Content-oriented (rather than dialogue-oriented) learning has its consequences, as illustrated by Hassan:

> Yes, I have not learned anything in this course at all, but I only passed the exam with luck and chance. I have only read the questions, but I have not learned anything, yes, because I am not interested in politics. I didn’t learn it in my home country and I don't want to learn politics about this country either (Interview Hassan, #00:01:50#).

When asked what he can remember from the orientation course, Hassan answered: “I don't remember anything. Nothing at all” (ibid., #00:02:39#). Here, we see that the orientation course focused on content that did not seem relevant for the learner can hardly lead to a sustainable orientation in the new society.

In some cases, learning was perceived as an unnecessary burden: "About this political course, I don't think you ever need it" (Interview Hassan, #00:01:50#), which undermines learning motivation, as well as a general interest in the content of orientation courses.

All in all, a complex picture of the notion of acknowledging the other emerges from the findings: Education, which is purported to be an aid to integration into a (new) society, is inevitably torn between the principle of recognizing a person as an individual being in his/her uniqueness and the entirety of his/her life-world contexts, and the goal of ensuring the acquisition of required knowledge for a certain society and respecting

the constitutions and principles of the (new) society (and helping to shape them if necessary). The tension, indicated by instructors as well as by participants, can be described as a tension between acceptance of the German culture and preservation of the home country's culture, but also a tension between the idea of shared principle of humanity (universalism) and a right to be different and unique.

Discussion and Conclusions: "But can you lead someone to a world?"

Organized learning possibilities play an important role in facilitating the transition of newcomers to a society. Integration courses are crucial for obtaining not only the language competences, but also to gain an overview of the fundamental principles and pillars of the new society. We suggest that Buber's philosophy of education has great potential for conceptualizing and analyzing adult education offerings for migrants. Buber's dialogical education provides an orientation for ever-changing life circumstances and ever-developing heterogenous societies. We might benefit from Buber's approach also in dealing with such issues as fostering mutual understanding and respect, enhancing social participation and social cohesion, and helping people grow.

"But can you lead someone to a world?" (Buber, 2005b/[1935], p. 281) asked Martin Buber. His answer lies in dialogical education, in the (mutual) development - in the real "co-experience of people of the same nature, fused in the same kind, but still different minds" (ibid., p. 283). Education means "approaching something" (ibid., p. 279), but a person also "starts from something" (ibid., p. 280). It encompasses the versatility of the world in which people have already amassed experiences, but also the continuing quest for truth. One cannot convey a worldview, cannot lead to the truth, because "there is the existential responsibility of the person for having a worldview; a group cannot take it from a person, it mustn't" (Buber, 1993/[1965], p. 61). Buber's dialogical principle assumes the process of joint search for truth through encounter and communication with the aspiration of developing a deep understanding of the world, elaboration of a worldview, and overcoming the stage of fictionalism (appearance instead of being) (cf. Buber, 2005b/[1935], p. 285).

Dialogue as a special form of communication was considered by Buber to be essential for helping people grow and develop. Learning communication skills is also an explicit requirement formulated by BAMF in the curriculum of the orientation courses. The results of our study show, however, that dialogue rarely takes places in the orientation courses for migrants – due to numerous reasons such as time restrictions, density of the content to be learned, insufficient language competencies, didactical insecurities, and conflict avoidance. Orientation courses are per definition goal-oriented: they are designed to *transmit* to new-comers the knowledge and principles needed to live in a new society. However, the curriculum of the orientation courses also emphasizes an orientation on participants. This orientation is a didactical principle intended to integrate learners' needs, experiences, and patterns of meaning into the educational process. The results of the study show that orientation on participants remains in most cases a wishful, but unrealized component. The interviewed learners indicated that even if they felt free to express their opinions, there was in practice relatively little discussion. Disagreement was discouraged in order not to delay pursuit of the prescribed curriculum, and according to their responses, a deep reflection on democratic values, which is important for the further development of society, has been lacking.

If learning is limited to transmitting and memorizing information, then it is anti-dialogical; this learning would be what Buber called *Auferlegung* (imposition). Learning in terms of "opening up" (*Erschließung)* would more strongly promote the exchange and reflection about different life-experiences, meaning patterns and worldviews. We have found only little evidence in our interviews of this approach being used.

Some examples from the interviews, such as personal letters from an instructor to participants, illustrate the possibility of true encounter even under the very structured and formalized conditions of orientation courses. The few instances when participants reported discussions in class, they talked about how they were moments of gaining increased understanding of each other, where students felt respected for their unique life histories; as Buber might say, these were instances when the Other became Thou.

The capability to engage in dialogue is of special importance in a heterogeneous society in which difference and dissent play an integral part. Buber argues that acknowledging the otherness of the Other is the crucial point of each dialogue. Dialogue means being willing and able to open oneself to the other, to expose oneself to the other, make oneself vulnerable, be authentic, be able to articulate oneself. Some instructors mentioned in the questionnaire their wish for open conversations in class, yet pointed out that they do not possess the necessary competences to guide a dialogue across such differences as exist among groups of migrants from disparate backgrounds, and especially with the potential conflict situations that often arise from such differences. Such potential conflicts are reduced when I-Thou relationships are in place.

> The educator can only educate if he or she is able to build a relation based on true mutuality, on true dialogue with students, and this mutuality, this dialogue can only come to the fore if the student trusts the educator, if the student feels accepted, otherwise any attempt to educate will lead to rebellion and lack of interest (Guilherme & Morgan 2009, p. 568).

Finding orientation in a migration society includes learning to acknowledge the plurality of different societal groups (in the case of this study, orientation course participants as representatives of newcomers, and teachers as representatives of the host society). This process implies the ability to express one's own individuality and the resulting difference/otherness, and still to be open for a dialogue across those differences. Buber, working with migrants who came to the established State of Israel, laid emphasis on creating a true community [*die wahre Gemeinde*] where people develop an authentic reciprocal (I-Thou) relationship, one without instrumental purpose but rather with the aspiration to step into a dialogue (Guilherme & Morgan, 2017, p. 21). Without a dialogical approach of instructors, education can be trapped in the instrumental logic of the I-It-Relationship, where learners come to know facts and acquire a range of skills, but a true community never forms. This study illustrates the need for further training for instructors – in terms of didactical approaches and communication strategies.

The requirements that adult educators face are numerous. Based on the findings of this study, we can observe a discrepancy between the attitudes and aspirations of the instructors and the educational practice in which they work. They articulate a desire to accept and include the individuality of the participants, but at the same time they are confronted with the regulations by the BAMF, which make it hardly possible for participants and instructors to meet on an equal basis, or at least limit them through time restrictions and examination modalities. The instructors need to follow the detailed and rigid instructions of the BAMF and are subject to periodic review of their pedagogical practices to determine whether they comply with the given prescription. The guidelines for orientation are therefore pre-defined by the authors of the curriculum and must be

implemented by the instructors. The instructors, as shown in the findings, sometimes observe resistance among their students, a reluctance to follow the guidelines in the curriculum. A prescribed guideline, even perhaps the best one for a given situation, can hardly be imposed on someone. It might be difficult for adult educators when well-meaning, well-intended advice is not accepted. I-Thou-relationship might provide a useful concept to deal with this concern. Buber's dialogical concept argues against the practice of imposing values and beliefs; Buber calls for developing teachers' capacity for "real fantasy" (creative imagination anticipating a concrete whole person in the encounter) and for perceiving learners as subjects (acknowledging the creator's drive, *Urhebertrieb,* of each learner who strives to be active) (Buber, M., 2005e/[1926], p. 138). In this scenario, the teacher provides opportunities for learners to exercise this creator's drive through immersion into the new society and, just as important, by helping them see possibilities to be co-creators of it. The participants in this case would not only adapt themselves to the norms of their new society, into which the teacher tries to give them deeper insights, but they also actively analyze them, compare them with their previous experience, evaluate them, and in doing so, make the new society "their own" –a shared true dialogical community. For Buber, an acknowledgment of the plurality of life concepts means that "the educational efforts point to the real unity, which hides behind the ambiguity of the aspects" (Buber, 2005b/[1935], p. 281).

Our research allows us to make a tentative assumption, that, even when based on a well-intentioned attitude of the instructors, the integration course often leans toward the transmission of prescribed information and skills, development of missing competencies and knowledge (which are presumably required in the new society), and facilitation of the integration process. In other words, we are thinking about migrants as people who need help, who are receivers of our support. Such an attitude is, at best, empathetic, but it does not necessarily support the development of autonomy nor encourage dialogue on equal footing. Only in some cases, instructors treat migrants explicitly as equal contributors to society, as givers, co-workers and co-decision-makers. In order to fulfil this task, the emphasis must not be deficit-, but asset-oriented, where the individual lifepaths are brought into view, and differences are acknowledged and respected. The I-Thou-relationship stresses the holistic approach to a person as an equal. Through mutual recognition each person is acknowledged in his/her humaneness, rights, and strengths. The denial of the I-Thou-relationship, the denial of mutuality has ethical consequences (Guilherme, A. & Morgan 2009, p. 576). Dialogue is an essential element of educational offerings for migrants because it promotes a seeking for commonalities and the respecting of differences, encourages people to be part of a community, and, perhaps most important, treats each as fellow human beings.

Nevertheless, in addition to the criticism of the curriculum and the didactic design (that is rather far from dialogical education), the importance of acquiring knowledge about the processes, structures and rules of a new society should be acknowledged. The BAMF's intention to provide participants of the orientation courses with the knowledge needed for life in Germany seems appropriate. Orientation courses need to address both: the knowledge about the structures and principles of the new society, but also the experiences and the interpretation patterns from the lifeworld of the participants (Kloubert, 2019, p. 130). For sustainable empowerment to think and act in a democracy, however, a dialogical education that addresses a person in his/her entirety and differentness is essential. Buber understands that both the I–Thou and the I–It relations play a role in educational process. He acknowledges the need for the I-It relationship as a tool for understanding the world, but he repeatedly stresses the importance of a

dialogic encounter in the context of an I-Thou relationship: “Without IT a human being cannot live. But who lives alone with IT is not human” (Buber, 1979b/[1923], p. 38).

We recognize the difficulty in implementing such a demanding concept as dialogical education, not least as instructors themselves are trapped within structural limits of the orientation curses. The results of this empirical study demonstrate the challenge that not only instructors face, but also the responsible authorities. They have the task of developing a curriculum and pedagogical practice that deal with the living environments and narratives of migrants. The course content aims to develop freedom of expression and awareness for a plurality of perspectives, as well as the experience of autonomy, and on the other hand to define and justify the values of a democratic society. A dialogical education, which, according to Buber, is based on authenticity, awareness of the other(s), and the principle of not wanting to impose oneself, could be a useful lens to evaluate the adequacy of the educational program aiming at providing orientation for (any) adults in a pluralistic migration society.

Notes

[1] A representation of Buber's thinking about dialogical education can only be presented here in a very concise form. For a further description of Buber’s work, see e.g. Faber (1960), Friedenthal-Haase (1991), Schilpp and Friedman (1963), or newer research by Guilherme and Morgan (2014, 2017).
[2] All the quotes have been translated by us into English. The names of the participants have been anonymized.

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Modernisation of organisations due to migration? Mixed blessings in adult education centres in Germany

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Abstract

The following paper discusses as a research question the effects of increased migration by refugees and asylum-seekers on German adult education centres (Volkshochschule - VHS). Other studies have focused on the effects of co-called integration courses on learners, their trajectories, or general societal effects, such as inclusion in the labour market. In these studies, adult education was perceived as a means of how to deal with migration and integration, and the research was less focused on how migration and integration affects adult education centres. Based on modernity theories, this study used quantitative analysis in order to determine if the approximately 900 German adult education centres have changed in the last two decades due to increased migration and different legal frameworks. Program analysis were used in previous studies, while here the provider statistics were used for a longitudinal data analysis. This analysis focused on the following three factors: professional staff, the fields/subjects of provision, and financial sources.

Keywords: Adult education; adult education centre; migration; organisation; staff; Volkshochschule

Introduction

Many studies on migration and integration have focused on what effects adult education has on migrants and refugees (e.g. Fejes, 2019a; Heinemann, 2014; Käpplinger, 2018; Klingenberg & Rex, 2016; Lücker & Mania, 2014; Öztürk, 2014 Öztürk, 2018a, 2018b; Öztürk & Kaufmann, 2009; Palmén, 2016; Robak, 2018; Robak, 2015; Robak & Peter, 2014; Sprung, 2012; Stanik & Franz, 2016; Subasi, 2018; Wildemeersch, 2017; Zimmer, Lücker & Fleige, 2015). Typical research questions included the learning trajectories of students, the content of the courses, the integration policies, and the effect of adult

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learning on social and economic inclusion. Adult education was, in many respects, considered a main tool to use in order to deal with a situation with increased and non-planed migration. This extraordinary situation was frequently framed and perceived as a crisis by parts of the public. The focus of this paper differs from many of these studies. It concentrates on the effects of migration and integration on adult education centres, although it does not intend to analyse, for example, diversity (Öztürk & Reiter, 2017). This paper has an organisational focus on a key institution of adult learning in Germany.

Theoretical background and research questions

The development of adult education and its institutions is frequently discussed in relation to modernity theories (e.g. Salling Olesen, 2014; Schrader, 2014; Tippelt, 2018). Generally, adult education has historically important functions within the modernisation processes. Salling Olesen (2014, p. 40) stated: 'The theoretical notion of modernization seems to be a productive backbone in understanding the multiple institutional realities, conceptual meanings, and historical changes of adult education and learning in the context of societal functions of adult learning.' Furthermore, he mentions literacy education especially as 'enabling modern societies' (ibid., p. 41). Modernisation processes are often connected to language policies, because modern societies and governments often have a general interest in promoting communication and sustaining the nation-state as the basis of their power. Generally, it is assumed and expected that adult education will help individuals and society in coping with new situations, transitions, disruptions, or challenges, which are inherent to modern societies. Integration policies refer in many countries to the adult learning of migrants, which contains both the learning of languages and the learning of legal and social norms. Concepts range between the pole of intercultural/transcultural/multicultural learning (Robak & Peter, 2014; Robak, 2018), and the pole of learning how to assimilate and to integrate into the new society. Many studies have discussed different integration concepts critically (Fejes, 2019a), and despite globalisation, countries demonstrate a high degree of difference in how integration policies are exactly shaped. Moreover, national integration policies change over time, although certain path-logics can be observed.

The German integration policy has changed a great deal within the last two decades (for details see Lochner, 2016). It would be paramount and the issue of a different paper to explain all of the changes since the implementation of the new migration law in Germany in 2005, or the many changes made to asylum laws since the 1990s. These changes led to the establishment of integration courses as a tool to support people when arriving and wanting to stay in Germany. These courses are also used as a tool to pressure people to learn new things, like the German language or the legal norms in Germany. Participation in an integration course is a mix between a right and a duty. Additionally, the extraordinary events of 2015, which caused an influx of many refugees and asylum-seekers within a short period of time, led to extraordinary measures to cope with the situation and to also offer support to refugees so that they could integrate into German society and the labour market. The approach in Germany was sometimes described as an 'experiment' by people from abroad (e.g. Hockenos, 2018) because many people migrated to Germany within a short period of time and with unknown results. The German policy also differed from a number of other countries in that period of time. The question remains debatable if an 'experiment' is an adequate descriptive term, because many regulations and structures were used that had already pre-existed. These included the

blueprints for such integration courses in adult education centres that were used beginning in 2005.

Nonetheless, it is an interesting subject. Perhaps now is a good moment in time to investigate how the providers, the content of their courses, and their staff have changed. I do not want to discuss here what adult education is doing for the society or the migrants. I want to focus on organisational changes. This paper accomplished this goal by using and analysing quantitative longitudinal data from the roughly 900 German adult education centres, also known as *Volkshochschulen* (vhs), between 1992 and 2018. These adult education centres have a rich and multi-faceted history. These institutions were started 100 years ago in different parts of Germany by various political regimes (Borinski, 1944/1945; Gieseke & Opelt, 2003; Olbrich, 2001). These centres continue to be important providers of adult education in Germany.

The modernisation of organisations can be beneficial, but perhaps this kind of modernisation can also be disadvantageous. Modernisation is sometimes rather normatively perceived as simply a slogan for newer and improved structures or approaches. As a theoretical concept, it is in many respects a much more elaborate and often neutral concept (see also: Salling Olesen, 2014, Schrader, 2014). Education generally, and adult education especially, are very important institutions for modernisation processes, even in post-modern societies. This partly explains the political and economic interest in education as a supportive driver. This idea can be criticised as a functionalist and purely instrumental logic connected to education as a tool for adaptation (Zeuner, 2006). It is also important to note that processes of modernisation are manifold and can be characterised by many paradoxes (Loo & van der Reijen, 1997). Modernisation does not rule out that periods or events of regression can happen. The 20th century and the atrocities committed by Nazi Germans are a terrible example of how modernised and seemingly civilised nations can fall back in their development. Theodor Adorno and other scholars of critical theory repeatedly drew attention to the dialectic character of enlightenment and modernity, which is also very relevant for today.

Tippelt (2018, pp. 93-96) described, in relation to adult education research, ‘expansion’ and ‘differentiation’ as two key characteristics of modernisation. These were mentioned in addition to other characteristics, such as ‘individualisation.’ Following this approach, a modernised society should seek to establish a more elaborate and differentiated provision for education. It should offer more chances for individualised and tailor-made provisions. Thus, there are normative goals connected with modernisation and its improvements. These can be generally questioned because the call for more resources conflicts with sustainability and the limitations of resources. Today, the end of endless growth seems likely. For decades, this has been a challenge for the modernisation project (Meadows, Randers & Meadows, 1972).

This idea leads to another important question, which cannot be tackled in more detail here. Contrarily, the two characteristics of ‘expansion’ and ‘differentiation’ were used for the following research questions in this paper:

- Did migration and refugees cause an overall expansion of offers of adult education centres in Germany?
- Did migration and refugees cause a differentiation in provisions offered by the adult education centres in Germany?

These two research questions build on a previous historical analysis on adult education centres (Käpplinger, 2018). These questions were also informed by the fact that migration is historically a major stimulus for change and modernisation in societies. Some scholars

have recognized that a major stimulus for (positive) change comes predominantly from the outside: 'Modern societies receive the impulses for modernization not from the inside. At the inside are those who have fairly accommodated to the conditions. They are the least interested in change.'[1] (Precht & Welzer, 2016). This might be far too bold and general a statement, but it is interesting to study if migration is mainly or completely a societal burden (as it is often perceived and framed by right-wing extremists, xenophobes, or populists), or if it is also a stimulus for growth, differentiation, and generally more progress in society. Nonetheless, such an analysis requires an open-minded approach because the migration issue seems to be an almost 'toxic' issue. This is because there are extremes of only approval or disapproval by many people, and this limits the capacity for mutual understanding (Oeftering, 2016).

Data and methods

Many European languages know a word for a core institution of adult education invented by Grundtvig in the 19th century: *adult education centre (English)*, *Folkehøjskole (*Danish)*, Volkshogeschool* (Dutch)*, kansanopisto/työväenopisto/kansalaisopisto* (Finnish)*, Volkshochschule* (German), *Folkehøgskole/Folkehøgskule* (Norwegian)*, Folkhögskola (*Swedish), and *népfőiskola* (Hungarian). Nonetheless, the differences vary a great deal between the countries, and despite the joint historical roots, the diverse branches have developed very differently. This paper was framed using primarily the German context. Therefore, I encourage similar studies within other national contexts, or even comparative research in adult education. The reason for this is that the institutions and organisations of adult education are vastly different depending on the country in question.

The German Volkshochschule (VHS)

Thus, it is necessary to explain the German *Volkshochschule* (VHS) in more detail in order to support a general comparative understanding for the following analysis. The German Adult Education Association, Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V. (DVV), is the umbrella association of 16 VHS regional associations and approximately 900 public *Volkshochschulen*. It has more than 3,000 regional offices that exist almost everywhere in Germany, according to its own website[2] (see figure 1). The following text and figures were mostly taken from this website. In 2018, these centres provided 700,000 events (mainly courses, but also lectures, study trips, and excursions) with 16.8 million teaching hours and nine million participants.

Adult education centres are the largest provider of general adult education in Germany. However, these also provide vocational continuing education and training. One third of VHS participants asked in the Adult Education Survey (AES) answered that they were motivated to participate in VHS courses because of vocational reasons (Bilger, Behringer, Kuper & Schrader, 2017, p. 13). This is often the case for language courses, even when these courses are not described as being vocationally relevant.

Adult education centres (VHS) are mainly supported by local governments. The heads of the VHS are often employed by the local governments. They have a public educational mandate, which is mainly regulated by regional laws of the federal states ('*Länder')* and also by national or European law.

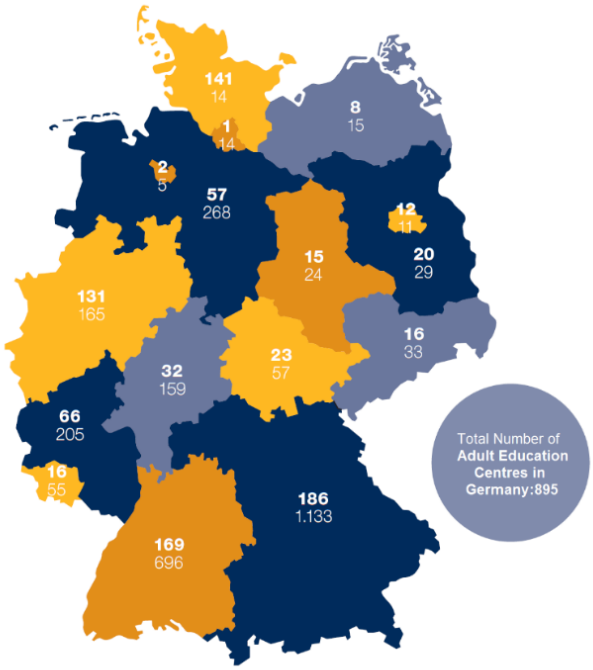

Figure 1. Adult education centres per region in Germany. Also shown are the number of centres and branch offices. (Source: dvv)

In rural regions, the adult education centres are often one of the few or even the only public training agencies available for adults. Adult education centres are supposed to be open to all people (with the normative slogan 'Bildung für alle') regardless of age, disability, gender, origin, social status, educational level, religion, or worldview. The adult education centres also try to meet their public mandate by setting socially affordable fees for all, as well as reductions for disadvantaged people. The centres work economically, but are not profit-based. Nonetheless, adult education centres must earn more than one-third of their financial resources from enrolment fees, but in some regions the fees can provide up to almost 50% of the budget. With stagnating or even falling public subsidies, the economic pressure on adult education centres is significant. Additionally, the centres often have to compete with other providers in response to the public call for tenders for projects. Project-based financing and new public management have been on the rise for decades. Thus, a 'driver for change' might not only originate because of the influx of people (demand-side-driven by migration), but rather supply-side-driven by government policies. Generally, the public mission of adult education centres is not only to reach all citizens, but also to provide a wide range of educational opportunities and themes. The wide ranges of content are structured by these key program areas:

1. Languages, and German as a second language
2. Health
3. Culture and creativity
4. Politics, society, and the environment
5. Work and vocation
6. Basic education/literacy and numeracy

Many VHS in Germany are almost 100 years old. These centres are closely connected to the rise and fall of democracy in Germany (Borinski, 1944/1945). Most of these were closed down or reshaped after 1933 by Nazi Germany. The centres were re-opened using private initiatives and allied forces in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) as well as in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) after 1945 (Gieseke & Opelt, 2003). They developed differently in the FRG and the GDR, but were united after the falling of the Iron Curtain. The VHS are a unique intercultural transfer and merger of the Danish folk high school idea that was developed by Grundtvig and Kold. However, the centres also refer to the British and Austrian university extension movements (Meilhammer, 2000).

Methodology used

Longitudinal data since the year 2000 from the German VHS statistics (Reichart, Lux & Huntemann, 2018) were used for the analysis within this paper. Initiated by the German Institute for Adult Education (*Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung - DIE*) in 1962, the annual survey collects data on the VHS. It contains rich information on staff, financing, events/courses, participation rates, cooperation with other organisations, and information regarding other activities, such as exhibitions. Almost all of the VHS participate annually in the survey, but mergers have decreased the overall number of VHS over time. More relevantly, the data is collected and reported by practitioners within the VHS, while scientists within the DIE support the reporting with guidelines and making plausibility checks on the reported data. Nonetheless, the survey data is not collected by scientists as in other surveys, and I do not know of any public quality reports or other extensive regular reflections on the data quality. Keeping these limits in mind, the survey is still a precious resource in addition to the longitudinal program archive of the VHS located within the DIE (see Käpplinger, 2018). Actually, the mutual usage of the program archive and the VHS statistics could offer rich opportunities for an in-depth analysis. Researchers could benefit from the advantages and disadvantages of both datasets and methods for an enriched analysis. Unfortunately, such a mixed-method approach has rarely been done so far, although researchers have clearly encouraged it (Fleige & Reichert, 2014). The VHS statistics have not been used in research as often as it could be. Longitudinal analysis like the one done by Martin and Muders (2018) showed interesting results. This paper and a previous paper in RELA (Käpplinger, 2018) illustrate at least some of the elements of a mixed-method approach and a longitudinal analysis.

Results

The expansion of and less differentiation in adult education centres due to integration and migration

The strong involvement of the VHS in recent migration policies has resulted in significantly different program structures, especially after 2015. The VHS in Germany are the biggest single provider of language and integration courses for migrants and refugees. Almost one-third of all integration courses can be found in the VHS, while many other providers offer such courses as well. Additionally, there is a certain level of competition between providers. Governments and administrations use procurement measures (Fejes & Holmqvist, 2019) to put certain pressures on providers, and this decreases professional autonomy. This is important to note because it introduces quasi-market-like mechanisms into this field of education, which are between state and market as regulating forces (Hake, 2016).

The integration courses are not generally obligatory for all migrants in Germany, but if they want to stay in Germany or want to claim social benefits, they have to attend such courses. Thus, there is at least an indirect pressure to take part in these courses, and the immigration office in charge often determines if individual migrants have to participate or not. As already mentioned, the participation within the integration courses can be perceived as somewhere between a duty and a right.

Figure 2 was produced using annual data from the VHS statistics compiled between 2004 and 2018, which was the last year available when this paper was written. The year 2004 was intentionally chosen because the new German migration law was implemented in 2005. Thus, the inclusion of the year 2004 allowed for some comparison of the development from before and after the introduction of the law, although the main focus was on the changes made after the implementation of the law. The descriptive analysis of this data demonstrated that courses in German taken by migrants more than tripled from less than two million hours taught before 2005 to more than 6.5 million hours taught in 2018. In comparison, the other six main program areas available in the statistical information (other languages, health, culture/creating, work and vocation, politics/society/environment) stagnated or declined, while only literacy increased from 1.2 million to 1.4 million hours taught.

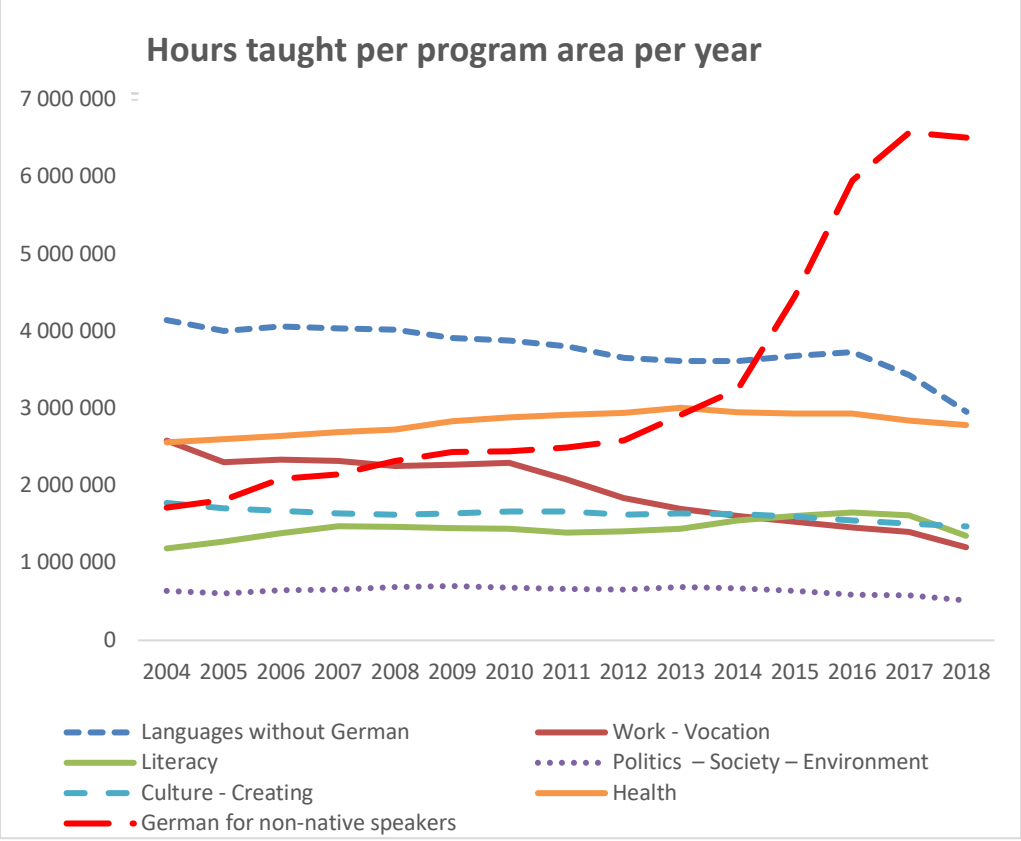

Figure 2. Hours taught per program area per year. (Source: dvv-Statistik. I processed the data by using data from each year that the statistics were available.)

The decline of language courses other than courses in German for non-native speakers, as well as the decline of courses in 'work and vocation', are most remarkable. Nonetheless, the decline of the program area 'work and vocation' had already started before 2015, which was the height of the so-called refugee crisis. Thus, it is possible to

interpret the challenges of integration as a great chance for the VHS to grow again and reverse the long-term trend of the last 20 years, which saw a slow decline of the VHS. In terms of expansion, the VHS might have benefitted a great deal from migration. The total volume of hours taught increased impressively from 14.6 million in 2004 to 16.8 million in 2018. This increase of the indicator time or volume is even more remarkable, because the general tendency in adult education in the last few decades is to decrease teaching hours. This is due to a number of reasons, such as general acceleration, a preference for short courses, and so on.

Another interpretation or hypothesis is that the increase of language and integration courses for migrants led to a quantitative decline in the other courses. The VHS staff could be too occupied in coping with the challenges of offering a high number of integration courses, and so they lacked the time needed to do other open courses. These open courses sometimes need more planning and so perhaps were more likely not to take place. Explorative interviews with program planners in the VHS between 2017 and 2019 nurture such a hypothesis as being likely enough for further analysis and testing. This was not done in this paper, but it seems to be an important task for researchers to undertake in the future. It was, for example, said that if any course in the open program does not take place, the program area of integration could very rapidly make use of such capacities becoming available. Program analysis will not be able to consider this. This is because the cancellation of open courses cannot be known by program analysis without additional information on cancelled courses, and on courses established alongside the open program. In this respect, the statistics were more informative despite their flaws in other respects compared to program analysis. For example, program analysis allowed for in-depth insights because the provider statistics were highly aggregated without needing to have details from the course descriptions. The latter was what the program analysis used and focused on. Both methods can have complementary values.

Room capacity is often limited in the VHS. Renting new rooms is not that easy, especially when the difficult real estate market in Germany is considered. This can result in a lack of classes other than integration courses. A ‘substitute hypothesis’ seems to be likely after summing up all of the hours taught in the other courses, and correlating these with the hours taught in language courses for migrants (see figure 3):

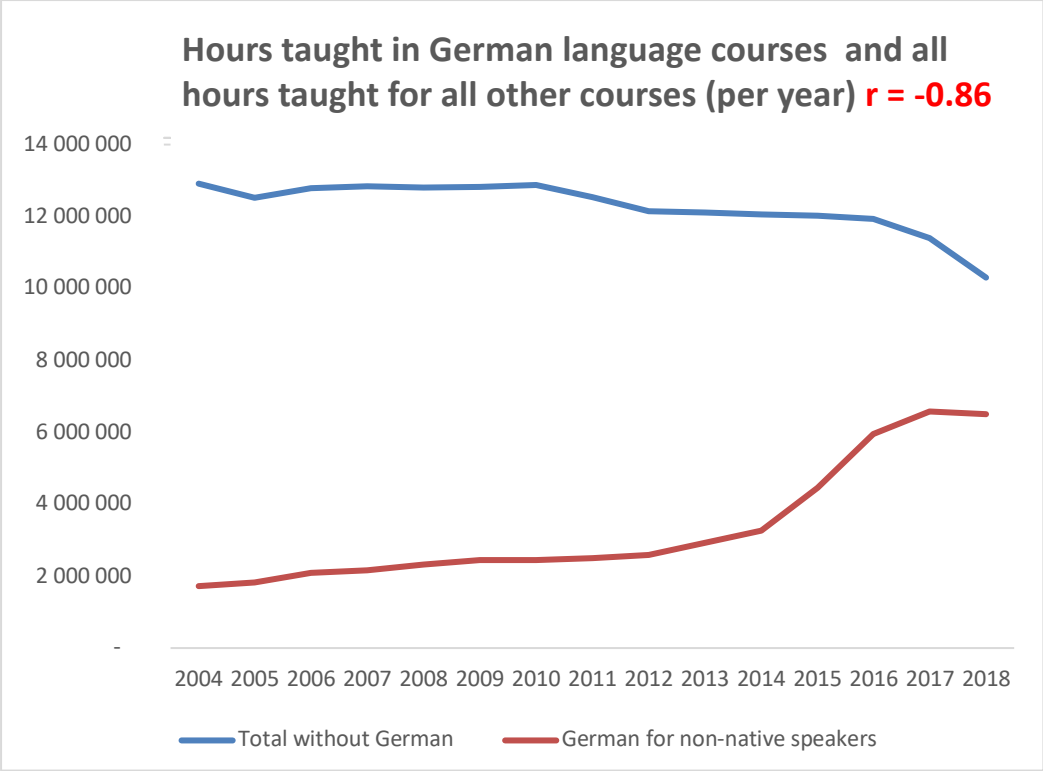

Figure 3. Hours taught in German for migrants, and hours taught in all of the other program areas per year. (Source: dvv-Statistik. Data processing is my own.)

The correlation is strongly negative (r = -0.86), which might prove the hypothesis. It has to be handled with great care because this is only a bivariate analysis with possible unobserved third influences and hidden factors, such as demographics or changing labour markets. Such an interpretation forgets that the hours taught have overall increased between 2004 to 2018, while most program areas had already been declining for a long time. Thus, it has to be stressed that the VHS have overall flourished in recent decades. Nonetheless, the differentiation in and plurality of program areas might have suffered, making the programs less diverse in content compared to the past. There is a certain danger that the VHS have become predominantly public language schools, while other program areas decline and become increasingly peripheral. The original public mandate of *adult education for all* might become an increasingly hollow phrase. For example, the share of all language courses (German and other languages) in relation to all hours taught increased between 2004 and 2018, from 40.1% to 56.3%. However, it is also important to note that this dominance is especially valid for the indicator hours taught, while the indicators of participants and courses were less dominated by the language program area. It is crucially important to reflect critically on the selection of indicators, because each indicator has advantages and disadvantages. Only an analysis of a variety of indicators comes close to something like a holistic picture. Selecting only one indicator might be totally misleading and even manipulative. Thus, only one-third of all participants and all courses were located in the language area, which is a sharp contrast to the tendencies described earlier. Language courses are comparatively more time intensive than other program areas, which sometimes made use of single events that lasted only a few hours. Contrarily, this is also a reason why language courses were attractive for many program planners, because the indicator ‘hours taught’ was often a main benchmark for regional policy, or even an indicator mentioned in laws or regulations related to laws in financing

the VHS. Single events, such as a public lecture, were much less attractive. This is important to note because the VHS are often indirectly under economic pressures, despite being a public institution. So-called new public management is an important background variable, although its relevance depends a great deal on regional factors.

The major increase in and the organisational benefits of changed migration policies for the VHS as organisations becomes clearer when looking at the staff structures and finances in the VHS statistics (see figures 4 and 5):

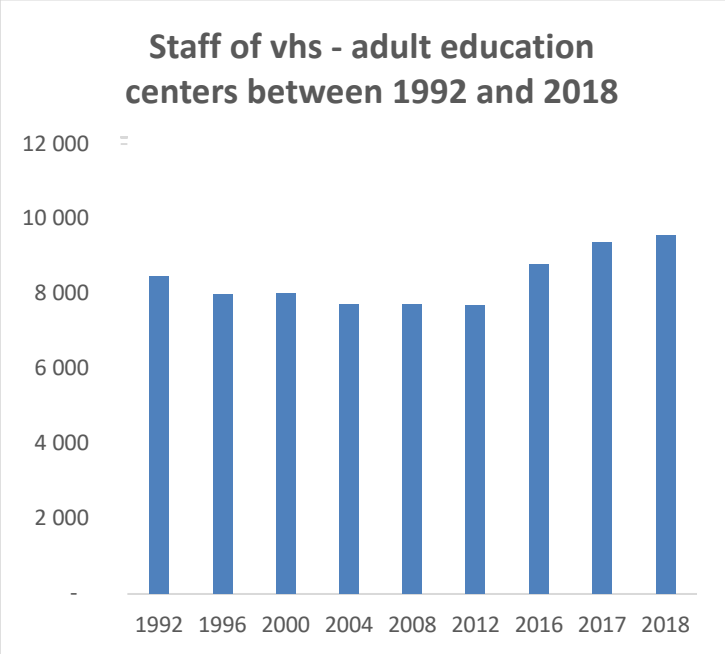

Figure 4. VHS staff (management, administration, and program planners) between 1992 and 2018. (Source: dvv-Statistik. Data processing is my own.)

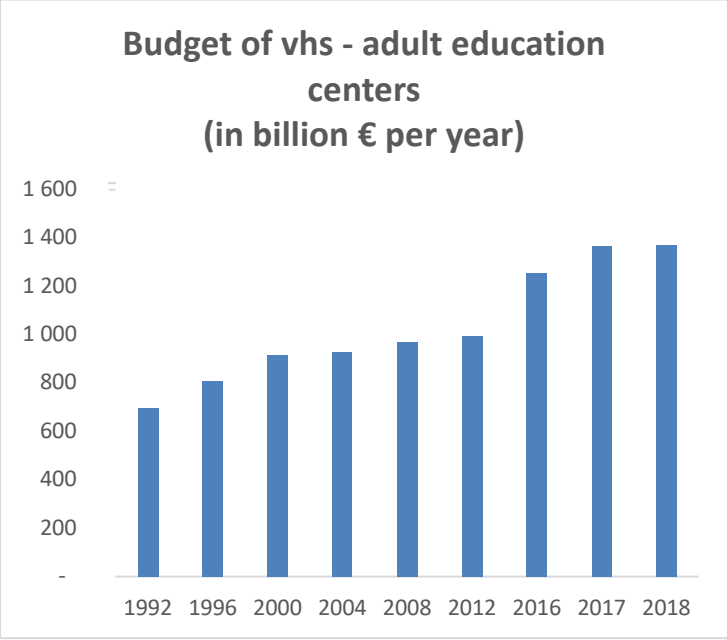

Figure 5. VHS Budget between 1992 and 2018. (Source: dvv-Statistik. Data processing is my own.)

From 1992 until 2012, the staff structures and the budgets for the VHS were either decreasing or slowly increasing. Considering inflation, the financial increases were in reality decreases. This development changed a great deal after 2016. Two hundred and sixty million Euro were spent on the VHS, and the staff increased by more than 1,000 people. It is important to note that the results shown in figure 4 were solely based on leaders, program planners, and administrative staff in the VHS. The much larger group of teaching tutors (who taught mostly on a freelance basis) were not included here, as they formally did not belong to the institution where they worked. These tutors were employed on a non-permanent contract basis by the VHS. The analysis of this staff and the effects of migration on these external personnel would require a separate analysis.

Overall, the VHS as organisations benefitted a great deal from migration. They were able to grow substantially in relation to personal and financial resources. It remains to been seen what will happen after the big migration influx that occurred in 2015. It is unlikely that such an influx will happen again, and so the need for integration courses will most likely decrease in the future. Does that mean that the VHS will experience a similar decrease in their personnel and financing? If this happens, the flourishing of the VHS might have been only one more episode in its history. The COVID-19 crisis raises fundamental questions, as well. It is debatable if all of the VHS will survive the economic crisis during and after COVID-19, because some of the VHS have the legal status of private associations, and so do not have the public duty to secure the survival of each VHS. It may be that the finest hour of the VHS in 2015, and its biggest crisis in 2020/2021, occurred/will occur within the timeframe of only a few years. This development is highly dynamic.

Conclusion and outlook: Mixed blessings and a need for further research

Now, turning back again towards the core research questions:

- Did migration and refugees cause an overall expansion of offers of adult education centres in Germany?
- Did migration and refugees cause a differentiation in provisions offered by the adult education centres in Germany?

We can observe ambivalent answers in relation to these questions. The VHS have recently experienced a significant expansion in relation to their personnel and budget, which clearly increased after two decades of stagnation. The overall volume of provision has also increased a fair amount. The influx of migrants, and the role of the VHS in the politically assigned core role of providing many language and integration courses, were extraordinary historical events. It was also a decision in favour of the VHS, when considering it in relation to the financial and personnel resources of the VHS as an institution.

Nonetheless, these positive and modernising developments of differentiation and growth for the institution and its personnel (Tippelt, 2018) are accompanied by less positive effects and, at least, ambivalent challenges. As was already mentioned, modernisation is a paradoxical project (Loo & van der Reijen, 1997). Assuming that modernisation has only positive side effects and no negative ones is illusionary. For example, the analysis seemed to indicate that the courses and program areas have lost a certain richness and plurality. The previous level achieved in thematic differentiation seems to have lost ground because the provision of language courses gained so much

momentum. This could be perceived as these courses playing too dominant a role in the curriculum. There is a certain danger that the process of differentiation in the program has stopped, and it might be necessary to re-establish more plurality in the provision of a bigger variety of themes within the program. This is also valid for the mainstream integration approach, which is politically externally defined and rather monolithic. It does not allow for variety and plurality in the provision of different course forms and intercultural exchanges.

However, this critical interpretation has to be itself critically reflected upon. It requires further research in order to be confirmed, rejected, or further differentiated. The analysis presented here was predominantly based on quantitative and aggregated data in relation to the main program areas. It was also based on some information from the general and national discourse on migration and adult education. There might be more recent diversity, which could be hidden behind the main trends and located within the different program areas or within single VHS centres. Program analysis can most likely analyse this better, because it can look into the course descriptions and the rich information regarding the content there (Robak & Petter, 2015). Recent years have seen a vivid discussion in at least some of the VHS about how 'cross-over' can be achieved (Brose, 2013; Lücker & Mania, 2014; Zimmer, Lücker, & Fleige, 2015; Weiß, 2018). 'Cross-over' refers to how migrants can be encouraged to take part in the six other open program areas beyond language courses. 'Cross-over' asks for transitions and goes beyond target groups. It could also support more learner-centred approaches, because the mainstream integration language courses are framed by political decision-makers, and the nationally defined curriculum and assessment standards for these integration courses do not really encourage or do not really allow learner-centred approaches.

Here, there are also approaches that seek to employ former migrants/refugees as trainers/teachers in the 'open' programs. This would help in avoiding that migrants are constructed monolithically as people who have to learn, because there might be migrants who can teach others as well as learn. Overall, migrants are, in many respects, a diverse group (Öztürk, 2018a). This is important to note because it is unfortunately the case that migrants are perceived as a homogeneous group, which is utterly misleading (Öztürk, 2018a). The institution of the VHS could be open to a more diverse personnel with additional migrants on their staff, which is not yet a reality for the VHS (Öztürk & Reiter, 2017).

The increased resources might lead to better overhead structures, from which other program areas could also benefit. VHS associations have increased their staff, which was mainly caused by the influx of money connected to migration and integration.

It is also important to analyse if programs offered to the non-migrants have at least partly suffered by an increased provision for migrants/refugees. Additionally, the exchange and intercultural encounters of migrants and non-migrants are also very important in many respects (Robak, 2018, p. 212). This goal was perhaps even better achieved previously, because the present measures of the integration policies define migrants as a special target group. This causes a tendency towards 'othering'. This is addressed in their own program area with the assumption that learning German is the core integration measure. The advantages of a new migration policy might have negative side effects (Käpplinger, 2018) because it supports a selective approach for groups defined by legal status, rather than inclusive measures with diverse groups of learners. Diverse groups that include migrants and non-migrants can allow for intercultural learning (Robak & Petter, 2015) or even transcultural learning.

Nonetheless, the language courses are heavily regulated by external and governmental forces using quasi-market measures (Hake, 2016). There seems to not be a

great deal of professional freedom in planning these courses (Palicha & Weiß, 2020). These regulations sometimes remind people of a kind of policing related to the official immigration regimes, although migrants themselves have advocated for their needs and contributed a great deal to the widening of the courses offered through their own protests (Weiß, 2018).

The story of the integration courses in Germany is complex and rich in ambivalences. It is far from being easily labelled as solely advantageous or disadvantageous. Actually, there is still a need for an in-depth analysis of different indictors and differentiating between regions. Nonetheless, people perceive these centres as challenging the ideals of adult education (freedom of choice, learner-centred approaches, lifeworld orientation, etc.). This is the reason that in previous papers I used the phrase 'sweet poisoning' in relation to the integration courses and adult education centres. This phrase caused mixed responses that included both affirmations and disagreements (Palicha & Weiß, 2020). The institution and personnel of the VHS benefit from increased public investment, but the core ideals of a learner-centred adult education might be endangered. At the least, this deserves attention and critical reflection is needed. It is important to study and analyse this idea without making quick judgements out of a purely academic or idealistic positioning. The situation is, in many respects, ambivalent and sometimes paradoxical. The changes of migration and integration laws are a modernising influence for Germany. This is because many previous governments promoted migration for workers to stay a limited period of time, but not for people with the chance and the desire to stay here ('*Gastarbeiter')*. Germany was ideologically constructed as solely a country of emigration without immigration for decades before the turn of the 21st century. Thus, the present situation is certainly far from ideal, but much closer to the realities and lives of many migrants. It is interesting to see which role adult education plays within this wider context (e.g. general migration policies, public opinion), and how this role is changing. Additional research could also look beyond the VHS, or compare the VHS with other public or voluntary providers in adult education, because it is likely that not all providers and organisations were affected similarly by migration and integration. The same is most likely valid for the comparison of different regions (e.g. urban versus rural regions), because populations and migration movements differ a great deal regionally. The national figures provided here were solely intended as an overview of the issue, and this might hide a lot of the differences within nations.

Presently, the migration peak seems to have already been reached in Germany, and the COVID-19 crisis has moved to the foreground. It is endangering the VHS. It seems to be very unlikely from a political standpoint that as many people could once more access the country as they did in 2015, although the collateral damage of COVID-19 might cause people to flee and to become refugees. Before COVID-19, the number of language courses for migrants were already stagnating or even decreasing in the VHS in some regions. Because of COVID-19, many courses had to be cancelled. Additionally, social distancing is a big burden for the provisions of the VHS, which cannot be totally digitalised. This raises serious concerns. Was the flourishing of the VHS only a brief blossoming? Will the VHS no longer be a sustainable development after the mastering of the migration 'crisis' and the new COVID-19 crisis? Overall, the recent developments of the VHS are ambivalent in many respects and need continued observation.

What is also lacking in a European perspective of adult education research is an in-depth comparison of different national integration regimes, practices, and results. There are, of course, texts available (e.g. EAEA, 2016; Klingenberg & Rex, 2016; Palmén, 2016), but it seems to not be enough. We need much more research in this dynamic field. A comparison of countries could provide additional information about different practices,

as well as stimulate mutual learning and critical reflection on each country's national practice. However, this would also require a more coherent and joint approach towards migration and integration, while European countries and governments presently seem rather divided, and COVID-19 has deepened differences so far. A core task of researchers and research may be needed in order to exchange additional knowledge and experiences that go beyond borders.

Notes

[1] Original quote before translation: 'Moderne Gesellschaften bekommen ihre Modernisierungsimpulse nicht von innen heraus. Denn im Innenraum sitzen ja die, die sich in den Verhältnissen gut eingerichtet haben und an nichts so wenig interessiert sind wie an Veränderung.'

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Paternalistic Benevolence – Enabling Violence: Teaching the Hegemonic Language in a Double Bind

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Abstract

The transnational empirical project zooms in on 'German language classrooms' and the teachers' task of dealing with the double bind between 'the need to teach the German language for the empowerment of the learners' on the one hand and the consequent 'reproduction of the hegemonic norm of a monolingual society' on the other. The teachers in the focus of the project work for institutes of adult education with learners who are migrants and refugees living in Germany or Austria. The results show how teachers frame their work through two central positions. The first can be framed as 'paternalistic benevolence'and the second as 'enabling violence'. The latter corresponds to a critical stance reflecting on the harm done in learning spaces while still being inevitable in nation-states that construct themselves as monolingual unities. Pedagogical professionals looking for a responsible path that reduces the violence done to a minimum will discover interesting reflections on the possibilities of how to find an always uncertain and contradictory place in the interstices.

Keywords: German language classroom; migration; enabling violence, paternalism, double bind

Introduction

Forced migration caused by the necessity to leave the home-country due to war, poverty, natural disasters or other life-threatening dangers is and continues to be one of the most important challenges nation-states have to deal with. Nation-states in general are genuinely based on an 'idea' of a more or less homogeneous community, linked by culture and language – imaged communities (cf. Anderson, 2016). As a result of migration flows,

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receiving societies like Germany and Austria have the chance to question and reframe their 'norm(alitie)s', their traditions and their concepts of 'identity'. By taking this chance, they could develop themselves further and find new concepts concerning who they are and who they want to be in a globalized world divided by social disparities. However, instead of seizing the opportunity as such, fears and uncertainties are spread by a nationalist discourse. By constructing the migrants as 'the other' (Said, 2009), as threatening and alien, it is not cohesion in society that is being promoted, but division. The concept of 'integration' plays an active part in this division. It is part of a dispositive (cf. Gordon & Foucault, 1980, 194ff) answering to an artificially constructed 'emergency', reassuring the populations of the receiving countries that they do not have to be afraid of losing their own hegemonic position - referred to as national identity - in society (cf. Mecheril, 2011). The discourse on integration is a disciplining one-sided discourse putting the new-comers into the position of having to adjust to the given rules, language and values, ignoring the chance to develop and change as a society as a whole. One central part of the integration discourse in Germany and Austria is the system of the German courses for adult migrants. Most of these courses are state-funded, while others are conducted by volunteers who take on this job for a variety of reasons, including 'the will to shape the society' and 'feeling the responsibility to help' (Karakayali & Kleist, 2015, 31f). Talking to teachers in German language classrooms and doing research on their very difficult and precarious task of teaching marginalized people in a racist societal structure is ambivalent at the very least. Should it not be the state and its insidious, complex migration regime that is the focus of research, instead of shedding light on those who work in precarious conditions as language teachers and do their least bit to support migrants and refugees in many different ways? The answer to this question is simultaneously yes and no.

Nearly half a century ago, Louis Althusser (1971, p. 227) analysed how labour power in the context of capitalist societies is reproduced and reinsured not 'on the job', but increasingly *outside* production, inter alia the education system. It follows that while teaching German as the dominant language, state-funded adult education organisations and NGOs reaffirm present hegemonic ideas and intentions. Thus, these organisations can be identified as an inherent part of the educational institutions that secure the hegemonic structures within their work. As Foucault, a scholar of Althusser, was able to show in his lectures on 'Security, Territory, Population' (2017), self-government, anchored in the individual, is inextricably linked and an indispensable condition for the working of the whole complex system of power. Hence the individual practices of teachers in the classroom, the attitude they take towards their work and learners, and their engagement with the integration discourse can be used as a magnifying glass to better understand how the systems and mechanisms of power are related to each other.

This is why the project, which will be further presented in this article, zooms in on German language classrooms and talks to teachers and course organisers, learning more about their perceptions and attitudes and their daily practices in the classroom. Following the arguments of critical pedagogy, we assume that a critical examination of power relations must be part of the development of pedagogical professionalism. For teachers this means being highly reflective about their engagement with the integration discourse and being aware of their difficult task of dealing with the double bind between 'the need to teach the German language for the empowerment of the learners' on the one hand and the consequent 'reproduction of the hegemonic norm of a monolingual society' on the other.

We will start by briefly presenting the project and then elaborate on two of the central teacher attitudes that were found in the interviews: 'paternalistic benevolence' and

'enabling violence' (Spivak, 2008). Both these terms will be explained further in the respective sections. Concluding, we make references to the possibilities of how to find interstitial spaces in the conflicted and ambivalent spaces of teaching a hegemonic language.

The project – the German classroom re-visited

The transnational project 'Please, become as we would like to be! – German Courses in Germany and Austria between Disciplining and Empowering' presented in this article gathered data in Austria and in Germany (2015-2018) (cf. Heinemann, 2018a, 2018b). The full data set includes three different forms of data material a) field notes from 18 participatory observations in German classrooms following the indications of critical ethnography, b) guideline-based interviews with 18 teachers and course organising professionals, and c) a criteria-based selection of state accredited teaching materials. The whole data set is analysed using the Viennese Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Wodak & Meyer, 2016) method, which is theoretically grounded in the Critical Theory (Frankfurt School). The main research question focuses on analysing how normalisation processes forming 'adjusted subjects' to the hegemonic norm are reproduced and stabilised through the system of the German courses. Given that one part of the research focuses on how discourses influence the content of the courses as well as the classes' dynamics, CDA in combination with critical ethnography seem to be useful methods not only to analyse the formation of subjects, but also to show the ideological impact on the course structure and content. The attitudes and practices of educational professionals (teachers and organisers) are analysed under this broad perspective, which intertwines discourse and the concrete practice in the class-room.

The following article will discuss just one specific excerpt of the data set, namely the results which are based on the interview data with teachers, gathered during the peak of refugee flight movements into the centre of Europe 2015-2016. The teachers surveyed during the project work in institutes for adult education with learners who are migrants and refugees living in Germany or Austria respectively. 10 of them work in government-funded classes, 8 are volunteers. Data gathered in the nation-states of Austria and Germany are analysed in one corpus of data. The German (83 M residents 2020) discourses have a significant impact on the Austrian (9 M residents in 2020) discourses that revolve around language, migration and integration, and discourses in general are not bound to man-made national borders. Therefore, a separate analysis of the data is not reasonable.

The analysis of the data is complete and we want to use this article to elaborate especially on the pedagogical challenge for teachers working with adult learners, who are marginalised in society in many ways. In the scientific field of adult education in Germany and Austria, there is a common understanding that the teacher-student relationship should be one of equal partners, participation should be voluntary and that it is not about educating adults like you educate children, but about sharing knowledge and opening rooms for 'Bildung', widening the possibilities and scopes of action. The 3rd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education adds '(e)ducation is vital for human rights and dignity, and is a force for empowerment (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016, p. 8)'. The German classrooms – especially those which are offered by government-financed institutions - do not meet these policies in any regard. Migrants are forced to visit the courses or else face sanctions, their participation is monitored closely, and the power disparity between teacher and student makes learning on an equal footing

impossible. Last but not least, the idea of 'Bildung' is replaced by an economic idea of preparing the students to enter the job market in low positions where they just need basic German knowledge (B1/B2) and work under vulnerable conditions. Even though the general conditions in courses led by volunteers are different to those working in institutions, the disciplining discourse on integration affects every society member and therefore all teachers. They find different ways to deal with it. In the following, we will first present the highly problematic stance of 'paternalistic benevolence' found in most of the interviews, and second a critical reflective stance which we call 'enabling violence' in reference to Spivak (2008).

Paternalistic Benevolence

One of the most common frameworks within which the interviewed teachers are acting in the German language classrooms is the stance we have coined 'paternalistic benevolence'. After introducing the phenomenon of paternalism in general, we will analyse the basic paternalistic figure against the backdrop of the present 'integration discourse'. We will then identify incidents of 'paternalistic benevolence' in the adult education classrooms from the data and contextualise them in the field of critical adult education.

The concept of paternalism can be basically described as an "interference of a state or an individual with another person, against their will, and defended or motivated by a claim that the person interfered with will be better off or protected from harm" (Dworkin, 2017). In the

'The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy' Dworkin defines it as when '1. Z (or its omission) interferes with the liberty or autonomy of Y. 2. X does so without the consent of Y. 3. X does so only because X believes Z will improve the welfare of Y (where this includes preventing his welfare from diminishing), or in some way promote the interests, values, or good of Y'.

The nature of paternalism to act against another person's will, by deciding something without conscious consent, is one of the main aspects Gramsci has outlined again and again in his prison notebooks. How is consent organised so that the ruled ones confirm and agree to their oppressions and controls, and how is this linked to the reaffirmation and stabilisation of the hegemonic ideas and structures (cf. Gramsci, 1992, p. 153). Every time the teachers in the classrooms (re)construct the learner as a 'not-educated', 'not-knowing' person, they infantilise the learners and simultaneously subjectify the position of the migrant as the *person in need*. Through the repetition of these actions, teachers within the present societal frameworks strengthen the hegemonic structures: 'Cultural hegemony is based on the (re)creation of cultural, moral and mental mindsets of a society (…) Pedagogical ideas and concepts are self-evident parts of constructing, consolidation but also of erosion of hegemony as the practical pedagogy, which enables through 'Bildung' and education the absorption of culture at all (Bernhard, 2005, p. 120)'.

By zooming in on the classrooms, we could identify a stance, which we want to coin 'paternalistic benevolence' based on the principal conditions of paternalism as listed by Gerald Dworkin. We will analyse how these conditions are argued and acted upon throughout the interviews.

Adult educators in German language classrooms in Germany and Austria are confronted with the force of the hegemonic 'integration discourse', which is very much connected to the fear that the national welfare-system could break down, security and prosperity is at risk, and finally that the nation-state is itself in danger (cf. Mecheril 2011).

Based on this fear, migrants and refugees are constructed as a threat and a disturbance, who have to be regulated and got under control (cf. Mecheril & van der Haagen-Wulff 2016, p. 121). Teachers, working inside this hegemonic ideology, are therefore pressured to 'integrate' new migrants and refugees as fast and efficiently as possible. If they go with the discourse and are not opposed to it in some way, they can portray themselves as good helpers towards the 'new-comers' on the one hand and as rescuers of the nation-state on the other. They don't just feel pleased to support the migrants learning proper German, but also have an idea 'of the greater good' as they play their part in the 'integrating process'. Therefore, they neither question their own role in the migration regime nor the hegemonic status of the German language. Instead they imagine themselves helping the constructed 'needy' migrant who still has to learn the right rules, language and values to adjust and become a 'good German/Austrian', and not to disturb the hegemonic norm in any way. To underline this argument, we want to draw attention to one subject that comes up quite regularly in the interviews - the prototype of the 'homophobic migrant'. One teacher reports how she deals with this issue in the classroom: 'Sorry, but perhaps you should go and live in Saudi-Arabia or Iraq, there they have the death-sentence for this. But if you want to live here, you need to know our constitution, our fundamental and human rights. You have to respect them. Whether you like it or not (GH, Pos. 424)'. Even though we completely support and understand the concern of the teacher not to respect homophobic talk inside the classroom and her_his well-meaning idea of teaching the 'politically correct' stance for living in Germany/Austria, it is interesting that being homophobic is put together with the right to live 'here' in this nation state and knowing 'our constitution'. Unfortunately, there are many homophobic Germans and Austrians who were born and brought up inside the nation-state, who don't care about 'our/their' constitution at all. But no one questions their right to exists inside the national borders. Hence the teacher's action towards the participants is part of her stance of paternalistic benevolence. By rebuking the homophobic expression with a general verbal expulsion from the nation-state, she wants 'the best' for her students, helping them to adjust to the rules of the receiving country. At the same time, she 'disciplines' them against the background of a disciplining integration discourse.

Addressing the learner as a person in need, lacking language competence and self-organised learning skills, offers legitimisation for all kind of paternalistic actions in the classrooms and leads to harmful actions towards the learners, but always – and this is crucial for the understanding of the paternalistic practices - with a benevolent intention. Another example we want to give is one repeated quite commonly throughout the interview data. This entails a stance towards the learners based on the strong belief that the acting person would know what's best for the other person and therefore not ask for conscious consent. 'Because I have mainly untrained and uneducated learners (so called 'Lernungewohnte') and therefore I *force* them to always write side notes in their mother tongue. What does this or that mean, because they wouldn't do that on their own, […]' [KK 57-59, transl. SAS] The interviewee stresses the necessity of forcing the learners to use a method of which s_he is convinced. A more appropriate approach in the framework of adult educational pedagogy would be to develop a range of methods together with the group, so that the learners could explore and practice different kinds of methods and then individually choose their own ones voluntarily. Instead, the teacher assumes they are not able to develop their own skills, are not able to explore and choose on their own, and moreover believes that forcing them for their own good is the best method.

Another teacher argues in a similar way. S_he is talking about her_his well-meaning and interesting approach to include different forms of teaching methods and reports on one of her_his strategies: 'And then I forced them to write poems [GH 285, transl. AH].'

Throughout the process of infantilisation, decisions are made for learners and they are reduced to persons with deficits and lacks of knowledge. Hence, in this case, the teacher doesn't explain and motivate the group to join the experience in trying out different forms of writing, but 'forces' them into writing poems. Even though the outcome might be good, addressing adults in a paternalistic way - forcing them instead of explaining – leaves its traces in the subjectivation process of the learners.
As Peter Ives points out following Gramsci: '[T]he central dynamic of 'hegemony' explain[s] how 'consent' is constructed in such a manner that does not define it as the opposite of, or the lack of, coercion, but rather the relation or structuring of coercion and consent (Ives, 2010, p. 92)'. Forcing the learners to use a certain method of learning, disciplining them to do so, is always combined with a benevolent stance which builds the connection for getting the students' consent. For many migrants in the first months after arriving in the receiving country, German class teachers are often the only 'German' or 'Austrian' person they work and speak with regularly. This means that the teachers also become a central part in their emotional connection to the receiving country. One of the students reflects on the relationship, and how he experiences it, quite directly: "G [the teacher] is our Mum and she brought us up in this foreign country (B 1)".

As we were able to reconstruct by analysing the interviews, forced actions, orders and humiliating speech-acts are argued and authorised by the teachers against the background of a disciplining integration discourse, which again is rooted in a long history of capitalist states that are established on the foundation of deeply racist societies (cf. Balibar, 2017; Hall, 1992; hooks, 2000). 'Paternalistic benevolence' is therefore grounded on the idea of being superior, of knowing better and more, presupposing 'the other' knows less. Furthermore, paternalistic benevolent actions are linked with the concept of empowerment in a complex and contradictory way, which is itself deeply rooted in the era of the Enlightenment and in this way to the colonial civilising mission. Following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critical thoughts towards the Enlightenment in which the white man decides and distributes rights, justice and knowledge to the weaker ones, with the grand gesture of benevolence and generosity towards those who are in need and receiving without being able to empower themselves, we could state: 'All benevolence is colonial (Spivak, 2007, p. 176)'. The 'civilizing mission', the approach to bring the Enlightenment to those who seem to live in the 'dark', was and *is* one of the most important legitimising discourses, when the imperial powers have to defend their invasions and oppressive economic politics (cf. Spivak, 1994) . Empowerment and 'paternalistic benevolence' are therefore historically linked to each other on different layers: symbolically, culturally and economically. Keeping these complex interwoven historical layers in mind ,which still constitute the relationship between the global 'West and the rest' (Hall, 2012), we will have a closer look at paternalistic benevolence and how this is connected to the western state.

As Althusser pointed out in his essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus' following Marx, every ruling class must battle for the reproduction of the conditions of the production in terms of the (capitalist) production, and these battles need obedient subjects (cf. Althusser, 2014 [1971], p. 203). Examples that he refers to include civil servants, workers in schools, and employees of the court system. In our focus, these obedient subjects include coordinators, administrative staff and teachers of German language classes who are reaffirming and reassuring the continuity of the present and established order. Althusser outlines the obedient attitude of subjects through the concept of interpellation or hailing with the following notorious example: a person on a street is called by a police officer 'Hey, you there!'. Feeling addressed s_he turns around. This one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turn at the moment of hailing is the moment of becoming

a subject or being subjected (Althusser, 2014 [1971], p. 190). It is the practice of repetition, the performative act of repeated interpellations itself in Althusser' concept, which Judith Butler later further developed criticising Althussers' belief in the simplicity of the interpellative function (cf. Sonderegger, 2014). Butler questions this simple form of subject formation drawn by Althusser on the street and calls for deviation and disobedience within the hailing moment. She focusses on the possible transformation in the returning and repetitive performative act within the moments of hailing. The simply constructed interpellation and response of Althusser can be interrupted, and responses of doubts and irritations can occur. As a consequence, this can lead to the person not turning around or turning only halfway, resisting the full subordination and subjectivation by the order which addresses her_him. In the context of our analysis, that would mean that teachers in the German classroom probably doubt the need to turn around one-hundred-and-eighty-degrees. Those who decide not to turn around at all, turn just a bit or at least hesitate to turn around in the full 180-degree-movement look for other ways of dealing with the double bind. A double-bind concerning the educator who wants to offer learning spaces which are empowering in an equal partnership with the adult learner on the one hand and the need to follow the state order to teach the hegemonic language (with state accredited materials) on the other. One of the frameworks that teachers refer to, to find a way in between – without naming it as such - is the concept of 'enabling violence'.

Enabling Violence

The term 'enabling violence' was coined by the postcolonial critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and means in short that sometimes the violence done to people, for example by forcing them to learn English in the colonial territory occupied by the English, or in our case German when living in a country where the majority speaks German, can be enabling in the long run: '(…) because there is the violation, one can also think about the ways in which one could undo the violation, or rather how to sustain the enablement with a minimum of violation (Spivak, 2007, p. 176)'. Especially, when the form of 'violence' leads to enabling the persons to resist the oppressor with the necessary tools, developing a voice which can be understood and listened to (cf. Spivak, 2008, p. 15).

And as a matter of fact, speaking and even understanding the hegemonic language opens certain doors and possibilities for the participants and widens their scope of action. At the same time, certain obstacles remain and are keeping doors shut. An example is the broken promise concerning the job market. In the current integration discourse, the demand to learn the national language is promoted by the promise that once the newcomers master it, they will be able to find a good job (and even German speaking friends) - the condition being that migrants speak the hegemonic language as good as any average citizen raised in Austria or Germany. This is a condition which can't be met by most of the migrants especially when they can't afford expensive German courses on a higher level or start learning German as an adult. However, according to this discourse, those who fail to master the national language will experience discrimination in the labour market as well as in everyday life, because they aren't able to communicate in a 'civilised manner'. Consequently, racist experiences become a personal matter. Some of the teachers interviewed try to find a reflective position in this excluding, racist and harmful discourse. Even though they know about the violence in the integration discourse and the course-system, they use different forms of enabling their students to cope with the restricting challenges they and the students face. Three of the most interesting strategies

will be elaborated further in more detail: the *strategy of dreaming*, the *strategy of providing a tool box* and the *strategy of telling counter-narratives*.

Within the realms of possibility, teachers with the attitude of 'enabling violence' follow the idea that dreams are one pathway to give strength and power even though they are restricted. The *strategy of dreaming* includes the idea that learning about language and the receiving country contributes to the learners' possibilities to dream about their own professional future and future in general living in Germany/Austria. One of the interviewees affirms this for example: 'Yes – and besides the language part, in this course one of my aims is to empower them to have vocational aims, or any goals, for their future, for their future here in Austria – even though it is a limited one anyway [Interview cw, 55-58, transl. AH]'. Reflecting the limitations, not forcing anyone to imagine anything that could lead to even more frustration - just to open up rooms for dreaming is a strategy deeply rooted in the approaches of critical education and can be very powerful when handled with care in the classroom (cf. Monzó, 2019, 239ff). The gained strength can support them to resist and counteract the hegemonic constrictions.

The second strategy we want to present is the *strategy of providing language as a tool-box,* even though Audre Lorde's famous saying 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house (Lorde, 2018)' is mostly true in the context of the German course system, too. Nevertheless, the attitude of teaching German as a tool for self-empowerment, to become independent and to move around freely is different to the general discourse that follows the idea of learning enough German to find a job and to be an otherwise efficient, silent and inconspicuous part of society. Another quote which underlines our conclusions can be found again in the same interview: 'Language is a lot about self-empowerment, because without language – here in Austria – language is just indispensable to realise all these things here now. […] Language is very important for self-empowerment for most of them, not for all. […] Just going out of the house and do this and that all on their own [Interview CW, 227-231, 235f transl. AH]'. It is interesting that the interviewee can not only differentiate that she is talking specifically about the Austrian context, but at the same time she knows that it is not true for all students that the learning of the language will be used as a tool for self-empowerment in the same way. Some have other ways and resources to reach their goals. Language is seen as just one tool among others. The teacher always has the context in mind and it is more about conveying tools/resources for the learners, which they can decide to use, then about teaching the language just because 'they have to learn German, if they want to live here'. The appropriation and control of the dominant language could at least, as Spivak suggested, open pathways to resist the hegemonic structures and to develop a voice that is listened to.

The last strategy that will be presented here is the *strategy of telling counter-narratives.* Teachers following this strategy try to intervene in the hegemonic discourse by telling alternative stories whenever they find a space for it. They take ‚family – pictures' of white, blond families in the German course book and ask the class to question what they see. They react to stories of discrimination not with dethematisation but with ideas on how to resist. It is not about conveying their own ideology to the classroom but - knowing that the learners are affected by the hegemonic discourse, too – giving space for other ideas of reality, again without force but as an opportunity to discuss and learn from each other. When talking about the experience of discrimination of the students during the interview, one teacher assures 'I always bring this up. […] And yes, I always say my opinion, which doesn't have to be accepted [SM 381-387, translated AH]'. She shares her view, her opinion, her story on what happened but doesn't expect the students to adopt the same opinion. She is sharing ideas on an equal footing, which of course has

its natural limitation when it comes to ‚opinions' that are discriminating to anyone or any group and therefore have to be classified as violence.

All three strategies are used by those teachers who do not turn around fully in Butler's sense of the hailing moment but instead are performing a half turn. These teachers do not want to affirm and stabilise the hegemonic structures and therefore declare explicitly that they are critical of the German course system – especially when it comes to refugees - and search for ways to still act as partners to the students, even though their situation seems almost hopeless. Amidst all the given restrictions, they try to teach in these contradictory situations outlined above. Their strategies are based on the '*power of imagination',* meaning that one has to be able to imagine a world in which it is possible to fulfil one's dreams, use one's tools to resist the hegemonic discourses and its effects, and to create other and new stories of reality.

Interstitial spaces – the power of imagination

For Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, working with the power of the imagination is one of the most important pedagogical tasks teachers have to concentrate on. It makes it possible to break the lines of reality, to think utopian, to invent oneself as someone different to the one you are today and visualize 'things that are not in the here and now'. Furthermore, it triggers the 'Spieltrieb'[1], Schiller's tool to re-unite the formal and the material impulse in the human being. Spivak ab-uses[2] the concept of the 'Spieltrieb' to play with the double binds one is confronted with in the myriad ambiguous contexts of this world. Examples she refers to are the double bind between caste and class, race and class, body and mind, self and other (cf. Spivak, 2012b, VIIIIf). Aesthetic education, sabotaged in the Spivakian sense, is 'play training' for her, an epistemological preparation for democracy (cf. Spivak, 2012a, p. 4).

To not turn around or turn only half-way in Butler's sense would be a corresponding condition for the training of the imaginative in terms of ethical interventions and it would interrupt the repeating practices of interpellation and response. Teachers working against the backdrop of 'enabling violence' should seek alternative possibilities to learn to live with the double bind, through half-way turning. These possibilities include for example intervening and interrupting within the cruelty of the hegemonic structures by producing alternative anti-hegemonial learning material, permanent questioning the frameworks of their jobs, the learning conditions and their links to residence and working permissions, and learning to sabotage the Enlightenment from below (Spivak, 2012a, p. 3) by radically questioning their own position, their shaky knowledge base from which some might feel superior – finally produce creative ways of anti-hegemonical speech-acts, training the imagination as Spivaks suggests. Henry Giroux elaborates on the responsibility of educators quite clearly: 'Pegagogy is never innocent and if it is to be understood and problematized as a form of academic labor, educators must not only critically question and register their own subjective involvement in how and what they teach, they must also resist all calls to depoliticize pedagogy […] Crucial to this position is the necessity for critical educators to be attentive to the ethical dimensions of their own practice (Giroux, 2017, p. 76)'.

Teachers can find orientation and inspiration to reflect on their own practice in the context of politically oriented art and arts education (Plessie 2020; Rajal, Marchart, Landkammer & Maier, 2020) or educational scientists who explicitly search for ways to decolonize the hegemonial educational practices. These could include - among many others - Antonia Darder (2009) and bell hooks (2010), who belong to the group of

scholars who put the 'body' in the center of teaching by engaging with the physical, emotional, and material conditions that are embedded in the process of living and learning. There are also scholars working on indigenous methodologies like McCoy, Tuck and McKenzie (2018), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) and Margaret Elizabeth Kovach (2009) who are very inspiring when it comes to decolonizing one's own educational practices. Other ways to find interstitial spaces inside the hegemonic structures can be found in the resisting self-reflexive educational practice of activists in critical adult education (cf. MAIZ, 2015), in the different practices of counter-publicity (cf. Kolb & Messner, 2019), the powerful strategies telling counter-narratives (cf. R. Anderson & Fluker, 2019; Anzaldúa, 2012; Thomas, 2018) or even the fictional empowering narratives found in (queer)feminist science-fiction literature (Le Guin, 2020; cf. Piercy, 2019). All these ideas can serve as hints for pedagogical professionals who are seriously searching for interstitial spaces in the hegemonic system. They need to develop and cultivate their power of imagination and they need courage, perseverance and– as the hegemonic system is constantly transitioning – constant flexibility to adapt to the new situations. It is then, however, that there is chance to take the responsibility towards the migrants and refugees in a respectful and supporting way. Even it is not possible to do everything 'right' – the very least educators can do is to follow Foucault's art *"*of not being governed like that and at that cost" (Foucault, 1992 [1978], p. 12).

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Notes

[1]'There shall be a communion between the formal impulse and the material impulse, that is, there shall be a play instinct [Spieltrieb], because it is only the unity of reality with the form, of the accidental with the necessary, of the passive state with freedom, that the conception of humanity is completed (Schiller, 1794, p. 19)'.

[2]The notion 'ab-use' refers to Spivak's form of affirmative sabotage. She suggests, that we learn to use the European Enlightenment from below (Spivak, 2012a, p. 3).

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Mobilising experiences of migration: On the relational work of study circle leaders with asylum seekers

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Abstract

Adult education and its teachers have an important role when it comes to providing knowledge that prepares asylum seekers for a potential life in a new country of residence. In this article we focus on the study circles organised by study associations and analyse the way study circle leaders (SCLs) mobilise their experience of migration in their work with asylum seekers. The article is based on interviews with SCLs and managers, who have been SCLs themselves, and by drawing on a social psychological approach, we analyse SCLs' relational work with the participants. The analysis shows that SCLs' migrant background is mobilised as a pedagogical resource and has a prominent influence on the relationship with the participants. However, the relationship is a balancing act, since there is a risk that the asymmetrical pedagogical relationship becomes more symmetrical and thus turns into friendship, guardianship and/or social work.

Keywords: Asylum seekers; migrants; popular education; study circle leaders

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Introduction

In times of migration, adult education gains an increasingly central role in providing asylum seekers with support that helps them to handle their current situation when waiting for a decision on their asylum application, as well as providing knowledge that prepares asylum seekers for a potential life in a new country of residence (Fejes, Aman, Dahlstedt, Gruber & Nyström, 2018; Fejes, Dahlstedt, Mesic & Nyström, 2018). In such work, as it has been pointed out, the qualities of teachers become important, not least teachers' own experience of migration and of settling in a new country of residence, i.e. their personal qualities (Colliander, 2020 Rubenstein Reich & Jönsson, 2006).

Such an important role for adult education and teachers became visible not least in 2015, when Sweden faced the largest number of asylum seekers since the Second World War, increasing from 54 000 in 2013 to 81 000 in 2014 and then 163 000 in 2015. Among the asylum seekers, the majority came from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan (Swedish Migration Agency, 2020). The government mobilised several initiatives targeting adult asylum seekers. One of the largest of these initiatives, counting the number of participants, was *Swedish from day 1* in which the government commissioned study associations to provide adult asylum seekers with an introduction to the Swedish language and society, in the form of study circles. Between the autumn of 2015 and the end of 2017, more than 120 000 unique participants (asylum seekers) participated in such activities, which made up approximately two thirds of all adult asylum seekers coming to Sweden during this period (Swedish Government, 2017; Fejes, 2019; Fejes, Aman, Dahlstedt, Gruber & Nyström, 2018; Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017).

Within study associations, those who act as "teachers" are called study circle leaders (SCLs). These are volunteers who, for free or for modest payment, act as leaders for small groups of participants, i.e. they are not professional teachers. The pedagogical idea behind study circles is that a group of people meet in order to collectively enhance their knowledge on a topic of joint interest. The circle leader is free to organise the circle in the way he or she finds best, in dialogue with participants (see e.g. Gustavsson, 2013). The leader is thus assigned the role based on personal qualities rather than formal qualifications. In this article, the aim is to analyse how such personal qualities are mobilised within the framework of study circles targeting adult asylum seekers.

Study associations and Swedish from day 1

In this article, attention is directed towards study associations in Sweden, and their work with asylum seekers. Study associations are part of Swedish popular education which, besides study associations, includes folk high schools as institutions. These institutions are funded by the State, at the same time as they are 'free and voluntary' with high autonomy from the State, i.e. they can organise whatever courses they like, and design them as they like. There are no grades, and participation is voluntary. Such a relationship between popular education institutions and the State is part of the corporatist Swedish welfare model (Micheletti, 1995; Premfors, 2000). In such a model, relations between the State and civil society organisations have been construed as important for developing a more democratic society. The idea was that decisions would thus be more embedded in broad layers of the population, while high levels of participation in the activities of such organisations would contribute to the democratic fostering of the population (Dahlstedt, 2009; Edquist, 2009).

If we relate the Swedish case of popular education to the wider literature, the notion of popular education is not singular. However, some common denominators have been

identified, such as the collective notion of learning in which the collective, and its individuals, are resources for learning, the political dimension of popular education (social change), dialogue across knowledge domains as well as between people, and the idea that people engaged in popular education should be people of change (Kane, 2013). Popular education is often also construed as being 'against the state' – as activities for the broader masses who are not part of the elite, and thus, popular education is shaped as unique, or at least different as compared to State organised education (see e.g. Flowers, 2009). However, in the Swedish case, popular education emerges in a close relationship with the State.

Today, the Swedish State provides basic funding to folk high schools and study associations, in order for these institutions to provide courses and study circles of their own design, in terms of content as well as pedagogical forms. Such circles range from courses in different languages, courses in how to apply for a job, music, instruments, dance, literature, wine tasting and so on (or rather it could be anything). Further, participation in such activities is voluntary (Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2020). Thus, popular education in Sweden is 'free and voluntary' in terms of organisation as well as participation. However, study associations and folk high schools need, at least in relation to activities conducted based on State funding, to follow the state aims for popular education, broadly defined in terms of giving 'everyone the possibility, together with others, to increase their knowledge and "bildung' for personal development and participation in society' (SFS 2015:218). Popular education should also, according to the State's aims, support activities that contribute to the strengthening and development of democracy, increase people's influence over their life situation, create engagement in the development of society, and close the educational gaps between individuals and groups in society (SFS 2015:218).

Besides basic State funding, popular education institutions receive funding from county councils and municipalities, as well as through commissioned tasks by the government. *Swedish from day 1* is one example of activities based on the latter kind of funding, where the State commissioned popular education organisations to provide study circles targeting adult asylum seekers. Such study circles were arranged across most of the 290 municipalities in Sweden. The circles focused on activities that aimed to give participants a basic knowledge of Swedish, as well as knowledge about Swedish society. The participation of the asylum seekers was voluntary, and the study associations were free to organise the circles anyway they saw fit.

Study circle leaders

As already described, those who work in the circles are the SCLs. These are persons who are engaged as leaders based on their personal qualities rather than their formal education. Thus, the role of the SCL is distinctly different as compared to the role of a 'teacher' in formal adult education (or in compulsory and upper secondary school). However, there is a surprisingly limited amount of research on the work carried out by the SCLs. Some of the main findings from available research (see Andersson, 2001; Bergström, Bernerstedt, Edström & Krigh, 2014; Edström, 2014) point to how SCLs usually focus on different aspects of their task: they either focus mostly on the *content* of learning and the pedagogical practice, on the *social* aspects of the pedagogical practices, or on the *ideological* aspects of the organisation behind the specific study circle (Andersson, 2001). Further, Edström (2014) study also points to how, in order for the SCL to be construed as competent, they need to be competent in the subject they teach, as well as being socially competent. The latter competence includes an engagement and ability to engage, a will to

share one's knowledge, the ability to see and to empower participants, and to be open to renewal.

Research that specifically focuses on the work of SCLs targeting migrants (see e.g. Fejes, 2019; Osman, 1999, 2013) mainly discusses the hierarchical relations that emerge in study circles. In such relations migrants, on the one hand, are construed in line with a 'cultural deficit paradigm', as culturally different and lacking the knowledge and skills needed in order to be part of Swedish society. The Swedish majority, on the other hand, is construed as the norm, to which the migrants are supposed to adapt. This means that the work carried out by SCLs in relation to migrants:

> does not mean organising and mobilising ethnic minority groups as a collective to challenge the power structures and demand social justice but to organise them and internalise in the group a democratic ethos and incorporate them into existing democratic structures (Osman, 2013, p. 164).

Further, in line with such results, Fejes (2019) has illustrated how asylum seekers in study circles easily end up construed as not yet citizens, as different and thus in need of further knowledge in order to adapt to Swedish society. The teaching carried out thus easily ends up in teaching asylum seekers about what the SCLs construe as Swedish traditions. The same kind of relation between SCLs and asylum seekers appears, whether or not the SCL was born in Sweden, Fejes points out.

In sum, research on the work of SCLs, and particularly in relation to migrants, is scarce. At the same time, available research points to the need for further work in this area. In this article, we wish to contribute knowledge on the role of SCLs' personal qualities in their work with asylum seekers. We do so by focusing on the relational work carried out by the SCLs.

Theoretical framework

In this article, we approach the relational work of SLCs by drawing on a social psychological approach, where social interactions are understood to 'lie at the heart of classroom learning' (Gehlbach, 2010, p. 360). Based on such a perspective, Gehlbach (2010) has argued the need for teachers to develop competence in social perspective taking (SPT). Thus, in order for teachers to contribute to students' learning, they need – as accurately as possible – to decipher students' thoughts and feelings in the specific learning situation they are located in. Being able to understand how others perceive a situation is a personal quality that requires considerable motivation on the teacher's part. However, this quality may also be obscured, in the sense that teachers for example ascribe personal traits or certain behaviour to the students, rather than evaluating the existing contextual factors conditioning the students' learning (Gehlbach, 2010).

In line with an SPT perspective, asymmetrical relations between teacher and students are necessary in order to enhance learning (Aspelin & Persson, 2011). Amongst other things, such relations are based on the teacher's previous experience and knowledge of what it means to be subjected to pedagogical influence, as well as the teaching mission of supporting students' development. Students, on the other hand, do not have the possibility to take the professional perspective of the teachers, nor do they have a responsibility to support someone else's development. A pedagogical relationship is therefore built on a unidimensional encompassment. However, another risk related to SPT is psychologisation and intimisation, occurring when a socially-oriented teacher becomes

excessively involved in the life world of the students. When this happens, some of the pedagogical possibilities in an otherwise asymmetrical relation may be squandered.

Method and analysis

This study focuses on the largest study association in Sweden, the Workers' Educational Association (ABF). ABF was the association that enrolled most participants in *Swedish from day 1* between 2015 and 2018. Six different ABF locations where *Swedish from day 1* was carried out were chosen for further study – located in one large city, one medium-sized city and two small towns.

In order to gain insight and background information on what took place in these study circles, before conducting interviews, we participated as observers in each location, taking field notes and conducting informal conversations with managers, SCLs and participants. We also collected documentation concerning the activities, such as course plans and teaching material. The observations also made it possible for the informants to get acquainted with us and to get a sense of what we were doing, which made it easier to plan and conduct interviews. At each location a sample of SCLs was chosen for semi-structured interviews. The SCLs were selected since they were responsible for leading the study circles in *Swedish from day 1*. Among the SCLs, four were female and five male, six worked in locations in the large city, while three worked in the other three locations. We also interviewed nine managers, three females and six males, of which five had been or were SCLs combined with their work as managers. These nine managers were selected since they were running the local ABF office where the study took place.

Each interview lasted between 40 and 75 minutes. Each interviewee was informed about the research conducted, the freedom to withdraw at any time, secure storage of the information and the deletion/changing of identifying markers in coming publications in order to safeguard anonymity[1]. The circle leader interviews centred on motives for engagement, their background and path toward becoming an SCL, their teaching and participants, as well their involvement in tasks other than teaching. As will be illustrated, most of the SCLs themselves had experience of migration. Manager interviews focused on the organisation of *Swedish from day 1* and rationales for engagement. The questions asked concerned engagement motives in these activities, their background and path toward becoming a manager, activity organisation, their thoughts about their participants and involvement in tasks other than managing the activities. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and edited for readability.

In the analysis, we will draw on the interviews with SCLs, as well as with the managers that have been or are SCLs. The empirical material was analysed through a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which provided a productive platform for managing our empirical material. More specifically, this means that we went through all our interview transcripts and observational field notes together in order to familiarise ourselves with the material as a whole, before we started with the coding and categorisation work. One of several themes that came up was the relational work conducted by the SCLs, and the analysis centres on the social relational aspects and how the SCLs talk about their interactions with the participants. By viewing teaching as a social activity, the analysis showed that one important aspect of the SCL relational work with the participants is grounded in the SCLs' own background and their experience of migration, i.e. qualities, and how they draw upon these in their work. We have thematised the findings as 'Mobilisation experiences of migration', 'Acts of balance' and 'When the scale tips over'.

Analysis

The relational work performed by the SCLs lies at the core of the teaching conducted in the study circle. Our observations and interviews with the SCLs show that the establishment of relations is closely tied in with the SCL's ability to engage in social perspective taking (cf. Gehlbach, 2010), not least in regard to their understanding of the participants' conditions for learning Swedish during the process of seeking asylum. The empirical findings illustrate how the SCLs continuously respond to matters related to the asylum process and the events unfolding in the participants' respective country of origin. Such instances are, on the one hand, regularly present in the study circle conduct, in the SCLs' way of approaching the participants' motivation to study. On the other hand, as will be shown in the following analysis, the SCLs are also trying hard not to let the participants' personal concerns, in terms of the ongoing asylum process, gain the upper hand, not least because their formal job description is solely to organise learning in the study circles.

Mobilising experiences of migration

The analysis shows that the SCLs' background and past experiences have a prominent influence on how the SCLs position themselves in relation to the participants. The SCLs that we have encountered have different backgrounds. All but one of the SCLs have a migrant background, thus having experience of migrating to Sweden and learning the Swedish language. In this group, there are also SCLs who started out as participants in 'Swedish from day 1' that have, so to speak, made a career within ABF. What is characteristic for these individuals is that they are quite motivated to learn Swedish and ABF has fast become their sanctuary. Their efforts were noticed by their SCLs and the management, whereupon they were recruited as interns, received more and more responsibilities and later on became SCLs themselves.

> This is why I could learn some Swedish. It was like I said, first I could not speak at all but then Anna-Karin said she saw my struggles. She knew that when I came I could not speak at all but after a couple of months it went well. [...] I then asked her if I could start as an intern and she said yes. (SCL 9)

> I told Anna-Karin: 'I can make coffee and clean. And I can sit here and just listen'. That's how I got to be an intern at ABF. You have to sign an agreement, and an intern agreement with the Migration Agency. Then I became an intern for six months. After some time I started to have some circles also, the beginners. That made me learn faster. (Manager 6)

As illustrated in the excerpts, the career path of going from intern to SCL was a rather quick process. One reason was the shortage of SCLs due to the increased numbers of study circles based on the large numbers of asylum seekers during 2015–2016. Some of the SCLs talk about the opportunities they were awarded to start as interns, receiving more responsibility and their journey towards becoming a SCL. As described by these SCLs, such personal qualities, both their experience of being migrants and their knowledge of being participants at ABF, have allowed them to establish credibility among the participants. This, in turn, has made it possible for the SCLs to appear as role models, in the sense of persons that the participants may identify with, not least by sharing their experiences and expressing their understanding of the participants' life situation at large. One SCL describes how SCLs may become role models on the basis of their personal qualities:

> I think they saw me as a role model and as a leader. I could also mirror myself in their situation as I have a similar experience to theirs. I worked, applied for asylum and got the chance to stay. These experiences have made working with them easier. (SCL 5)

As described by the SCL, the SCLs seem to become important individuals in the lives of the asylum-seeking participants. As we have illustrated elsewhere (Fejes, Dahlstedt, Mesic & Nyström, 2018), the SCLs are also seen, by the participants themselves, as important not only as teachers in Swedish, but also as important persons that they can trust, share difficulties with and seek social support from. A role with such personal qualities is further accentuated by an SCL, reflecting upon his mission as an SCL: 'Teachers have an educational background, that we [the SCLs] do not have, but we have *our* experiences' (SCL 2). Here, the SCL pinpoints a crucial part of the job description of SCLs in general, i.e. they are not teachers in the traditional sense, but rather a more experienced participant leading the circle.

Another aspect of SCLs' experience that is mobilised and construed as an important personal quality is their mother tongue. In our observations we could also see how SCLs employed their mother tongue as a springboard for participants' learning, not only in terms of learning the Swedish language, but also about Swedish society in a broader sense. As further elaborated by one of the SCLs:

> For those speaking Farsi, this is the right place as the SCL knows Farsi, and thus it becomes easier to introduce… both grammar and also facts, information about society, and so on… I mean, life experience. That you know how things work in Sweden. (SCL 8)

Yet another experience mobilised by the SCLs, and transformed into a personal quality that is useful in the work as a SCL, is the experience of learning the Swedish language, which is used as a means of further stressing the importance of learning the Swedish language for inclusion in Swedish society. As one of the SCLs contends:

> I tell the participants that language is the foundation. Living in another country is about communication. So if you cannot communicate, it will be rather difficult to enter society. So it is about communication. Everything revolves around it, otherwise you won't do anything without communication. My idea [for teaching], the one I know: I relate what has helped me… I have walked that path so I know exactly the way to go. There is only one; no other way. You will have to believe me. (SCL 1)

As indicated by the citation above, in the interviews the SCLs have underlined the importance of their personal experiences of learning Swedish and daring to speak it, as a means of eventually becoming included in Swedish society, precisely as the SCLs themselves have become. Thus, personal experiences are employed by the SCLs as pedagogical tools, as a quality, in motivating participants to learn and speak Swedish. Once more, the SCL is thereby shaped as a role model, i.e. someone who has succeeded in learning Swedish and becoming included in Swedish society, and from whom the participants can learn.

What we have illustrated here is how experience of migration is mobilised and becomes a quality that is useful in creating close relations with participants. Such closeness and ability to employ social perspective taking will potentially create good conditions for learning. However, as we will illustrate in the next section, SCLs constantly need to balance such closeness in order to uphold their role as leaders of the study circles.

Balancing acts

Even though closeness in relations between SCLs and participants might be valuable, there are a range of conditions that make it difficult to handle such closeness. One such condition regards the participants' specific life situation as asylum seekers. With extended waiting periods for a decision on their application for asylum, there are great psychological strains for the participants. This is repeatedly acknowledged by the SCLs, who need to find a balance between wanting to support the participants in their psychological challenges, while at the same time needing to support them in learning the Swedish language. As one SCL argues:

> As a person, you have feelings too, but I tend to say: 'Do you have problems? It's not easy to hide, but we'll take it outside the classroom'. Or we may be seated in a room chatting. We try to separate things that have been said: 'Here, we either practice Swedish, or we talk about everything. When we are finished here [in the study circle], we may talk about something else'. That's the way it is. You need to be clear on that, otherwise it won't work. (SCL 5)

Here, we can see how this SCL handles such balancing acts by separating the teaching from the more psychological support. On the one hand, the SCL stresses the importance of upholding the asymmetrical relations between SCL and participants, by defining what can be dealt with, when and where (cf. Aspelin & Persson, 2011). On the other hand, by asking the participants to leave their problems outside the classroom, the SCL indicates how the relations with the participants entail mutual responsibility and considerable emotional commitment on the part of the SCL. Thus, the SCL underlines an intention to continue providing support to the participants, as far as possible, although being well aware of the inability to influence the participants' asylum process.

However, the balancing act of becoming too close to the participants while upholding the asymmetrical relations emerges as a quite challenging endeavour, which is illustrated in interviews as well as in observations. The field note below, taken from one of our observations, exemplifies how such a conflation between the two perspectives can be observed:

> // While writing phrases on the blackboard for which participants are invited to underline time adverbials, Manager 1 who today was substituting for a SCL, suddenly remembers an important event and calls out://
>
> Manager 1: Jane, you received your residence permit today! Congratulations!
>
> Jane: Finally, I have waited for two years. (Answers cheerfully)
>
> // Other participants congratulate //
>
> Mahmood: I hope I receive a decision about my case soon, then I can meet my family.
>
> Manager 1: Inshallah [God willing]! (short break) Could you underline the adverb of time?

Here, we can see how the SCL balances between being close while at the same time maintaining the asymmetrical relationship with the participants. First, the SCL acknowledges one of the participants' positive response on an asylum application. But then the teacher refocuses on the teaching task as another participant also expresses his hope for a decision soon. One of the SCLs elaborates on the challenge of balancing between closeness and distance accordingly:

> It's not easy. But we do our best, for example in regard to the appeals, contacts with their lawyers [...] It's not so strange that you become affected by it. I myself have been politically active for many years. And the humanistic, well the humane, this thing with empathy, sympathy, has always been a part of me, to sympathise with those who are disadvantaged for one reason or another. That's the reason that I have learned so much: I know how to handle my feelings. [...] You need to have closeness, but at the same time distance as well. (SCL 8)

This is quite elaborate reasoning by the SCL, who refers back to many years of political engagement. The SCL points to the importance of handling one's feelings and finding a balance between being close and distant towards participants. In other words, the experience and ability to handle one's feelings becomes construed as an important personal quality in an SCL working with asylum seekers. In the next section we will further elaborate on such balancing acts by providing three examples where there is risk of the relationship becoming unbalanced.

When the scale tips over

There are several occasions where there is a risk of the relationship between the SCL and the participants becoming either too close or too distant. Or, in other words, where the asymmetrical pedagogical relationship becomes more symmetrical and thus turns into something else, e.g. friendship, guardianship and/or social work (cf. Aspelin & Persson, 2011). Such a shift in the professional relationship entails a transgression of boundaries, where the SCLs take on responsibilities and tasks outside of their role as pedagogical leaders of the study circle.

Tipping into friendship and community engagement is one of the ways in which the SCLs transgress their pedagogical mission. The SCLs display considerable social engagement not just with the participants, but also in the local community where the study circles take place, for example by coaching the local football team or working extra at the local library. Such engagement of the SCLs allows for their relations with the participants to reach far outside the classroom. Or as one of the SCLs explains: 'Well, the majority of the participants are my friends as well. I play football with them, I visit them and they come to me' (SCL 5). As illustrated in this quote, for some of the SCLs the boundaries between private and professional engagements may become quite blurred as their teaching becomes intimisised (cf. Aspelin & Persson, 2011), e.g. by the development of friendship with the participants. These SCLs maintain that such a close relationship contributes to mutual understanding and trust (cf. Gehlbach, 2010). One of the SCLs expounds further on the matter:

> You ought to compare the first week (with) the third week. He starts talking or she starts talking more, laughing, joking around. [...] Then, it may feel as if my son was there. I can relate, or my daughter maybe. [...] It gives me a really nice feeling when I see such people emerge from their isolation. (SCL 6)

Tipping into guardianship is another form of mission widening that has been displayed among SCLs. All of them describe how participants persistently approach them with requests to carry out a range of different bureaucratic tasks, such as communication, interpretation and representation in relation to the Migration Agency and other authorities such as health centres and banks. One of the SCLs explains:

> One example is that a really long time has passed, the state administrator isn't responding by email or telephone. They may have received a telephone number and may then say [...]

> ‘Please would you just ask her what has happened with my case?’ I say: ‘You speak English, don’t you’, but they reply: ‘No, please can you…?’ And then we take it. [...] It may be a doctor’s appointment. It may be a visit from the Migration Agency. [...] Then, all you can do is sit and read what they have and try to calm them down. [...] The gratitude you receive is what continues to keep me here. (SCL 6)

As the quote illustrates, tasks other than pedagogical ones are quite common in the everyday work carried out by the SCL. These tasks are also outside of the formal work assigned to the study associations by the State. But still, they are conducted based on the relationships emerging between SCLs and participants in the circles. However, these tasks are mostly done outside the activities within the circle, but they could also be seen as an extension of the object of study and learning since the participants gets the opportunity to learn Swedish at the same time.

Similar to this is the combination of guardianship *tipping into social work*, which relates to the expansion of the mission tasks into what could be understood as a psychologisation of the relationship (cf. Aspelin & Persson, 2011) between the SCLs and the participants. Due to the fact that the participants’ lives become such an integral part of the circles, the relationship between SCLs and participants easily becomes anchored in social work. This becomes evident in cases where participants are expelled from the country or go into hiding from the authorities. The SCLs may in these cases seek to offer emotional stability in the participant’s life through actions such as channelling the person to organisations that may offer protection from the authorities. One of the SCLs explains further:

> A person is not so hastily expelled, there is always time to appeal. For a period of time they might keep away [from the study circles] because there is too much to handle, but they tend to return because they appeal the expulsion ruling. Some of them even appeal several times. An appeal might take a really long time. I have had a student whose appeal was rejected six times… They always come to me, wanting a testimonial [for the appeal]. After they receive my testimonial, that may be the last time I see them. I am in contact with most of them by Facebook or Viber or WhatsApp or something else. So I may often send [a message] and ask how it’s going. (SCL 7)

As illustrated in this excerpt, the SCL is supportive in the process of asylum seeking, as well as keeping in contact with some of those who have had their application rejected and are forced to leave the country. So the relationship continues even after the participants have left the circle, or even the country.

In sum, the ability to go to some lengths in supporting asylum seekers inside as well as outside the study circle is construed as an important quality of SCLs working with asylum seekers. However, such a quality can also become a challenge, in that the asymmetrical relationship between leader and participant becomes too intimisised.

Discussion

This article has directed attention towards SCLs and the qualities they mobilise in their work with asylum seekers. The circles are venues in which people of different ages, gender, linguistic and study backgrounds come together to learn Swedish in the spirit of folkbildning as ‘free and voluntary’. The asylum seekers participate without any financial sanctions and through the study circle they have the opportunity to suspend the isolation that many participants explain casts a shadow over the asylum process and the looming

asylum decision. It is in this particular context that the SCLs seek to organise language learning and introduction to Swedish society.

The SCLs are at the centre of the study circle (see e.g. Gustavsson, 2013). In this position, the experiences of the SCLs are mobilised as qualities that help provide opportunities for language learning and support of the participants in their encounter with the new country. Key qualities are the SCLs' experiences of migration, of learning the Swedish language and of settling in Sweden. The value of migration experiences is also emphasised by Colliander (2020) and Rubenstein Reich and Jönsson (2006). In arranging such learning, these qualities have been shown to incur participants' trust, and on the basis of these experiences the SCLs often view themselves, and are seen by the participants, as role models. These findings are in line with Edström's (2014) results where a competent SCL is someone who can engage the participants and also share one's knowledge and experience. This can also be interpreted as the SCLs – by employing such qualities in their daily professional work – having an ability to perform social perspective taking (SPT). In line with Gehlbach (2010), this ability may be viewed as supporting and strengthening their position as leaders of these particular circles because the SCLs can view the world from the perspective of the participant and in such a way be better equipped in helping the participants to learn.

However, the ability to employ SPT brings several challenges. The analysis illustrates how being an SCL is a demanding task which often becomes a balancing act in which one has to be a pedagogical leader at the same time as not allowing social aspects external to the circle to take over. Here, the SCLs emphasise that they take measures to ensure that language learning remains the focus, by attempting to consign conversations relating to the personal migration process to the margins of the classroom.

As a consequence of their own experience of migration and of becoming settled in Sweden, the SCLs express difficulties in distancing the state of the participants from their own experiences. In line with Gehlbach (2010), we argue that the SCLs, in some respects, extend their ability for SPT far beyond the learning mission of the study circle. As presented above, the SCLs' relationships with the participants tend to become channelled into another set of relationships, most clearly in the form of *friendship*, *guardianship* or *social work*. The reason for such mission extension is not solely anchored in SCLs' SPT and their experiences of Sweden, i.e. their personal qualities, but also in the realities of the migration process that the participants experience in their daily lives and bring to the table in the classroom. This raises questions concerning whether it may be considered unfavourable for the participants if the SCLs make such a leap.

From the perspective of Aspelin and Persson (2011), the relationship between the teacher and the pupil is acknowledged for its asymmetrical features, which means that the teacher has been a pupil and thus may adjust the pedagogical interventions in line with such experiences. As mentioned above, in this specific context we have also identified a productive 'social force' related to the asymmetry. Such a relationship between the SCL and the participants could, in line with Aspelin and Person (2011), be seen as a psychologisation or intimisation that tends to detract from the pedagogical mission. However, due to the specific circumstances in which the participants find themselves, the study circle is appreciated by the participants as a place of stability where not least the SCLs serve a crucial role in dealing with the precarious situation of the participants as asylum seekers. The pedagogical leap into a variety of social aspects of the participants' lives is highly valued (as also reported in our previous studies, cf. Fejes, Dahlstedt, Mesic & Nyström, 2018).

In this research, we have seen that both the participants and the ABF organisation value the SCLs with experiences of migration, as these are turned into personal qualities

that are important for the job as an SCL. The organisational position is visible in that a large majority of SCLs are hand-picked. They are not solely selected for their pedagogical and language skills, but also to serve as 'migrant role models' who are receptive to the participants' precariousness and in a way represent what it means and takes to succeed in Sweden.

However, even though we have been able to illustrate how personal qualities of a specific kind become important in the support of adult asylum seekers, there are also inherent risks in mobilising such qualities. Firstly, referring to Osman (2013), the kind of work carried out in study circles targeting migrants' risks producing an archetypal form of citizen that may 'fall into line [...] as a caricatural image of immigrants' (Osman, 2013, p. 164-165). And secondly, with experiences of migration becoming transformed into personal qualities construed as important in the work of the SCL as a role model for asylum seekers, there is a risk of ontology becoming conflated with epistemology (cf. Skeggs, 1997). In other words, the emergence of norms suggesting that only migrants can teach migrants. Such an argument is obviously problematic, as it suggests that all individuals of a certain collective are alike.

Notes

[1] The project has undergone ethical vetting and been approved (Dnr 2017/280-31).

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The Potential of Peer Guidance to Empower Migrants for Employment

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Abstract

Peerness is a common approach to learning, especially in Nordic adult education, but is increasingly adopted by European Union (EU)-funded projects that aim to improve migrants' employability. This article discusses action research that evaluated an ESF-funded project, run by a Finnish popular adult education association in collaboration with vocational adult education institutes, NGOs, and a trade union. The project trained migrants to become peer group guides and empower migrant-background participants for employment. The training prepared guides to become experiential experts, but increased the distance between the participants and themselves. The guidance could even strengthen the otherness of participants when the peerness was based solely on sharing a migrant background. Voluntary peer guidance may reinforce this separation, but dependence on ESF funding also shapes mainstream adult education; therefore, the empowerment of migrants should build on collaboration between experiential experts and guidance professionals as part of the regular adult education system.

Keywords: Adult education policy; employability; empowerment; migrants; peerness

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Employability of migrants as adult education policy

In Europe, the educational integration of migrant-background young people and adults mainly focuses on improving their employability (Darvas, Wolff, Chiacchio, Efstathiou, & Goncalves Raposo, 2018). At the European Union (EU) and member state level, this is commonly governed by social and employment, rather than education, policies. The EU Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion is the main agency administering financial support for the education and training of migrants (European Commission [EC], 2020a) and one of its main instruments is the European Social Fund (ESF), which has been promoting employment and labour programmes in Europe since 1957. These programmes target groups currently identified as most in need, such as the unemployed, young people, the elderly, women, and/or migrants. The ESF focuses on equality, the prevention of social exclusion, participation, improving competencies, and developing new structures for employment markets (EC, 2020b).

In their declarations on lifelong learning, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2016, p. 6–8) and the EC (2000, p. 3, 5) have outlined the future of European adult education, but the goals seemed to be contradictory: adult education should aim to respond to the unique learning needs of people and promote their lifelong freedom to participate in education, but concurrently it should develop adaptive competencies among learners for labour market participation and support their active citizenship through employment. Political documents make normative assumptions about citizens—how they should be or what they should become—as members of European society (Fejes, 2019, p. 234–235).

The EU considers the ESF to be the most important vehicle for investing in human capital and, in some European countries, as much as 90 per cent of the labour force policy expenses, primarily relating to competitive projects, are covered by ESF funding (EC, 2016). In Finland, EU funding, especially through the ESF, has become the most important driver for the integration of adult migrants. Of over 2,100 ESF-funded projects during 2014–2020, directed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, which is mainly responsible for integration and employment measures in Finland, 270 directly promote the integration and employment of migrants. The funding for each project ranges from tens of thousands to four million euros (European Regional Development Fund, 2020). By contrast, funding through the state budget for promoting migrants' integration and employment is, in total, roughly a few million euros annually (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2016).

ESF funding is encouraging a growing number of NGOs, especially popular adult education organisations, to seek justification and funding for their activities. When welfare services are increasingly transferred from the public to the private and voluntary sectors, popular adult education organisations compete in integration project markets, due to their traditional expertise in peer learning and education. However, little research has considered the impact of adult education concepts in empowering migrants for employment or in shaping the conceptions and policies of adult education.

In this article, we discuss the findings of a follow-up evaluation research project, which the authors carried out as a part of an ESF-funded project that aimed to find an effective model for supporting the employability of migrants. The project applied the idea of empowerment through *peerness*, training migrants to become volunteer peer group guides for other (long-term unemployed) migrants. The project was run by a Finnish adult education association, in collaboration with vocational adult education institutes, NGOs, and a trade union. The follow-up evaluation research used an action research approach, collecting 2018–2019 data through participant observation, interviews, and self-

evaluations. While the research provided comprehensive feedback and information for the project consortium, in this article we focus on scrutinising the potential of peer group guidance to empower migrants for employment, based on the research findings. Before describing the research setting and discussing the findings, we briefly examine the concepts of peerness and empowerment in the context of the project.

Peerness as a voluntary adult education service

At the start of the project, its underpinning concepts were not explicitly defined by the project partners. Since the project was coordinated by a popular adult education organisation, it was assumed that the concepts would be dominated by the Finnish adult education tradition. However, with partners from vocational adult education, trade unions, employment offices, and worksites responding to the ESF call, it was likely that the perceptions of peerness, peer groups, and volunteerism would be diverse.

In the tradition of Finnish and Nordic popular adult education (literally free edification-work), peerness built on the idea of independent and self-motivated (volunteer) collective self-education. The educational aim was to develop dialogical and equitable relationships (peerness) between the participants (e.g. Pätäri, Teräsahde, Harju, Manninen & Heikkinen, 2019) and emphasise self-motivation, mutual mobilisation, and democratic collaboration between adult learners (Nordhaug, 1986; Pätäri et al., 2019).

Peerness and volunteerism have gained popularity due to the global neoliberal shift from public to private and voluntary social, health, and education services. While this has been justified as an alternative to the hierarchical and bureaucratic public services, it is also considered necessary because of the high cost of public services (Nylund, 2000), with social innovations increasingly being expected to replace inefficient and expensive public services (Cullen, 2017). The definitions, goals, and priorities of voluntary activity usually reflect economic factors, such as unemployment; for example, in Finland, the massive unemployment of the 1990s resulted in a host of voluntary and peer support groups and associations emerging to support the unemployed (Nylund, 2000, p. 100). In the UK also, employment was supported by projects based on voluntary activity during the economic recessions of the previous thirty years (Kamerade & Ellis Paine, 2014, p. 263).

In integration projects, like the target of our research, social service definitions permeate the adult education vocabulary. A typical focus of peerness is on self-help groups, where individuals are simultaneously needy and independent, reciprocally giving and receiving support (Borkman, 1999). The groups and their collective expertise are assumed to depend on similar experiences and specialised knowledge about their life conditions (ibid., p. 14, 16). It is common to distinguish voluntary activity from self-help and peer support, according to who offers help and who receives it: for example, Nylund (2000, p. 32–35) considered volunteer activity—traditionally provided by religious charitable organisations—to be vertical, ‘top-down’ helping, but self-help and mutual support to be horizontal peer activity, with no hierarchies between the actors.

In the social work paradigm, the formation of peer groups is assumed to be built on diverse criteria, such as age, work, profession, or lifestyle, but also on a reciprocal need to deal with life crises such as sickness or loss (Hyväri, 2005, p. 214–215) and, in some cases, on the migrant background of the participants (e.g. Päällysaho, Saunela & Pesonen, 2019). According to Hokkanen (2003, p. 268), the different interpretations of volunteerism and peerness lead to diverse group expectations in relation to openness and the intensity of activity, or to autonomy and internal homogeneity. It is also assumed that

the nature of the group activity depends on group members sharing the context of the activity and the duration and acuteness of certain life experiences (ibid., p. 268).

The way in which peer group activity is organised depends on the definitions, experiences, and goals of the group. Hokkanen (2003) emphasised that understanding peerness as togetherness and sharing of mutual experiences may lead to oversimplifying the phenomenon and disregarding the uniqueness of individual experiences. She explained that peerness always connects to a certain issue and its manifestation (ibid., p. 267–270) and, even though the issue may be the same, different peer groups may focus on either accepting or improving the situation; therefore, if there are too many conflicting views in the group, the members are unlikely to continue attending (Borkman, 1999, p. 7, 16).

Peer groups are often facilitated by volunteer peer group guides. According to previous studies, the willingness of migrants to become volunteer peer group guides may be based on their own experiences of being helped, and thus their role shifts from that of a user to a provider of the service (Handy & Greenspan, 2009, p. 969). Voluntary work may offer individuals professional fulfilment, intellectual challenges, and the opportunity to develop themselves and interact with people (Khvorostianov & Remennick, 2017, p. 345). Entering labour markets can be challenging, and voluntary work can be a means to obtain employment (Kosic, 2007, p. 21) and other forms of societal inclusion (Schedler & Glastra, 2000, p. 61). However, the peerness between a volunteer guide and a peer group participant can be problematic: despite the term 'peer' signifying equality, a peer who takes the role of a guide rises temporarily to the role of expert or pedagogical authority (Koskela, 2009, p. 58–63).

In our research, we started with a concept of peerness as mutual understanding between people in similar circumstances, based on their own experiences and comprising reciprocity and equality (Hokkanen, 2003); however, it transpired that the actors in the project had different interpretations of peerness.

Experiential expertise as a means to empowerment

A key concept in the project we studied was empowerment, which has become essential in integration policies and projects striving for the employment of migrants, although the concept was not explicitly defined in this particular project. Since the project was coordinated by a popular adult education organisation, we could assume that the concept would adhere to the adult education tradition. A well-known interpretation is Paolo Freire´s (1985) idea of empowerment as a 'pedagogy of the oppressed', whereby people grow into consciousness by reflecting on their own life conditions. More broadly, empowerment can be understood as a self-initiated and collective process of understanding restrictive circumstances and recognising the possibility of overcoming them through action, leading to a better life and a more just society (Hämäläinen & Kurki, 1997, p. 207–214).

In social work, empowerment is commonly interpreted as a strategy that enables an individual empowerment process. Communities' social structures are key for endorsing the process, enabling people to become members of a group, to share experiences, and to reflect on life jointly with others, thus contributing to the formation of their identity and functioning as an empowering mirror (Hänninen, 2006, p. 192; Siitonen, 1999, p. 116–119). Aarnitaival (2012) emphasised the significance of migrants´ independent involvement in the sense of belonging to a community. She claimed that empowerment is intertwined with migrants´ experiences of obtaining and sharing information about

social practices. Learning strengthens their identity and confidence, but the possibility of sharing their own learned knowledge and feeling that their contribution is needed leads to experiences of involvement and participation in the community (ibid., p. 181–184).

Empowerment has become a global catchword in inclusion policies and a major tool or goal in employment projects for migrants (EC, 2020b). The focus on employability of EU policies and ESF funding favours an individualist and depoliticised interpretation of empowerment; for instance, Zimmerman (1995, p. 582–584) considered empowerment to be an individual process, whereby people become active subjects of their own lives and aware of their competencies, but also active participants in the community and aware of their society and social environment. In integration projects, empowerment is considered to be a means to encourage participants to take responsibility for their situation and to encourage their willingness and motivation to learn the skills that are considered crucial for becoming employable (Vesterberg, 2015, p. 11). The use of empowerment vocabulary, which has positive connotations in adult education, makes it appealing and justifiable for adult education organisations to develop projects that focus on employability through empowerment.

Experiential expertise is a new label for peer support that aims to empower marginalised groups, especially in social and health care, but also in integration programmes. The term *'experiential expert'* implies an equal relationship between a service user and a professional: they both have expertise, although it is gained in different ways (McLaughlin, 2009, p. 1101–1114). While migrants are commonly marginalised as they are considered to be in a high-risk group in health care, the role of experiential expert can provide them with opportunities to participate (Jones & Pietilä, 2018, p. 304, 307, 309). In addition to promoting their sense of capability and positive self-image, it is assumed to have a deep impact on migrants' sense of belonging to a society. An example of a project in which the peer group activity gave migrants an experience of 'being a Finn' was a Finnish ESF-funded Digital Path to Work project (Päällysaho, Saunela & Pesonen, 2019). In this project, migrants acted as peer guides for other migrants in developing the digital skills needed for working life and education (ibid., p. 53–59).

Experiential expertise indicates a new relationship between professional helpers and their clients (Jones & Pietilä, 2018), but despite the positive effects, voluntary activity may also lead to exploitation (Nylund & Yeung, 2005, p. 26, 30). While peer groups have become more popular, volunteers are increasingly responsible for achieving the goals of public integration policies and enhancing the participation of marginalised people. The training of peer group guides aims to prepare them to meet these expectations. According to Alm Andreassen, Breit, and Legard (2014, p. 325, 330–336), the volunteer work of experiential experts is not recognised as a profession or paid employment, despite the experts' achievement of work-related competencies or delivery of workforce inputs.

In our research, we started with an interpretation of empowerment as a self-directed process, whereby migrants would gain the individual and collective resources to participate in and influence society. We were uncertain about what kind of peerness and volunteer guidance would be developed through the vertical approaches adopted in the project design.

Research setting and methodology

The project which we followed and evaluated was coordinated by a Finnish adult education organisation, in collaboration with vocational adult education institutes, an employment office, NGOs, and a trade union. The aim of the project was to enhance the

employability of migrants, especially women, who had been unemployed for a long time, through peer group guidance. The peer group participants were expected to be literate and not asylum seekers. As the primary language used in the groups was Finnish, some Finnish language skills were also required.

The peer groups were guided mainly by project-trained volunteers. The training especially targeted people with a migrant background. The requirements for becoming peer group guides were a willingness to guide migrants and some experience of Finnish working life. The training lasted for 25 hours and included some self-study. The topics included information about working life, job seeking, peerness, intercultural communication, and group guidance. During the project, 36 peer group guides, of the 45 who started, completed the training and were given a certificate for their participation in the training and a badge indicating their knowledge of peer group guidance.

After the training, 17 peer group guides commenced volunteer guidance of migrant-background participants, aiming to strengthen their work-related competencies and Finnish language skills. Each peer group had five to eight sessions per week or every other week, each lasting two to four hours. During the project, 18 peer groups were organised, in which 126 migrants participated, representing different ethnic backgrounds and genders, work-related competencies, and motivations for seeking employment. Initially, the peer groups were guided only by two migrant-background guides trained by the project. In addition, a Finnish expert was invited to discuss study topics in peer group sessions.

During the project, it transpired that not all of the peer group guides had sufficient skills to guide participants in such challenging circumstances; therefore, project staff, who were guidance professionals and had long experience of integration work, started to guide the groups alongside the peer group guides.

The purpose of the follow-up evaluation research was to support the project in developing an effective model for enhancing the employability of the target group. The methodological framework was action research, understood as an interactive process that aims to produce best practices through collaborative problem solving, integrated with data-driven analysis (Denscombe, 2010; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). As researchers, we participated in project meetings and were involved in all the project activities. Our role was to verbalise the tacit knowledge demonstrated in activities, in order to analyse, discuss, and develop them (cf. Heikkinen, 2010, p. 215). In addition, we were especially interested in understanding the meanings of peerness created during the project.

In this article, our focus is on what the research findings (Heimo, 2019; Tapanila, Ojapelto & Heimo, 2020) revealed about the potential—promises and pitfalls—of peer guidance in empowering migrants for employment. We collected the data behind the findings by using participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and self-evaluations by peer group guides. We carried out the observations during the peer group guide training (28 hours) and documented them as word-for-word field notes by 1 or 2 researchers (over 70 pages). We conducted 15 interviews (over 110 transcribed pages) with all the instructors in the peer group guide training (6 instructors from 5 organisations), the peer group guides who had guided the first peer groups in the project (4 peer group guides), and some key informants in the project, such as the project staff and collaborators (5 people from 3 organisations). The interviews were conducted by two Finnish researchers and each lasted approximately one hour. The themes included peer group guide training (motivation for joining, learning experiences) and peer group activity (successes and challenges, actions as a peer group guide) for the peer group guides, but also, for the project staff, their experiences of other projects and their perceptions of, and goals for, learning during the training. The self-evaluations were

completed by the peer group guides at the start and end of their training. For the purpose of this article, we have translated the quotations into English.

We analysed the data through hermeneutic and deconstructive content analysis in order to discover the interpretations of peerness created during the project. In the beginning of the analysis, we verbalised our pre-understanding of peerness, empowerment, and volunteerism (cf. Nikander, 2002, p. 1–2). To get deeper understanding—as characteristic of hermeneutic analysis—we repeatedly compared our assumptions to the interpretations of peer group guides, instructors and key informants (cf. Siljander, 1988, p. 115). In this process, contradictions and tensions emerging from the data and the ambiguousness of the language were deconstructed and disclosed (cf. Niikko, 2018; Royle, 2003). The roles, responsibilities, and negotiation about the peerness, as well as the distinctions, similarities, and counter-arguments that the peer group guides and project staff revealed, were analysed. Following the action research methodology, the analysis included several recurring phases of planning, collecting and analysing the data, and reflecting the actions (cf. Heikkinen, 2010). Interpretations were discussed with the project staff and compared with similar projects and research. Although the interpretations were drawn from unique accounts, they can be perceived as reactions to shared circumstances, constituted by generic societal structures.

Peerness as an ambiguous aspiration

In the analysis, three interpretations of peerness created in the project were constructed (Heimo, 2019). Responsible peerness, empowered experiential expertise, and self-directed career-planning indicated the potential—promises and pitfalls—of peer guidance in empowering migrants for employment. Most of the informants' accounts crossed these categories, since they included characteristics that applied to many of them. In the following, we scrutinise the interpretations and their development during the project as our understanding about them increased by disclosing their tensions in the hermeneutic-deconstructive analysis.

Responsible peers as exhausted tutors

The majority of the peer group guides considered helping other migrants to be their most important reason for joining the training, conforming to the interpretation of peerness as vertical volunteerism (cf. Hokkanen, 2003; Nylund, 2000). They wanted to give back the help they had received when they came to Finland as migrants. During the training, the guides used a lot of 'we speech' when they described the needs and wishes of the peer group participants. They assumed that, as peers, they understood the challenges the participants faced and how it felt to come to Finland without peer support:

> I think the group participants know that I have felt exactly the same as they are feeling … that kind of contradiction, helplessness, like … what I am going to do, and the uncertainty every morning about where to apply … But I have gone back [to work] again and they also have the same opportunity (peer group guide).

However, the reality of the peer groups and the participants did not coincide with the expectations of the guides. The participants' backgrounds, skills, life situations, positions, and motivations for seeking employment were different from those of the guides. The guides were mostly well educated, moved to Finland for work or family reasons, and had experience of working life in both their own countries and Finland. Many participants,

however, had a low education level and a refugee background. Even though the peer group guides used 'we speech' during the training, when they talked about themselves and the participants, some of them also positioned themselves as Finns; for instance, they told us that they had adjusted to Finland and even adopted some Finnish habits that they initially regarded as bizarre; therefore, the project staff regarded them as well-integrated migrants, while the participants were seen as newcomers to the integration path, no matter how long they had lived in Finland. The instructors in the peer group training also set standards for integration, such as knowing the 'right' things about Finland, and simultaneously, constructed stereotypes of the Finnish and migrant people.

> Instructor 1: Sometimes, the opinions of the participants do not fit with Finnish society.
>
> Peer group guide: But we migrants think differently from the Finns. Maybe, for us, this is not surprising.
>
> Instructor 2: Not all Finns are the same as each other.
>
> Instructor 1: By that I meant that, sometimes, they [the migrants as participants] have opinions and beliefs that do not promote integration … so you [the peer group guides] should ask questions and be interested. … Spreading the wrong information is unacceptable—you should correct the participants with facts.

Many novice guides were worried about how the peer group participants would get along: they were anxious about taking sole responsibility for the participants but, despite being volunteers, they identified with the goals of the project staff, which were to guide the participants towards employment or study. The guides also pondered possible challenging situations in peer groups and the possibilities of receiving support, leisure time, and substitutes during their guiding duties. The peer group guides took the voluntary work very seriously and were extremely committed to it. Some peer group guides even became exhausted through taking on more responsibility than was necessary. Their activities showed their empathy with other migrants, but they also sacrificed many aspects of their lives to the voluntary work. Some guides fulfilled their responsibilities even when they were ill or talked about 'work' rather than voluntary activity:

> You could say, that [the peer group guidance] takes time, even though you think that you go there [just] to discuss, that it would be a conversation group. But it isn´t a conversation group at all. It is the same as work (peer group guide).

Between the group sessions, the peer group guides worked with the participants on their personal issues and delivered materials to them by e-mail. The guides were in contact with their colleague (the other guide in the group) on an almost daily basis and often developed material for the group. If only one group participant showed up, they felt that their efforts had been wasted and were disappointed by the participants' lack of commitment, which they interpreted as a lack of appreciation for the voluntary help they gave so freely to the participants.

Empowered experiential experts as alienated teachers

The instructors in the peer group guide training revealed that they expected the novice guides to have experiential expertise and knowledge about guidance, and also to be suitable role models for the peer group participants. During the training, the novice guides were able to share their knowledge and learning with each other, which related to the idea

of a self-help group (cf. Borkman, 1999). The instructors trusted the guides' proficiency enough to allow them to evaluate the suitability of Finnish language tests for different learners, the usefulness of computer programs, and the cultural appropriateness of games and examinations. They encouraged the guides to work professionally in the peer groups by demonstrating good peer group guidance, ethics, and best practices. The instructors hoped that the guides would adopt solution- and practice-oriented methods in the groups:

> I think that in the peer group guide training, there were actually people who had a migrant background and, in that way, they were really peers, [because] they came to this country and they went through all this: looking at things differently and learning the language—then suddenly they were the experts! … I don't know; somehow, I felt that I was [only] in some kind of small guiding role (instructor).

> The course [the training] was formed in a way that made us all experts: our own experience is valuable to you, so we can also give you something (peer group guide).

Many peer group guides accepted the role of an experiential expert (cf. Jones & Pietilä, 2018). The methods used in the training built on reciprocity and dialogue between the instructors and the novice peer group guides, which was experienced by the guides as one of the most empowering elements of the training. The novice guides earned respect from other guides and instructors and the course content resonated strongly with their own meaningful experiences as migrants. The training empowered them as individuals by providing them with the role of helper, rather than the receiver of help (cf. Handy & Greenspan, 2009). Their assumed previous weaknesses, such as the challenges they faced in learning the Finnish language or being unemployed, became their strengths as expert migrants helping other migrants in peer groups (cf. Hokkanen, 2003; Slootjes & Kampen, 2017).

However, adopting the position of an experiential experts tended to alienate peer group guides from their peer position (cf. Alm Andreassen, Breit & Legard, 2014; Koskela, 2009). The empowered experiential experts started to act in a professional manner in the peer group: they constructed goal-oriented outlines for learning, gave homework to the participants, and evaluated their learning and development. One of them explained that he tried to imitate the instructors, in order to guide the group as his own training instructors did him. Similarly, another stated that she did not mind if participants disliked her, since her main responsibility was to guide and teach them. Some of the peer group guides had previous work experience as teachers, which they could use in the peer groups:

> I have a background as a teacher, so I can understand what people's thoughts are and whether they are following or not. The aim, through conversations, was to get the participants involved, but their weak Finnish language skills prevented that (peer group guide).

The creation of peerness between the peer group guides was empowering, but the alienating experiential expertise was connected to their background and experiences during the training. The experienced distance between the guides and the peer group participants made it difficult for them to provide similar empowering examples from their own training. The peer group guides lacked the professional experience and competence in dialogical and reciprocal practice that would have enabled them to interact with the participants as equals, without fearing a loss of respect.

Self-directed career planners as overly enthusiastic inspirers

The third interpretation of peerness created in the project was indicated by some peer group guides' aspirations to utilise their training to support a new direction in their professional careers: some hoped that they would receive formal recognition of their guidance skills, while one of the guides explained that she hoped the training and volunteer guidance of the peer groups would advance her employment. Many were interested in using the experience to enhance their curricula vitae and make a good impression.

Since the peer group guide training emphasised activity and self-directedness as qualities that support the achievement of project goals, the novice guides described themselves as active people. The instructors also characterised them as enthusiastic, motivated, and active people. Accordingly, both the instructors and guides encouraged the peer group participants to become more active in their efforts to seek work:

> Instructor: A course is not a shortcut to happiness; your own activity and motivation is very important. You can do different things, such as joining voluntary groups … but how do you get the information to the people and who will get these people out of their homes?
>
> Peer group guide 1: I'll go and get them, if you pay me a salary! (laughing)
>
> Peer group guide 2: I think it's totally fair. You must be active.
>
> Peer group guide 3: There can't be workplaces for migrants, but not for Finns.
>
> Instructor: Active citizenship concerns all citizens.

Because most of the peer group guides were employed, interested in societal issues, and had language skills and self-confidence based on their experience, their motivation for training was enhancement of their career paths. They shared the instructors' regular attribution of unemployment to the inactiveness of individuals and wanted to meet their instructors' expectations. Following their training, many peer group guides stated that the knowledge gained from the training helped them to form a clearer picture of their career aspirations and strengthened their decisions to change their careers. The knowledge obtained in the training also served as a 'buffer', in case the guides themselves became unemployed.

When guiding peer groups, the peer group guides as 'self-directed career-planners' were overly enthusiastic activators, expecting the participants to act in the same way as they did and reluctant to accept peerness with 'passive' participants. The 'activeness imperative' was visible in the different job-seeker identities of the guides and the peer group members: being a professional, an expert, or an employee was essential for the peer group guides, but being a mother, a wife, or a student might be more important for the participants. The contrast became particularly apparent when peer group guides with higher education encountered housewives with refugee backgrounds in their peer groups.

Peerness as an illusion built from the outside

In our research, we identified three interpretations of peerness that were created during the project and connected to empowerment and volunteerism. Responsible peerness depended on a migrant background, despite differences in the reasons for migration, language, cultural background, gender, and motivation to help other migrants. The

peerness of empowered experiential expertise was based on experiences of 'successful' integration, conveyed vertically to others. Finally, in the self-directed career planning of the peer group guides, peerness as voluntary activity was subsumed to personal ambitions and the improvement of their own opportunities.

At first, the interpretations were positive or neutral, but as our understanding of them deepened in the hermeneutic-deconstructive process, the tensions and contradictions they manifested became visible. The findings showed that the training methods that empowered the peer group guides became challenges in the peer groups. In the groups, the guides had problems in limiting the help they offered (exhausted tutor), in building reciprocity (alienated teacher), and in understanding the experiences of the participants (overly enthusiastic inspirer). The peer group guides had to balance experiences of stress and enjoyment as well as voluntary and professional work. Their motivation to guide the peer groups decreased when the participants seemed disengaged and it was difficult to reach the goals—such as employment—of the groups.

The experience of being a migrant was not sufficient to build peerness between the peer group guides and the group participants. The guides emphasised their position as role models and teachers, rather than reciprocal supporters. Help was given vertically and unidirectionally by the guides to the participants. Whereas the peer group guides were initially equal peers and were empowered by being raised to the position of an experiential expert and helper, the peer group participants were regarded solely as recipients of help. Guidance in peer groups, which aimed for the goal-oriented learning of the participants, came to appear more characteristic of the social and health care sector, where help is offered vertically. The voluntary peer group guides were not able to build the horizontal peerness typical of self-help groups and the self-educational ideal of popular adult education.

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we have examined the potential of voluntary peer group guidance to empower migrants for employment. The results of our research suggested that peer group guides may benefit from training that builds their competence and self-confidence and moves them towards experiential expertise. The target of our study, a Finnish ESF-funded project, managed to empower the peer group guides by considering their experience as migrants to be expertise. However, the experience of empowerment was difficult to transfer to the peer groups and, in fact, the position of an empowered experiential expert tended to alienate the guides from the unemployed participants in the groups.

Peerness is often seen as a solution to integrating migrants into Europe and projects based on peerness are financially supported by the EU; however, in our study, peerness manifested as a complex issue with various interpretations and meanings. At the start of the Finnish ESF-funded project, peerness was mainly taken for granted: the 'migrant-background-ness', which was the term used by the project, was regarded as a sufficient basis for peerness, even though the other background factors, competencies, and motivations of the peer group guides and the participants differed. It seemed that peerness had been interpreted too narrowly by the project and we concluded that peerness between migrants should not be built on a common simplified assumption that migrants are a homogeneous group. Peerness based mainly on 'migrant-background-ness' builds unnecessary categories, can stigmatise or strengthen the otherness of unemployed migrants, and is thus unlikely to empower them for employment. Therefore, the main

criteria for forming groups aiming for the employment of migrants should, instead of peerness, be based on the mutual professional interests of the participants.

The peer group guides struggled with the different roles and expectations of the project. The ambivalent role of the peer group guides and the expectation that they should act simultaneously as role models for successful integration and as peers who had experienced employment challenges, was stressful for the peer group guides. In addition, the diverse experiences and expectations among the participants concerning the roles of 'teacher' and 'student' caused tension. However, it seemed that the empowerment of the peer group participants depended on mutual learning, a sense of peerness, a low hierarchy in the group, and the dismantling the expected roles. To support the dialogue between the peer group guides and participants, we discerned that peer groups should be guided jointly by a migration-background peer group guide and a professional Finnish-background guide. The experiential expertise of peer group guides could then complement the expertise of the adult education professionals.

Our results suggested that project-based peer group guidance carried out by volunteer guides does not support the empowerment, integration, and employment of migrants, as typically assumed by adult education organisations. Peer guidance promises a solution for migrants' employment through solidarity between migrants, but the oversimplification of the concept and externally defined goals can lead to pitfalls; therefore, the employability of migrants should not be the responsibility solely of trained volunteers. The mainstream, official education and employment services should assume the main responsibility for the employability of migrants.

Numerous discussions between the researchers and the project actors made it possible to reflect on and problematize the project and its actions. Including studies based on action research in EU-funded projects may enable a critical viewpoint and the identification of challenges that may not otherwise be perceived. As characteristic for hermeneutics, we have not reached any final interpretation about peerness in this study (cf. Siljander, 1988, p. 117–118). However, the deconstructive analysis can disclose tensions in adult education structures, which may not always be visible (cf. Royle, 2003).

This research was based on only one ESF-funded project, but it exemplifies the challenges that are typical of many ESF-funded projects. The adult education actors worked on projects striving for employability, rather than fulfilling people's unique needs. The projects are massively funded and, to maintain their competitiveness, adult education organisations are obliged to run projects that meet the goals of EU and the available funding. The interpretations, adopted in the projects led by popular adult education organisations, shape the concepts and self-understanding of adult education; consequently, adult education is not defined by the perceptions of adult educators, but instead by the visions and strategies of the EU. By supporting employability of people in need through voluntary help between them, adult education is directed towards serving the competitiveness of nation states.

The adult education shaped by the EU-funded projects is reinforcing current societal and labour market structures in the disguise of empowerment through voluntary peerness. It corrupts the idea of empowerment in traditional adult education, which—instead of helping migrants to adapt to prevailing circumstances—would promote their self-initiated mobilisation for change.

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Migration, culture contact and the complexity of coexistence: a systemic imagination

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Abstract

This paper zooms in on a part of a larger qualitative and participatory study on the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in a specific Italian territory, that focuses on the embodied experience of newcomers in relation to the physical and social space, in daily interactions with others, and with the public discourse. We use Bateson's systemic understanding of culture contact to illuminate the struggles, constraints and possibilities of coexistence and to challenge the narrow interpretation of integration as a one-sided effort of the individual. We think of culture contact as a complex, relational, and entangled process of interaction in the human and non-human world. So, our methodology in this part of the project, based on sensobiographic walks, is a way to perform and to search culture contact, by creating an unexpected narrative and dialogic encounter between newcomers, natives and researchers in the physical space, using senses to enhance a sense of connectedness and illuminate learning, hence opening possibilities not only for understanding, but for transformative experiences and unprecedented relationships.

Keywords: Coexistence; complexity; culture contact; embodiment; integration

The integration discourse and unexpected subjects

In Italy, 2018 was the year of a dramatic turn in the public discourse and reception system for refugees (Luraschi, Massena & Pitzalis, 2019). Humanitarian reasons for asylum were deleted from the state law and the diffused model of reception, that was starting to bear its fruits, was dismantled in favor of an emergency model based on massive segregation and control. State resources for refugees' education, job-related training and tutoring were

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reduced, and local agencies providing intervention for groups of hosts in apartments and centers (SPRAR), dispersed across urban and rural territories, had to change their pedagogical orientation, dismiss many educators and social workers, and take a more bureaucratic role of controllers and administrators of objectified human lives and bodies.

This research had started a few weeks before this turn, as a qualitative, narrative, territory-based study funded by Fondazione ALSOS' call "Migration and Migrants in Italy: Places and practices of coexistence in the construction of new forms of social interaction". We wanted to document and analyze the diffused model of reception and its transformative effects in the Province of Lecco, Northern Italy, using the insiders' voices (Merrill & West, 2009) to chronicle informal and transformative learning of both newcomers and natives. We questioned linear and trivialized notions of integration informing EU's policies and practices and inspired by the neoliberal agenda more than human rights (Xanthaki, 2016). In the present global context of relentless migrations and growing diversity, integration is a problematic concept for many reasons: it entails the nation as a social homogenous whole and it reifies culture (Grzymala-Kazlowska & Phillimore, 2018; Schinkel, 2018); it fails in accounting for diversity, for the voices and aspirations of those to whom the integration policies are directed (Grzymala-Kazlowska & Phillimore, 2018); it is focused on migrants' features, needs, or skills, hence underestimating the role of relationships, interdependence, and circularity in building the concrete possibilities of 'integration'. Pushing migrants to mere adaption, the dominant model of integration enforces neo-colonial knowledge production (Schinkel, 2018) and reduces the learning potential of adult education to implementing 'normative assumptions concerning who the citizen should be – or rather become – in order to be included in and part of society (Fejes, 2019, p. 235)'.

Systemic imagination and curiosity for migrants' diversity, their lived embodied experience, and their relationships with the local community is a way to chronicle, in sensitive ways, the systemic process around subjects who bear different habits, look, and status. Migration is a complex systemic phenomenon, nowadays characterized by unprecedented speed, fueled by the escalating effects of wars and climate changes, and increasing inequalities on a global scale which pose new questions to adult education (Morrice, Shan & Sprung, 2017). The most recent features of global migrations, conceptualized as *transnationalism* (Morris, Hongxia & Sprung, 2017) and *superdiversity* (Meissner & Vertovec, 2015; Vertovec, 2007), still need to be fully understood in their long-term effects. The increased presence, at least in Europe, of more groups of different origins (Grzymala-Kazlowska & Phillimore, 2018), with different social backgrounds, life styles, and patterns of contact with their original country, or roots, as well as different accommodation strategies to the new environment, makes it impossible to talk of "belonging" or "cultural identity" in fixed ways. This situation could bring to new, more cosmopolitan and multiple identities, but what seems more likely is the refusal of the other (not least the "other" inside us), racism and fundamentalism. Superdiversity is a controversial, maybe Eurocentric concept (Czajka & de Haas, 2014), but it reminds us of the need to tackle the interplay of social configurations, reciprocal representations, and concrete encounters between diverse people. Facing this complexity, the neoliberal agenda, focused on economic reason, massive categorization, and forced adaptation, appears poor and creates disasters silencing the voices of both migrants and natives, and failing to recognize the reciprocity of their living conditions.

We focus 'Unexpected Subjects' (the title of our study): male[1] asylum seekers and refugees hosted in apartments and centers scattered in the Province of Lecco. They are *newcomers* (Wildemeersch, 2017), a word that bypasses normative categorizations and generalizations, and suggests a feature of experience, i.e. *action* in relation to a (new)

environment, not a *status*, as entailed by such terms as 'asylum seeker' or 'refugee', or a social generalized *identity*, as 'migrants'. We value the diversity and uniqueness of these young men, each bringing his origins, language, habits, expectations, and peculiar representations of the experience of migration. They are new in the place and they learn day by day what is possible and what is not, for them. If we want to know anything about them, we must talk and share a space of dialogue, which is problematic and not guaranteed. Literature on adult education demonstrates that being accepted, seen, talked to, considered, respected, recognized, are fundamental experiences for any newcomer to *find a place* – literal and symbolic - in the new society. Integration is not only about finding a job or speaking the language, or the outcome of an individual effort of adaptation: it is a relational process towards harmonic coexistence.

Integration can be re-imagined by drawing attention to real lives, namely to the daily effects of informal embodied learning hidden in the relationship with space, with others, and with the public discourse itself. Newcomers' movements in the physical space are revealing of their relation to the territory; the spatial turn has challenged the idea of space as a mere container, characterizing it, instead, as 'the ongoing construction of human activity and practices' (Higgins, 2017, p. 102). The enactment of spaces through movement nurtures our imagination, memory and identity, shaped by our biography, ethnicity, religion, gender, and language (Higgins, 2017).

This paper covers a part of the larger study to address the topic of coexistence, its struggles, limits, and possibilities, using Bateson's seminal work on culture contact (1935) to develop reflexivity and relational sensitivity. In the following, we present our theoretical framework and the context of our research. Then, we describe the layered design and methodology of the project before offering some significant stories from the field. In the end, we discuss our examples in the light of the concept of culture contact.

Complexity theory: re-imagining migration in a new frame

Migration and coexistence are constitutive of the human condition: as soon as the human species made its appearance on Earth, groups started moving in search for resources; so, they had to negotiate with natives the possibility to live in the same space. Bateson (1935) describes three different outcomes, or states of equilibrium, as a result of this:

a) The complete fusion of the originally different groups
b) The elimination of one or both groups
c) The persistence of both groups in dynamic equilibrium within one major community (Bateson, 1935, p. 65).

He warned decision makers to thoroughly consider factors at work in the cycle of disequilibrium/equilibrium that always characterizes culture contact (and all human relationships), and to take responsibility for it: the settlement of newcomers in a new place brings disequilibrium and pushes the whole system towards one of these ends. We call them (a) inclusion, (b) integration, and (c) participation, warning the reader, however, of their ambiguous and different meanings. Each of these outcomes, desirable from a certain perspective, entails a different treatment of human differences. What is desirable? What is the political agenda about the management of difference, and what are its consequences for (adult) education?

By centering our research on culture contact, we try to re-imagine migration in a different, if not new, frame. Historically, several cycles of disequilibrium/equilibrium

have been structural for Europe, and more generally for the evolution and differentiation of human life on Earth, bringing by turns to the assimilation, destruction, or contamination of life worlds, connecting and/or separating people bearing different languages, art, bureaucracy, laws, as well as illnesses, weapons, and technologies (Diamonds, 1997). So, when we think about 'the long summer of migration', the 'refugee crisis', or any other recent phenomena, it can be refreshing to remember that we are focusing but a small arc of a larger ecological and historical pattern (Bateson, 1972). Bateson framed it with a question: "what do we do with differences?". A crucial question, and the basis of present and future politics and practices, not least educational.

In fact, any research on migration, nowadays, has to face superdiversity and the unprecedented need to understand how cultural worlds meet (Blommaert, Spotti & Van der Aa, 2017). In the global North, populations are growing diverse, bringing at the forefront matters of social inclusion, integration and/or participation, not only in the political discourse, but in daily lives. If the political agenda is only able to imagine migrants as marginalized adult learners, the circular pattern of culture contact and the question of how to manage differences remains unthought. Research should investigate the conditions that foster the harmonic coexistence of diverse people, and what kind of learning they need. There are many reasons to believe that we are failing at that.

The task demands a circular imagination, i.e. shifting attention from the individual to the system, as a complex situation where everybody is pushed to learn, reciprocally. As said, the integration discourse is one-way: newcomers are expected to comply with educational programs shaped for them to meet neoliberal goals and achieve 'full citizenship' in the long run (Fejes, 2019; Guo, 2015). There are apparently no goals of integration for natives, giving for granted that they already are integrated. What can be done to enhance, in the whole system, the kind of transformative learning that can ensure livable ways of coexistence?

The systemic perspective suggests that categorizing the other is the wrong answer to the issues of culture contact. The 'other' and 'us' are the product of interaction. Coexistence is a circular pattern of multiple, interdependent, and entangled levels of interaction. The idea of 'multiple embeddedness of migrants who form networks of bonding and bridging social relations across multiple social fields' (Blommaert, Spotti & Van der Aa, 2017, p. 350) is also true for the ones we call 'natives', who may have been, or will soon become, migrants themselves. In our society, an individual is the product of multiple cultural realities, not fixed entities, but holistic contexts and systems of co-evolving values (Jurkova & Guo, 2018). This also includes the crucial relationship with space, objects, and a whole territory, its climate and atmosphere, landscape, embedded values, constraints, as well as the possibilities it offers.

We are inspired by complexity theory (Formenti, 2016, 2018; Glasersfeld, 1995; Morin, 2015) as a source of metaphors and imagination that challenges the dominant linear vocabulary. When complex phenomena are simplified for the sake of understanding and control, we can expect ecologic and social disasters (Bateson, 1972). The dominant discourse on migration is based on linear assumptions and metaphors; complexity allows to re-imagine it as the intersection of irreducible circular processes where the process of reception is seen as a whole entailing an entanglement of micro, meso and macro processes:

a) The individual construction of behaviors, perceptions, meanings, and emotions (microlevel);
b) The structural determinants and larger processes sustaining dominant and marginal models of coexistence in a certain society (macrolevel);

c) The relational and communicational spaces where real people meet, develop, transform their actions, ideas and perspectives within an ongoing dynamic context (mesolevel).

We are especially interested in the latter, where embodied and embedded narratives (Formenti, West & Horsdal, 2014) sustain a livable coexistence, and learning.

To give a method to this frame, we refer to embodied reflexivity (Anderson & Braud, 2011; Hunt, 2013; Pink, 2009), the 'space turn' in socio-linguistic (Higgins, 2017), and the 'sensory turn' in ethnographic studies. Walking together in the physical space, as maintained by De Certeau (1984), produces space itself through the embodied experience of moving, telling, and imagining together. We use sensobiographic walks, an ethnographic narrative method (Järviluoma, 2017; Luraschi & Del Negro, 2019; Murray & Järviluoma, 2019) where two subjects walk and talk together in a place of choice and share all kinds of perceptions, imaginations, and memories. The researcher facilitates the dialogue, documents, and asks further questions during or after the walk. This generative method develops meaning, beyond the mere collection of stories. We focus the 'sensescape' (Howes, 2005) and the construction of space by newcomers and natives who live in the 'same' territory, yet do not perceive it in the same way; we invite them to develop a 'common place' and co-create new meaning, that is original and notably different from the meaning assigned by urban planning or public discourse.

Changing winds: the context of our study

The public discourse of integration shifted dramatically, in Italy and Europe, in 2018 (Luraschi, Massena & Pitzalis, 2019). When we started the project, we wanted to explore the celebrated Italian *diffused model of integration* (Caneva, 2014), that was starting to bear its fruits at least in those territories where local administration, associations, citizens, and employers had taken responsibility to create a sense of community around newcomers, not least using the (uncertain and meagre) state resources in a virtuous way. Interestingly, this grassroots model has been a creative answer to the long-standing lack of solid policies and investments by the state (Korac, 2003). A world-renown example is Riace, a hilltop hamlet in the South of Italy, whose Mayor, Mimmo Lucano, was awarded by Fortune among the 50 Greatest Leaders in the World (Forthomme, 2016) for his achievements over nearly 20 years, receiving 6000 migrants and stabilizing around 450 of them in a town of 1800. Knowing that his little community was slowly dying with several empty houses and a population growing older, Lucano managed to offer housing and work to newcomers and their families, teaching them artisanal techniques and organizing a system of sheltering. Some decided to stay and re-populated the place; local citizens collaborated, for example accepting delays in payment for food and rent, waiting for state reimbursements.

In 2018, the winds of politics changed, Lucano was arrested in October for fraud and abetment of clandestine migration, and Riace's experiment was closed. In our territory (Province of Lecco), many apartments funded by the SPRAR system started to close in favor of larger centers with no resources for education, mostly located outside urban spaces in dismissed facilities or even camps. We are not going to analyze these changes or their reasons, here; what we are interested in, is their educational side. What do newcomers learn from the experience of being criminalized, rejected, and disciplined? How do adult educators live their shifting role, from facilitators of inclusion to

administrators of lives? What do natives learn from discourses of hate, racism, and fundamentalism, and from the lack of contact with the 'othered other'?

Thanks to our participatory framework, many subjects felt legitimized in bringing their worries and struggles into the research space; our aim shifted little by little from the task of chronicling best practices to chronicling the participants' frustration, fear, disillusionment, and uncertainty. And yet, the diffuse model was still celebrated by professionals, decision makers, employers, volunteers, who knew by experience that a sense of community, recognition, and cooperation is fundamental for real inclusion and participation. In several occasions, they signaled that 'inclusion' was a better word for them, referring to an Italian long-standing tradition of respect for diversity. A new research question was emerging from the field: which are the experiences of contact, on a daily base, between newcomers and natives living side by side in the same land? Can research itself be a way to enhance culture contact, beside documenting it?

The complexity of coexistence: an embodied research process

The perception of space by newcomers is shaped by their movements within the territory and shapes them in turn: we were interested in their interactions with the human and non-human world, the relationships inside and outside hosting centres and apartments and with the public space, urban and rural. Fieldwork was organized in three phases.

1. Start-up phase: shaping the network

We met and interviewed several actors involved in the welcome programs: social workers in reception centers, teachers, coordinators, local policy makers, volunteers, employers, etc. Our aim was to create a solid network of informants and start to build a complex representation of the diffused model in the territory, to realize soon that this model was being dismantled piece by piece. Our participants were grateful nonetheless for this dialogic space where they could express their feelings and reflect on what was going on.

During a workshop within a school for adult students (CPIA), Ansou[2], a 22 years old refugee from Guinea-Bissau, opened his speech thanking Silvia and the other participants – 10 refugees and asylum seekers, 2 social workers and 1 teacher:

> ANSOU: (speaking Italian) I'm very pleased with all of us being here together! We're managing to take a break from everyday stress. I'm worried about my future in Italy, because I would like to become a gardener. I have studied for one year and it was hard and important for me, but now? I don't find a job because I know only few Italians… (our translation)

In these conversations, we also realized that newcomers and natives of the same age rarely meet. Most volunteers are retired people, and young native adults travel to the big cities of the region to work or study. Informal occasions to speak Italian are also very rare. This brought to the decision to create couples of about the same age during the third phase (sensobiographic walks).

2. Mapping phase: exploring newcomers' movements in the territory

We organized two workshops with 12 social workers and four workshops with overall 30 newcomers using a narrative-aesthetic method of participatory inquiry (Formenti, 2016; Heron, 1996) to explore the newcomers' movements in the territory, using an educational and learning framework. This idea was very strong among the professionals, as witnessed by Roberto during the first workshop with social workers:

> ROBERTO: Mine is a B class job, since years ago they used to say that in order to work with migrants you didn't need much, just some good will, a couple of English words, a style. I used to agree with this idea that it was a social, not an educational work, but I changed my mind in time and realized how much education was involved. […] My function is to send out [of the reception centre] people who are as suitable as possible, which doesn't mean they are conformed, but they have the right means to build and use their own competences. [Our translation]

In the newcomers' workshops, we asked them to draw a map of their daily movements, then we had an open conversation with the group. Cultural mapping (Kingsolver & et al., 2017) is an ethnographic tool to investigate the subjective understanding of space, and reveal strategies of adaptation or resistance. Researchers in anthropology, psychology, and education use it to illuminate struggles, resources, and social justice issues. Drawing circumvents linguistic gaps and facilitates storytelling; as other forms of art, it sustains the expression of emotions (see for example Mullett, 2008), and leaves space for imagination and interpretation; maps are both literal and symbolic, they trigger stories and metaphors. Besides, art combined with biography may have transformative effects (Formenti & West, 2016; Horsdal, 2012; Illeris, 2014; O'Neill, 2008).

Most participants did not speak good Italian, so mapping enabled them to share their experience; the workshops highlighted the meaning of some special places (adult school, bus/train station, supermarket, parks, football field, workplace) and daily life relationships. We learnt much from and about them: they go to school and to work; they prefer supermarkets with Free Wi-Fi; not having cars, they walk, ride a bike or use public transportation (bus, train); their approach to the territory is 'slower' than residents: how does this influence their perception and meaning?

We also learnt that the rare contacts with local citizens are usually purposeful and based on needs: the construction of the newcomer as needing and vulnerable starts here. Informal contacts, free from specific purposes, are rare. Newcomers move around, yet they remain invisible to Italian citizens.

Figure 1: Lamin's drawing (workshop with newcomers)

In his drawing [fig. 1] Lamin, a 22 years old asylum seeker form Gambia, composed all his favourite places. He lives in a small mountain village and he is taking lessons for driving license.

> LAMIN: If you want a job, you need a car to get there. I go mountain running every morning and to school three times a week in the afternoon. I also love playing football with Italians…

SILVIA: Can I ask you if there are places that you don't like?

LAMIN: I hate smoke. I don't like places with people who smoke or sell bad things [drugs; dialogue is in Italian, translation is ours].

Drawings and stories illuminate the effects of public discourse on newcomers' experience. An example: on April 11th, 2019 newspapers and social media gave relief to an ordnance from the Mayor of Caloziocorte (LC), a city involved in our project, determining a new town planning scheme that banned reception facilities for refugees nearby schools and the train station and relocated apartments and centers at periphery. Newspapers bluntly titled 'A part of the city closed to migrants' [fig. 2]. Media and politicians often refer to 'migrants' as a generalized category; a not accidental mistake, reinforcing trivialization and construction of a generalized unwelcomed other. This policy of communication raises barriers nurturing fears, distrust and hate; the lack of spaces where it is possible to reflect and maybe challenge the meaning of words and decisions like the ones reported brings negative emotions to escalate and influences the use of space.

Delibera della giunta leghista nel Lecchese

«Una parte della città chiusa ai migranti»

I fatti

La planimetria

fantoni

Figure 2: A national newspaper announcing, 'A part of the city closed to migrants' (Corriere della Sera, April 11th, 2019)

We had a workshop on April 16th, five days after these news; there had been no previous occasion to talk among the refugees or with social workers. Dumbia, a 19 years' old refugee arrived in 2016 as unaccompanied minor from Ivory Coast:

DUMBIA: I don't like going to Caloziocorte, but I am forced to go there to take a train and come here, to school.

SILVIA: And why don't you like to go there?

DUMBIA: I saw on Facebook that people do… how do you say… I saw the newspaper; they are saying this is a red area… it is a thing on immigration. You know, when I heard it, I felt pretty bad.

SILVIA: I felt bad too. Did anybody else hear this story? This news?

DUMBIA: I did not understand, I just watched a video where they talked about a red zone where strangers cannot live… and I am a stranger. [dialogue is in Italian, translation is ours]

Sabrina, a teacher, clarified that the new ordnance did not forbid walking in the streets, since red areas concern buildings, not people; she informed Dumbia and the others that she belongs to a local committee that was asking for cancellation of the ordnance. During our workshops, it became clear that these young men's choices in moving around do not only respond to their basic needs and adaptation, but answer complex needs, not least the need for meaning-full and care-full contact. Playing, sharing, caring for the other, or simply enjoying a beautiful place in good company are what makes them (us) human: we are mammals and born vulnerable, so we fear the unknown but we are sensitive and open to the experience of care. Reciprocal diffidence is nurtured by the lack of interaction and knowledge, which is massive in these stories. The possibility to develop reciprocal trust, meaning, and hope for the future is reduced in absence of good enough relational spaces. Media also play a role in boosting the scary effects of public discourse (Musarò & Parmiggiani, 2017). In such a climate, narrative inquiry connects back to the original roots of adult education in activism and the desire to make a difference in communities (Formenti & West, 2016; 2018).

3. The embodied phase: walking side by side

In the third part of the project, we carried out twelve sensobiographic walks with 6 newcomers and 6 native young adults about the same age, accompanied by Silvia. The lack of contact between these two groups had emerged during the inquiry, and they confirmed it. These walks were meant to be a dialogic exploration of space, namely of what we called the 'place of the heart'. In our analysis, we used a systemic layered perspective with three levels of inquiry:

- at the microlevel, we focused the insiders' subjective experience, as they tell it: their perceptions, meanings, and possibilities revealed by their movements and the stories they tell;
- at the macro level, we focused the discursive patterns shaping their everyday lives and meanings, not least through internalization; for example, the influence of media on their movements (as in Dumbia's story);
- at the meso level, interaction itself is seen a learning context; our methodology is performative and transformative in creating and facilitating unprecedented relationships. This level, analyzed in the following paragraph, is especially interesting for educators as an occasion to reflect on culture contact as a learning experience.

The meso level: understanding and enacting culture contact

We do not only *explore* the human experience of contact; we enact such an experience in our study. Our method is performative: it creates a new space for embodied dialogue and unprecedented relationships; it fosters an atmosphere of friendship (Tillmann-Healy, 2003) enabling reciprocal recognition, trust, openness, and generating information that is hardly exchanged in more formal relationships. According to Tillmann-Healy, 'the most important aspect of this methodology is that we research with an ethic of friendship, a stance of hope, caring, justice, even love. Friendship as method is neither a program nor a guise strategically aimed at gaining further access. It is a level of investment in participants' lives that puts fieldwork relationships on par with the project (2003, p. 735)'.

We illustrate this concept with two examples from our fieldwork.

Moussa and Silvia: a transformative conversation?

Moussa, 27 years old, was born in the Ivory Coast. He has been living in a small town in Brianza and following an 'integrated reception' program since the summer 2017. Talking with Silvia inside the apartment where he lives with other four newcomers from different African countries, he describes his first period in Italy [dialogue is in Italian and French, translation is ours]:

> MOUSSA: I arrived in Sicily and was transferred to Lecco some days after my application for asylum. I stayed at Bione camp for one year. Silvia, do you know Bione? It was a big tent camp for asylum seekers inside the public sport ground. We were around 200 people from different countries.
>
> SILVIA: What were you doing in Bione?
>
> MOUSSA: (smiling to her) We learnt eating 'pasta al sugo' and speaking some words in Italian, 'buongiorno' and 'come stai?'
>
> SILVIA: Was it easy?
>
> MOUSSA: (laughing) Not much! Volunteers gave Italian lessons and took us to see the top of the mountains near Lecco. Silvia, do you know that we painted your football stadium?
>
> SILVIA: I saw the picture in the local newspaper...
>
> MOUSSA: I love football and we did a great job for Lecco!
>
> SILVIA: Do you play?
>
> MOUSSA: Yes, I do. I play football with my friends…

Moussa shows a photo on his Smartphone:

Figure 3: A beautiful image from Moussa's gallery, showing him painting the stadium's steps in Lecco.

In this short, apparently simple conversation, Moussa evokes a complex and articulated situation. He spent one year in a tent camp where an association of volunteers supported newcomers with basic language programs, excursions, and football matches. The word 'camp' is not neutral: it evokes historical images of enclosures where subjugated people

are brought to live together in packed and highly disciplined situations (Ascari, 2019). Interrogating this word, and the reality it refers to, and becoming aware of our hidden imaginary and frameworks of meaning, we open the way to critical thinking and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991).
Since the dominant narrative defines asylum seekers as 'guests', not as holders of rights, they are encouraged to do 'something in return' for the local community hosting them (even if the quality of hospitality leaves much to be desired). The contrast is sharp: who is giving and receiving what, here? Moussa's narrative shows pride, connection to the Italians because of his love for football, and gratitude to the volunteers for the good time spent together. We wonder if this is a signal of integration or inclusion. Frankly, it does not look like participation.

During the workshop in their apartment, his roommate Jabaru, a 24 years' asylum seeker from Nigeria, reveals Moussa's capacity to give and take care for the other fellows:

> JABARU: (speaking English) This is your sewing machine.
>
> SILVIA: Do you sew, Moussa?
>
> MOUSSA: (speaking Italian) Yes, I do. I worked for a tailor in Abidjan, the largest city of Ivory Coast.
>
> SILVIA: What are you doing now?
>
> JABARU: Moussa arranges clothes for us all. He's a professional! (Moussa & Jabaru laugh together)
>
> SILVIA: Do you work as a tailor?
>
> MOUSSA: I'd like to, but now I'm apprentice in a farm. I don't like that job! [Our translation]

Figure 4: Moussa's sewing machine

Moussa's frustration is determined by the adaptation discourse: since newcomers are expected to be low skilled, they only can have low quality jobs and salaries (Zanfrini, 2019), and they cannot be 'choosy'. They must integrate, no matter what they want or like, or their real capacities. Integration means working, learning the Italian language, and gaining stability. Dreams and preferences are not envisaged.
Some months after this conversation, Moussa decided to stop his traineeship at the farm, after meeting a guidance counsellor, and asking support to find another job as a tailor. Now he works for a company producing sportswear, and he wrote to Silvia that he feels far better in the new job.

Aziz and Abdiqani: from awkwardness to shared meaning

The sensobiographic walks with Aziz and Abdiqani show the struggles of culture contact as well as the effects of our method in creating an unprecedented possibility for reciprocal learning and understanding.

Aziz is Italian, a 21 years student of Law at Milano University, strongly motivated to be part of the project, not least because he is a native citizen with a migratory background, being the son of African parents arrived in Italy in the Eighties and now Italian citizens. Aziz's mother is from Ivory Coast and his father from Burkina Faso. When he met Silvia at an informal meeting with his local youth club, he saw a link with the association's motto - 'Rethinking future with youngsters' - and proposed to help with the complexity of organizing twelve sensobiographic walks.

He walked, then, with Abdiqani, 28 years old, refugee, married and father of a 6 years old daughter still living in Somalia; after arrival at Lampedusa (the Italian landing isle in the middle of the Mediterranean see) in the summer 2017, he applied for international protection then lived on the street before crossing the France border to join his relatives there. Two years later, summoned for refugee audience, he came back to Italy. Today he is living in Lecco, still unemployed, as he told Silvia in her car towards meeting Aziz, because his Italian is not good enough, despite having attended a course managed by volunteers for months, three times a week. He has no informal occasion to speak Italian. Working could be such an occasion.

In the first sensobiographic walk, Aziz led Abdiqani to the garden of his elementary school in the small town where he has always lived. This is his place of heart because, he explains, here he felt part of the local community for the first time in his life and he met his present friends. Notwithstanding Aziz's engagement, the start of their relationship is awkward and communication difficult. Aziz's flowery Italian represents a barrier for Abdiqani. Ironically, apart from their skin color they seem far too different:

> ABDIQANI: (speaking Italian) Where were you born?
>
> AZIZ: Here, in Lecco.
>
> ABDIQANI: You are an African from here. [Our translation]

After the walk, Aziz says to Silvia: 'I'm not sure if he understood much of what I tried to tell him […] It is hard to communicate if you miss any common reference point'.

During the second walk, when it was Abdiquani's turn to choose the place, the atmosphere changed. Abdiquani walked Aziz and Silvia through Lecco, the city where he lives, showing the places where he usually hangs around: the soup kitchen, the school of Italian, the mosque in the industrial district. He invited them for a coffee in the

reception center where he lives. Aziz was surprised of how many places he did not know in his own city. He also found a way to communicate:

> AZIZ: Do you like sport?
>
> ABDIQANI: I like running. We Somalians are strong in running.
>
> AZIZ: Did you compete in Somali?
>
> ABDIQANI: Yes, I was an athlete of the National Youth before the war. I escaped Somali because a friend told me that I could ask political asylum in Canada and keep on my training. But I failed the application… that is an old story.
>
> AZIZ: And now, do you still love to run? Do you go running here in Lecco?
>
> ABDIQANI: No… I'm out of practice. [dialogue is in Italian and French, translation is ours]

Figure 5: Abdiqani and Aziz walking in Lecco

This conversation brings to surface what the social workers in our meetings called 'the underworld', the unexplored lives of newcomers. Differently from traditional biographic interviews, sensobiographic walks trigger more fragmentary stories, less structured by an intentional plot. These people are accustomed to formal interviews and to the need to deliver a good refugee story. Embodiment and dialogue seem to change this common discursive frame, and open space for some real exchange.

One month later, Abdiqani chose to abandon the program and return to France. In the same period, during summer holidays, Aziz also went to France to visit his cousins and try to learn some French. On reentry, he described this first experience abroad as the most important in his life. We lost contact with Abdiqani afterword.

A discussion on culture contact and the levels of systemic interaction

Our data offer many insights on culture contact and the possibility to learn from a systemic and embodied imagination. The process of becoming part of a certain society entails the composition of the legal (residence status and political rights), socio-economic and cultural frameworks (Finotelli & Ponzo, 2018). The 'cultural' is defined by Finotelli

and Ponzo as a domain of reciprocal perceptions and practices between migrants and citizens, namely in the management of their perceived differences and diversities. Without this, the legal and economical frameworks are weak. In fact, due to their entanglement, the three frameworks 'can move at different paces and even reverse their course, worsening instead of progressing (2018, p. 2037)'.

How can we sustain the development of a good enough cultural framework in times when culture contact, and the dilemmas it raises, are massive? We saw how discourse, at the macrolevel, shapes the newcomers', professionals', and citizens' perception, meaning and interactions that can be observed at the micro and meso levels. Meeting stakeholders and social workers, we identified two main narratives shaping the model of intervention: the first gives for granted that newcomers want to live and stabilize in the place, which is false in most cases. If they had a choice, they would go away: to France, Germany, Scandinavia, or where their families and friends already live. Even in Riace, only 450 out of 6000 newcomers had settled down. The second narrative is the pervasive push to integration, hence the obligation to learn specific skills, such as speaking good Italian, which is problematic for someone who is not planning to settle down.

By focusing on culture contact, we bypass the discourse of integration and its neoliberal underpinnings, but also inclusion, which is preferable in many respects (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017), but still problematic. In times of superdiversity and transnationalism, in fact, we think that only dialogic participation, nurtured by curiosity for the other, would ensure sustainable ways to manage with difference and create the conditions for harmonic coexistence. We play in favor of Bateson's third solution, 'the persistence of both groups in dynamic equilibrium within one major community' (Bateson, 1935, p. 65).

The arrival of newcomers produces disequilibrium, conflict, and political, relational and psychological dilemmas. Education has a role to play here: How do we learn to tackle with feelings of insecurity and fear (especially if the other is *already narrated* as potentially disruptive and disturbing) on one hand, and, on the other hand, to embrace curiosity and the desire for the other, not least as a resource for our economy, culture, and lives (Wildemeersch, 2017)?

The historical Italian ambivalence towards migrants (Colucci, 2018), exacerbated by long standing poor policies, the lack of adequate resources and – more recently - hate speech in public discourse, could become a starting point for transformation. Transformative contexts are needed, recognizing dilemmas and endorsing the revision of previous perspectives of meaning (Mezirow, 1991). Here, the quality of the meso level interaction is crucial: people can find their own solutions, sometimes anticipating norms, plans and measures of intervention from the State. In formal education, socio-educational work, counselling and training, and also in informal meetings and grassroots work, authenticity, carefulness, and wisdom are necessary (Fraser, 2018). We tried to show that an embodied relational experience is transformative, even in a research setting, when the *subjective and embodied* is weaved together with the *relational and dialogical* dimensions (Formenti, Luraschi & Del Negro, 2019).

Conclusions

In our study, we documented the effects of recent policies and practices of newcomers' reception, increasingly driven by bureaucratic management, if not deportation and internment of masses of people. All over Europe, and in our territory, forced allocation is extensively used to manage thousands of people who are not acknowledged the right to enter or move freely within and between state territories. They do not belong, they do not

have the same rights as the natives, and the disciplinary machine works constantly, strengthening its procedures of control, age fixation, identity definition, status determination. Every day, the skies of Europe are traveled by the 'dublinated', i.e. those who, after Dublin III Treats, are sent back to their place of first docking, where they must wait until their status is clarified (which may take years). As a result, in 2019 the greatest flux of people seeking international protection in Italy came, paradoxically, from other EU countries (Villa, 2019).

Movement – a fundamental aspect of human biology, culture, and history - is not free: it is ruled by law and administration, mindless of human needs, desires, relationships, or meaning. Moreover, it is shaped by discourse. We are worried about the consequences of this, and the role of adult learning and education, too often narrowed down to normalization. The need for qualitative, ethnographic and participatory studies in this matter is urgent.

We saw that dominant narratives on refugees and asylum seekers are false: Italy is a country of transit, where most newcomers do not intend to live. They may have relatives and friends in other EU countries and aspire to family reunification. Or, as documented by Anna Tuckett (2018) in her ethnographic study on migrants' everyday struggles with the Italian bureaucracy, they perceive a lingering sense of failure and disappointment. Culture contact is a daily issue for them: 'people described the racial discrimination they faced in Italy, as well as the associated lack of higher-status job opportunities and the concern that their children would also face discrimination. This […] shapes and fuels their desire to leave Italy and produce it as an inferior country in migrant imaginaries (2018, p. 89)'. After 2018, the possibilities to work, to be regularized, even to have a roof over their heads became extremely reduced for newcomers. The long-standing lack of an overarching policy for integration, and insensitivity for the problems of culture contact, were made even worse by 'the predominance of control issues over integration concerns in the migration agenda' (Finotelli & Ponzo, 2018, p. 2036).

Here, we used the systemic framework to make visible the dilemmas, tensions, and contradictions of the present situation, at many levels, but also the generative learning potential they contain, when the relationship is good enough. The one-sided discourse of integration, leaning on the shoulders of the individual (Schinkel, 2018), provides only one way to be part of the neoliberal society, defined by accessing the labor market, and reduces learning to language skills and job competence (Fejes, 2019). We took a different stance, interrogating coexistence as a concrete, relational, embodied process occurring in a material and symbolic space and producing new unexpected modes of living together. Coexistence entails the negotiation of everyday life in space, managing with awkwardness and conflicts, with diversity, opening possibilities in dialogue and reciprocal learning. This is not granted, as we tried to show. We hope that our study will inspire researchers and educators towards more reflexivity and relational sensitivity.

Notes

[1] Women and families follow different paths: therefore, they are not involved in this study.
[2] Participants' names are changed for privacy reasons.

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Transformative learning theory and migration: Having transformative and edifying conversations

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Abstract

This paper introduces the concept of transformative conversation inspired by Arcilla's concept of edifying conversation, as an extension of TL theory's notion of discourse, in the context of adult education and migration. By contrasting the idea of exchanging arguments with opening space for conversation and one's private quest for meaning and self-understanding, I introduce the idea of becoming a fellow transformative conversationalist as an appropriate attitude for promoting TL. I will (1) differentiate between an instrumental and a transformative notion of learning in the context of migration; (2) engage Rorty in a conversation with TL theory; (3) introduce Arcilla's concept of edifying conversation to join and broaden the ongoing conversation and develop the concept of transformative conversation.

Keywords: Edification; liberal learning; migration; transformative conversation; transformative learning

All of us impatient for sunrise,
all of us in dread of it.
All of us in search of home.
(Khaled Hosseini, Sea Prayer)

Introduction: In search for an attitude

The experience of migration, the hope to find a new home, starts with leaving home, full of promise and threat. Migrants embark on perilous sea journeys – as in *Sea Prayer* (Hosseini) – or walk across continents. While the phenomenon of migration is wide and complex, the experience of migration is specific and individual. As a therapist, I have worked with migrant adults who fled to survive war. My training as a systemic therapist provides guidance – more precisely a useful attitude - for me working with survivors of

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violence and torture. I had to learn that I had no guidance for working with women who experienced war. I was in search of an attitude, an approach.

It is not only 'migration as a process of education and learning' (Kurantowicz, Salling Olesen, & Wildemeersch, 2014, p. 146) that needs to be studied, but also how educators can find a way, an attitude, supporting migrants learning. 'For migrants learning is an inevitable part of life' (Morrice, 2014, p. 152). They need to cope with 'migratory grief' and transform 'a social stressful event' (Vinciguerra, 2017, p. 354) into an opportunity to learn and develop, or at least survive, while rebuilding a 'shattered life' (Magro & Polyzoi, 2009, p. 86). Migrants have to find a new home inside and outside of themselves, by reconstructing a life and identity (Morrice, 2013, Magro, 2009). The need to find new answers to the question of how to live, having been 'deprived abruptly and often quite violently of what was most meaningful in their lives' (Magro & Polyzoi, 2009, p. 88), together with a loss of safety and self-understanding (ibid.), becomes a learning task. In what ways can adult educators support migrants on this journey of rebuilding and hopefully arriving in a new society, and a new, empowered self-understanding? How can hope and history rhyme?

Central to this learning process seems to be an understanding of the experience of migration, and how it puts one's life and self-understanding on hold; how it forces migrants to undergo processes of transformation without losing themselves while they have lost their way in the world. Is there *any* potential for learning, for (personal) growth and development in this adversity?

The theory of transformative learning (TL) (Mezirow, 1978) understands learning as an invitation to leave what one has taken for granted, maybe it is ones' self-understanding, or life as one knows it or one's assumptive clusters. This process can be traumatic. The theory of TL will be discussed later in this paper. Adult education offered under the umbrella of lifelong learning does not address trauma and personal narratives of flight [if it is good education, it does, it indeed should], emerging out of the tension of looking to survive and realizing one's dreams. There is little space for mourning. At what cost is this deferred? How is this experienced? What stories are told or yet to be told?

The following question arises out of this search for an attitude that fosters learning *transformatively:* While searching for a home, is there a role for conversation about one's private quest for meaning? One where the role of an educator could be one of a fellow conversationalist engaged in *transformative conversation*, critically questioning taken-for-granted frames of reference, and turning that quest into an opportunity for transformation.

This paper introduces the concept of *transformative conversation* which is inspired by Arcilla's concept of *edifying conversation* (1995). *This is* an extension of TL's notion of discourse, in the context of adult education and migration. By contrasting the idea of exchanging arguments with opening a space for conversation and one's private quest for meaning and self-understanding, I introduce the idea of becoming a fellow *transformative conversationalist* as an appropriate attitude for promoting TL.

I will (1) differentiate between an instrumental and a transformative notion of learning in the context of migration. This is as backdrop for (2) bringing Rorty (1989) into a conversation with transformative learning theory, and (3) introduce Arcilla's concept of edifying conversation to join and broaden the ongoing conversation and develop the idea of transformative conversation.

Adult education in times of migration: Between instrumental learning and transformative learning

There are answers to the question as to how adult education can support migrants in making their transition to the host country and becoming a member of society. Providing educational programmes is one way to help 'navigate complex paths, including perhaps improving their language skills and knowledge of local labour markets and cultures to ensure their sense of belonging and full participation in the host society' (Webb, Hodge, Holford, Milana, & Waller, 2016, p. 213). These programmes often work under the assumption that migrants *need* to learn and be *oriented* into society and employment, whereas migrant's skills and resources are considered as 'non-resources' (Morrice, 2014, p. 157). Skills, resources and prior identities are less valued (Webb, 2017). This kind of informative, instrumental learning (e.g. learning a new language, and accommodating to a different culture) should be conducted in a respectful way towards the learners' cultural backgrounds (Wildemeersch, 2017). However, this need to learn and accommodate is intertwined with an identity of vulnerability and shame (Morrice, 2013). It operates from a deficit approach, an assumption that migrants are lacking something (knowledge, competences) that needs to be addressed, so that they can become included as citizens (e.g. Gibb, 2015, Morrice, 2014, 2019, Webb, 2015, Wildemeersch, 2017).

This is not surprising, as Morrice (2019) asserts that current western-centric framing reflects colonial logics and privileges, employing an assimilationist approach: 'Integration has become an identity issue with migrants having to prove their willingness to integrate by attending classes and passing tests' (Morrice, 2014, p. 156). Migrants are held responsible to demonstrate their willingness and ability to adapt (Morrice, 2019). It is this deficit approach (aiming for adaption and assimilation) from which adult education has to decouple and also liberate itself from post-colonial framings and search for a different framing (Morrice, 2019).

Wildemeersch (2017) proposes a more expansive idea of adult education in the context of migration and reflects on Biesta's (2012) distinction between three different pedagogical approaches. Wildemeersch (2017) advocates a *pedagogy for publicness* that sees the learner as an active participant within the public sphere, whereas the role of an educator is to challenge formerly unproblematic notions and ideas, employing a *pedagogy of interruption*. This approach is different from a *pedagogy for the public*. It operates under a deficit approach with huge overlap of what Morrice (2019) has criticized in the context of migration. It wants to reduce plurality by employing an assimilationist approach, where the educator is primarily an instructor. It is also different from a *pedagogy of the public*, where the educator is a facilitator, engaging in open-ended dialogue. The downside, however, is that the learner has to continuously engage in public issues in order to be considered a good citizen, while in the process it becomes private learning problems.

The *pedagogy of interruption* (Wildemeersch, 2017) is interesting, not only with regard to citizenship and adult education in general and in the context of migration, but also for expanding TL theory. It engages many of the same ideas, like interrupting and challenging taken-for-granted assumptions. His work allows us to depart from our current understanding of TL to shift our focus from trying to achieve a (tentative) *consensus*, which is seen as a given within TL theory (e.g. Mezirow, 1991). His work aims for *dissensus*, as it creates opportunities to engage in the public sphere. Wildemeersch introduces an *element of dissensus* as 'a sign of plurality, and this in turn refers to the fact that in our human condition, life choices are not predetermined but are open to the freedom of subjects to choose among the plurality of possibilities that the world offers'

(2017, p. 119). This idea of the human condition, that one is not trapped by one way of looking at the world, is close to Rorty's (1989) idea of irony, as we will see later.

Wildemeersch (2017) introduces the idea of *dissensus* as a pedagogical approach that is highly relevant within the public sphere, from the perspective of citizenship education as a democratic practice and highlights

> the need for a space of conversation, whereby participants and facilitators open spaces of conversation about the world they come from, and the world they want to live in. Such spaces of conversation are based on the principles of equity and respect for each other's uniqueness. Yet, it is also a practice that sometimes confronts us with the limits of our mutual understanding. (p. 114)

This conversation within the public sphere addresses the question: How do *we* want to live *our* lives? This paper adds to his notion of conversation by shifting the focus to another question that emerges for learners out of their migratory experiences: How do *I* want to live *my* life? It invites the reader to shift the focus from mutual understanding to self-understanding. This process of learning holds the potential to become a transformative conversation within the private sphere, if one is able to rebuild a shattered life. This structural reorganization is central to Mezirow's notion of TL (Mezirow, 1978) and has to be the foundation for learning transformatively in the context of flight and migration.

Transforming pathways: Transformative learning and migration

This paper adds a new dimension to the idea of TL by introducing a framework that allows educators to support migrants in their attempt to increase their ability to weave contingent but coherent elements into a life story, to (re-)create an autobiography. Wildemeersch's (2017) differentiation between *teleological* and *non-teleological* dialogue offers additional insights. The former follows some kind of agenda and is supposed to arrive at a particular answer, whereas the latter is a form of open-ended conversation. The distinctive aspect between the two is, for Wildemeersch (ibid.), less the role and more the *attitude* of the educator. The risk one takes is not equally distributed within teleological dialogue, it rests solely on the learner putting her or his (self-)understanding at risk by engaging in critical reflection on one's assumptions. This is one of the problems coming with a dialogical approach, especially within a teleological perspective. I will argue later, that the educator who wants to foster TL should aspire to what I call a transformative conversation instead and learning to become a co-conversationalist, putting her or his (self-)understanding at risk through the means of a non-teleological approach.

In contrast to the instrumental view of learning within the context of migration, where immigrants are offered a particular vision of what citizens should look like, the skills and knowledge needed, TL offers a different possibility. TL, indeed offers something to migrants that is different from indoctrination, no short-hand way of becoming citizens, and reflects a different site of the migration studies. As a theory, TL has been around quite for some time and sheds light on positive and negative learning outcomes (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009).

According to Mezirow and Taylor, TL is 'an approach to teaching based on promoting change, where educators challenge learners to critically question and assess the integrity of their deeply held assumptions about how they relate to the world around them' (2009, p. xi). It aims at transforming assumptive clusters, which form a *meaning perspective* or *frame of reference*. Mezirow (1991) describes this as a *perspective*

transformation, where the learner (1) gains critical awareness of taken-for-granted assumptions and how they have shaped and limited one's way of being in the world, and (2) transforms them to make them more open, integrative, discriminating and inclusive. Concerned with both the private and public sphere, TL's main goal is to enable adults to come to an understanding about their own ideas, meanings and values, instead of those they have inherited and uncritically assimilated from others (ibid.). Within the private sphere, TL wants to support adults to liberate themselves from self-imposed limits on how one should live. Within the public sphere, TL aims at supporting adults to become socially responsible decision makers, actively engaging in questions about how to live together, and being able to transform society towards a more habitable place.

Not all learning in adulthood is necessarily transformative, for example learning a new language, gaining knowledge about culture and society or building on existing knowledge (Mezirow, 2012). Transformative dimensions of adult learning in the context of migration involve transforming points of view and/or habits of mind. Learning is only transformative when there is a difference in *how* one knows, not just in *what* one knows (Kegan, 2000). If one is not able to solve a problem within her or his current (self-)understanding, when formerly unproblematic notions and (meaning) perspectives are questioned, and '*the coherence-producing mechanism of our minds is interrupted* [and] [w]e are no longer able to interpret the situation based on our previous experiences' (Mälkki, 2019, p. 64), we need to learn transformatively. This interruption is what Mezirow (1978, 1991, 2012) identifies as *disorienting dilemma* – an essential first step towards TL.

TL is concerned with personal change and social action within the private and public spheres. '[T]he site of change - as well as agency - is envisaged primarily in terms of the transformation of the inner mental landscape of an individual learner which may, or may not, have broader social consequences' (Finnegan, 2019, p. 48). Finnegan (2019) argues that even though Mezirow's theory of TL is concerned with the individual, it is not individualistic since it emphasises intersubjective learning through discourse (Mezirow, 1991). Others 'serve as critical mirrors who highlight our assumptions for us and reflect them back to us in unfamiliar, surprising, and disturbing ways' (Brookfield, 2000, p. 146).

Why is TL a useful lens for understanding migration? It allows us to reflect on societies being transformed in the aftermath of processes of migration. And, on an individual level, it offers a distinctive perspective to understand migratory experiences in the light of transformation. I will first review the connections that have been drawn between TL and migration. Proceeding from there; I will highlight understudied questions and findings that enhanced TL. It is not surprising that TL has been important in the context of migration (e.g. Morrice, 2012, 2014, Webb, 2015). Scholars used TL mainly as a lens to understand the experience of migration (e.g. Magro, 2009, Magro & Polyzoi, 2009), mainly by referring to the works of Mezirow (e.g. 1991, 2000) as the architect of TL theory (see e.g. Jurkova & Guo, 2018, Magro & Polyzoi, 2009, Margaroni & Magos, 2018, Webb 2017). They have engaged in the idea of learning a new frame of reference (Margaroni & Magos, 2018) and explored disorienting dilemmas that are inherent in migrants' experiences, trying to cope with an overwhelming loss, migration and transitions (e.g. Magro, 2007, 2009, Magro & Polyzoi, 2009, Margaroni & Magos, 2018, Morrice, 2013). Learning in the context of migration is potentially transformative and intense: 'The process of migration disrupts the inherited frames of reference and the accumulated biographical repertoire of knowledge and understanding' (Morrice, 2013, p. 252). The need migrants are facing to reshape their lives and modify identities in the aftermath of migration has been explored (e.g. Magro, 2009, Morrice, 2014), as well as engaging in critical reflection (Magro & Polyzoi, 2009), or premise reflection that may

lead to perspective transformation (e.g. Magro & Polyzoi, 2009, Margaroni & Magos, 2018, Morrice, 2014). Most researchers have identified similar phases of transformation as Mezirow suggests (e.g. Jurkova & Guo, 2018, King, 1999, Magro & Polyzoi, 2009, Morrice, 2013) and emphasized cross-cultural/intercultural awareness as a potential outcome of the migratory experience (e.g. King, 1999, Margaroni & Magos, 2018, Taylor, 1994, Webb, 2017).

Understudied questions are, (despite the interest) the role of the transformative educator as a co-learner (e.g. Fursova, 2013, Magro, 2007), the interactions that lead to an increase in self-understanding (Jurkova & Guo, 2018), and the need to explore alternative routes to transformation (Magro & Polyzoi, 2009). Jurkova and Guo (2018) explicitly refer to Mezirow's Habermasian inspired validity claims and the need for a dialogue (not discourse as Mezirow suggests, e.g. 1991) that makes space for exploring new understandings of oneself and others. Margaroni and Magos describe the relationship between TL theory and migratory experiences at least to some extent as 'terra incognita' (2018, p. 207).

New insights for TL theory about what might constitute a transformative conversation with migrants, have emerged over the years. Proceeding from Fursova's (2013) work, we can identify distinctive aspects that are helpful in promoting TL in the context of migration, such as a format that (1) allows participants to learn from each other (about different (self-)understandings) and (2) helps them to identify and articulate skills and strengths in an appreciative environment. This leads to an increase in self-esteem and confidence, whereas learners felt patronised, when their resources skills were not acknowledged. We also learn from Fursova (2013) that women face both greater risks and benefits, renegotiating (traditional) stereotypes and roles. They have to carefully balance between renegotiation and a state of at least a temporary ‘not-knowing’ (Eschenbacher, & Fleming, 2020) in order not to be alienated from their traditional sources of support.

Another interesting finding suggests that when migrants tried to revise their expectations to fit in, they developed different selves, a public and a private self, in which the former had been transformed to meet the new expectations whereas the latter remains hidden (Webb, 2017). Morrice's (e.g. 2013) research reveals a different, *darker side* of TL that connects somewhat with Webb's (2017) findings, suggesting that in the process of learning transformatively, adults have 'to unlearn and let go of much of who and what they were (….) It also involved learning to live with loss of professional identity and the social status and respect that accompanied their premigration identity' (Morrice, 2013, p. 266). We learn from her, that this process of transformation was coupled with an ontological process 'where individuals have to adjust their sense of who they are and what they can be in the world' (ibid., p. 267).

Reflecting on these insights, there is a need for educators who want to engage in what I call transformative conversation to pay attention to (1) the kind of format and conditions that enable or limit empowering ways to develop a coherent self-understanding; one that allows one to (2) reconcile different, even conflicting aspects of identity; and supports (3) securing a space where learners can explore different possibilities. This can be done by inventing and re-describing their self-understandings in ways that do justice to pre-migration and post-migration parts of identity, allowing them to navigate identity and belonging, and ultimately to redeem their past by investing painful experiences in a promising future. The question left to answer would be: What kind of conversation can adult educators offer? In what way should it be different to what we are already offering, and what would that mean in practice? What would a transformative conversation look like?

From transformative learning to transformative conversations: Rorty in dialogue with transformation theory

Perspective transformation is an 'epiphanic, or apocalyptic, cognitive event - a shift in the tectonic plates of one's assumptive clusters' (Brookfield, 2000, p. 139). Learning transformatively is not 'a continuously joyful exercise in creative self-actualization' (Brookfield, 1990, p. 179) and there is often more to transformation than psychological change (Brookfield, 2000, Mezirow, 1991). The individualism of TL theory can be critiqued as migration education is where the public breaks into private lives. This paper supports a view of migrants learning transformatively within the private sphere. Instead of going beyond individualistic models, it is concerned with providing a theoretical framework that supports educators – in theory and practice – working to promote transformative conversations within groups, while also making space for private quests for meaning.

TL has always been concerned with assisting learners in their struggle with ambiguity and plurality. A Habermasian notion of rational discourse (Habermas, 1971, 1984, 1987) is located at the centre of the theory. By engaging in an argumentative exchange, learners are supposed to transform their assumptive clusters (e.g. Mezirow, 1991, 2012). In reflecting this idea against the background of migratory experiences, the question arises whether deep personal processes of transformation, one's attempt to rebuild a shattered life and identity, are truly initiated or catalysed by exchanging arguments. Fursova (2013) criticizes Mezirow's notion of TL, as her findings suggest that learning transformatively from the perspective of migrants is not as rational as suggested.

In the search for a different format, one that is less limited to rational means, we shift the focus from exchanging arguments within discourse to the concept of conversation. The different aims of TL theory, personal and social change (Dirkx, 1998), need different practical educational formats. Habermas and his notion of discourse belong to the public, not to the private sphere (Rorty, 1989). An educational format of exchanging arguments is suitable for the public sphere, where participants are engaging in a debate about how *they* should live *their* lives. A format that needs – at least to some extent – consensus and solidarity, although we have learned from Wildemeersch (2017) how useful the element of dissensus can be in conversation - within the public sphere - especially with regard to the context of citizenship education and migration. What is still missing within TL theory is an educational format, a transformative conversation, that makes space for the question of how should *I* live *my* life, where no consensus is necessary.

Adult educators wanting to support migrants in coping with their experience of a shattered self-understanding, need to be able to create a safe space. Reflective or rational discourse – as Mezirow suggests in order to promote transforming one's formerly unproblematic notions of identity, life, safety, etc. – might not be the most adequate format here. The coercive power of the better argument and a (tentative) consensus on how to deal with migratory grief, and experiences of loss and alienation seem to be out of place in this case. There is no need to arrive at a consensus on how one should deal with one's migratory experience, as there is no right way to do this. Of course, there is a need for a public discourse on how *we* want to live *our* lives together in the light of migration, how we can foster solidarity and democratic learning processes. But there is still a need for expanding TL theory by exploring new kinds of non-teleological dialogues, supporting migrants to transform their experiences into a learning opportunity with potentially positive outcomes.

Proceeding from Rorty's (1989) distinction between private and public vocabularies, we can add a useful dimension to TL theory: 'The vocabulary of self-creation is necessarily

private, unshared, unsuited to argument. The vocabulary of justice is necessarily public and shared, a medium for argumentative exchange' (Rorty, 1989, p. xiv). By placing Habermas' notion of discourse at the heart of TL, the theory falls short. It lacks a form of dialogue that is suitable for the private quest for meaning without being obliged to exchange arguments and to look for the non-coercive force of the better argument in order to defend one's self-understanding. By bringing TL theory into conversation with Rorty's ideas, the theory addresses the gap of fostering TL, without promoting the idea of exchanging arguments, in a quest for arriving at a new self-understanding and coping with migratory grief.

Migratory experiences can be traumatic, as the ones described in *Sea Prayer*. Leaving one's home, being abruptly and violently disrupted from everything that has been meaningful can be, and most often is, traumatic. There is mourning to be done in order to cope and ultimately to grow and develop – as mentioned earlier – and that certainly cannot be done within rational discourse.

What kind of format would be better suited? We have already learnt from Rorty (1989) that the vocabulary of self-creation is private and unsuited for argument. What does he mean by vocabulary?

> All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. These are the words in which we formulate (…) our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes. They are the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives. (Rorty, 1989, p. 73)

The vocabulary one employs is close to Mezirow's notion of a frame of reference as they guide our actions and provide us with clarity and certainty (Eschenbacher, 2019). They are the words in which we express our deepest self-doubts and highest hopes; in the context of migration, they include the migrants' attempt to survive and realize their dreams. As the words used to story or re-story lives – retrospectively and prospectively – they connect pre-migratory and post-migratory experiences. How can we support migrants in transforming their vocabularies? Through instrumental, informative learning that takes place, like learning a new language or acquiring cultural knowledge, the learner extends the vocabulary. It is Rorty's idea of irony that stresses the contingent nature of the way we construct and reconstruct our being in the world by employing one vocabulary among others. We are free to create new vocabularies by transforming our guiding assumptions, by employing new, formerly unknown words. Rorty's (1989) ironist idea is inviting us to explore different vocabularies as proposals regarding how one might live (Bernstein, 2016) instead of discussing arguments in order to see what we can all agree on to be the *right* way to live. Irony, according to Rorty (1989) is the opposite of *common sense*: When we take ideas, inherited final vocabularies or frames of reference for granted, we act *commonsensical*. Rorty 'wants to liberate us from the dead weight of past vocabularies and open up space for the imaginative creation of new vocabularies' (Bernstein, 2016, p. 52).

The close connection between Mezirow's idea of a frame of reference and Rorty's notion of vocabulary are coupled with the idea of transformation, whereas the former is about perspective transformation through premise reflection (Mezirow, 1991) and the latter is about redescribing oneself and one's being in the world (Rorty, 1989). To free ourselves from limits that are either self-imposed or learnt informally (here through discourses employing certain prejudices), we need to enhance our

> ability to appreciate the power of redescribing, the power of language to make new and different things possible and important—an appreciation that becomes possible only when

> one's aim becomes an expanding repertoire of alternative descriptions rather than The One Right Description. (Rorty, 1989, p. 39–40)

Here, the difference between exchanging arguments through discourse and the idea of redescribing through conversation becomes apparent. When we decide not to engage in teleological dialogues to support migrants in their quest for meaning and self-understanding, by not looking for one right description, we open space for conversations about different, alternative vocabularies (self-understandings) and proposals of how one might live, and establish and rebuild a meaningful life that has been shattered. This reminds me of what a transformative conversation might look like.

We learn from Dirkx (2012) that TL can be conceptualized as *self-formation*, a self that is understood as active and agentic, 'acting on and often creating the worlds which it inhabits. It is a reflective, dialogical, expressive, and deeply emotional and spiritual self that constructs and re-constructs itself through experiences of learning' (Dirkx, 1998, p. 10). This understanding of self is close to Rorty's understanding, as we learn from Bernstein (2016): 'we are not merely passive recipients of these vocabularies; we are free to create new vocabularies. And it is this creative freedom that Rorty wants to foster' (p. 47).

Bringing Rorty in conversation with TL broadens what is at the heart of the theory, the idea that one is not trapped by one way of looking at or being in this world, but free to create new vocabularies and transform assumptive clusters (Eschenbacher, 2019), what I refer to as transformative conversation. Rorty's hope for transformation is reflected throughout his writings and is shared in the attempt of the transformative educator to support learners to cope with (traumatic) migratory experiences, to ultimately transform and rise to the occasion in the midst of adversity. So that 'what the past tried to do to her she will succeed in doing to the past: to make the past itself, including those very causal processes which blindly impressed all her own behavings, bear *her* impress' (Rorty, 1989, p. 29). Transformative conversation is dedicated to this kind of engagement with one's past.

Arcilla's concept of *edifying conversation* as a basis for transformative conversations

The idea of transformative conversation rests on Arcilla's concept of edifying conversation, understanding the edifying dimension as central for TL. What is meant by the term *edification*? What is its relationship to a vocabulary? Proceeding from Arcilla (1995), Rorty understands the term *edification* as *autobiography*: 'As we edify ourselves in response to events that befall us (…) we develop our ability to weave contingent but consistent stories of the course of our own lives' (Arcilla, 1995, p. 100). In developing the philosophical concept of *edifying conversation* and translating it into the context of learning, Arcilla defines conversational edification as '*the power to converse reasonably with others for the purpose of edifying oneself*' (ibid., p. 105). The idea of edification, of developing our ability to form a coherent, but contingent story of ourselves, is central to the notion of transformative conversation.

It rests on the work of Oakeshott (1989, p. 41): 'The invitation of liberal learning… [is] the invitation to disentangle oneself, for a time, from the urgencies of the here and now and to listen to the conversation in which human beings forever seek to understand themselves'. By drawing on Oakeshott and his notion of liberal learning, Arcilla extrapolates several distinctive features of what he frames as a liberal education. Arcilla's (1995) reading of Oakeshott allows us to consider several crucial points: He highlights

(1) Oakeshott's concern with learning (and not with teaching), (2) its invitational character, where the learner is free to accept or reject listening to the conversation. This invitation comes with (3) the idea of disentangling for some time, (4) to listen, when (5) human beings are trying to understand themselves (more fully). Arcilla (1995) broadens Oakeshott's invitation not only to listen but to *join* the conversation.

The invitation to disentangle oneself for some time might sound problematic in the context of migrants facing multiple challenges. How can one disentangle facing the urgencies of today (and yesterday)? We learn from (Vinciguerra, 2017, p. 359) that '[t]he crisis imposes a rest not from life but in life'. So, what motivates adults, or in our case migrants, to learn? And how should this kind of learning be conceptualized? What is the learner's role? What is the educator's role?

> What motivates your efforts to learn is the desire for self-knowledge. Yet what if the others to whom you turn have no way of directly revealing you to yourself; what if they are equally searching for themselves? If there is any hope for liberal learning in such a situation, then it must lie in the power of the conversation as a whole, beyond the control of any single participant. (Arcilla, 1995, p. 6)

How can we conceptualize the educator's role, assuming that she or he is part of the transformative conversation but not more powerful than anyone else? This transformative education is inspired by Rorty's (1989) idea of redescription and Arcilla's (1991) concept of edifying conversation. What do we have to keep in mind if we want to engage in a form of radical questioning, attempting to liberate us from the dead weight of past vocabularies or self-imposed limits? This kind of questioning can be *terrifying* and *dangerous* (Bernstein, 2016): *terrifiying* because we might encounter what Brookfield called a *tectonic shift* in one's assumptive clusters (Brookfield, 2000, p. 139), challenging us to giving up what used to orient us; *dangerous*, because we might feel lost in some sense, 'it seems to leave us with nothing' (Bernstein, 2016 p. 121).

We have learnt from Fursova (2013) that some aspects are more helpful than others when educating from a transformative perspective with migrants. The kind of reflection that is a prerequisite to engage in TL was more likely to take place through an educational format that promoted a dialogical and meaningful engagement with diversity, where participants were able to share their experiences, ideas and emotions, in a '*constructive engagement with otherness*' (Daloz, 2000, p. 110). How does this idea of constructive engagement with others and otherness translate into practice? What is the role of the other? Following Arcilla participants are in need of

> each other to help them rediscover a sense of self-direction which they must nevertheless claim for themselves. Hence they have recourse to conversation, to an exploratory, associative, open-ended, tolerant exchange of intimations free from the demand that it issue in conclusions binding on all. (1995, p. 7)

Towards a transformative and edifying conversation

Knowing more about the role of the other educator, the question remains unanswered from the very beginning of this paper: What attitude – from the perspective of the transformative educator – is more likely to foster TL working with migrants? We know from Jurkova and Guo that both educators and learners should engage as 'collaborators of knowledge and co-learners instead of being labelled as experts and non-experts or divided by the power and authority' (2018, p. 184). It is essential to create an environment

acknowledging 'the uniqueness of one's identity and cultural background' (Webb, 2017, p. 174). The role of the educator may be one of a co-learner (Fursova, 2013, Magro, 2009) being not afraid to put one's own self-understanding at stake, and participate as what Arcilla calls 'fellow conversationalists engaged in questioning themselves before taking things for granted, in order to receive their being at a loss as a present' (1995, p. 2).

Following Wildemeersch, there might be a space for such a transformative conversation:

> The participants want to learn about the place where they have eventually arrived, about the language and the culture and about their chances of getting integrated. Yet they also want to tell about the places they come from, about their own languages and cultures, and about their hopes of starting a new life. Such educative moments for asylum seekers are not one-directional actions, whereby the 'master' teaches how the participants are expected to behave, what the values and norms of the host community are, and how they are supposed to accommodate themselves to these. It is a multi-directional experience creating opportunities for both participants and facilitators to articulate their own, unique voices. (2017, p. 124)

There is a need for opening a conversation where one can engage in reflecting on migratory experiences to edify and transform. The ultimate goal of adult education is to empower, that is no different in the context of working with migrants (King, 1999). This comes with the necessity to create some kind of *safe haven* where participants can generate a feeling of inclusion and appreciation (Magro, 2007) in their attempt to rethink themselves and their possibilities of being (Morrice, 2014) and to find a way in addressing the differences between their public and private selves (Webb, 2017).

We have learnt from Magro (2009) that navigating one's identity and belonging most often is a rather precarious path for migrants, living and experiencing a fragile, vulnerable life (Magro & Polyzoi, 2009). The migratory experience of interruption of one's taken-for-granted way of being and living in the world that comes with a disruption of inherited frames of reference, 'have led them to realize that they have, to some extent, lost their way in the world, or that the world affords them no way to what they love' (Arcilla, 1995, p. 7). Instead, most often they have to reconcile the 'conflict between the ideal or imagined identities that they hoped to create, and the reality of an identity that restricts' (Morrice, 2013, p. 261). In order to come to a new understanding of oneself and one's being in the world, engaging in transformative conversation might present a possible solution to the problematic, darker side of TL (Morrice, 2013, 2014) to edify and rebuild a new, empowered sense of self-understanding (Magro & Polyzoi, 2009).

When 'the various self-conceptions you take for granted do not form a coherent whole' (Arcilla, 1995, p. 6), learners need a space where they can quest after a deeper, more coherent understanding of themselves (ibid.). What we have learnt from research on migration (and TL), is that there is a need to *restory*, to arrive at a new, transformed self-understanding (Morrice, 2014, Tarusarira, 2017) especially when life stories do not form a coherent whole anymore. This is where an edifying conversation needs to evolve as a transformative conversation. At times, migrants have to manage dual identities (Webb, 2017), facing a hybridity of their self-understandings (Webb & Lahiri-Roy, 2019). Experiences of migration have to be understood against the (auto-)biographical background of migrants (Morrice, 2014); the vocabularies they employ to story their lives, retrospectively and prospectively, otherwise we are unable to understand their hopes, aspirations, expectations, doubts, and fears and the changes in their self-understandings (King, 1999). Engaging in what has been introduced here, the concept of transformative conversation, is one possibility to foster the kind of edification and

reconciliation (Tarusarira, 2017) migrants need with themselves, to find a way to redeem their pasts and generate possible answers and explore options to the question that is central to the concept of edifying and transformative conversation: 'Will you be able to recast what life throws, and has thrown, at you in your own terms?' (Arcilla, 1995, p. 99). This ability to recast in one's own terms and the need for reconciliation is central to coping with traumatic experiences.

Arcilla's (1995) theory of edifying conversation is better suited than Habermas' idea of discourse - in the context of TL - to give guidance to anyone who wants to help others to question taken-for-granted beliefs that are no longer viable. The Rortyan (1989) ironist notion offers a multiculturalist grounding for the idea of edifying conversation. However useful here, Rorty's ideas are not totally unproblematic and need to be carefully translated into an educational context (see Arcilla, 1995, Bernstein, 2016, Janik, 1989).

Rorty understands an ironist as someone who 'affirms both her or his solidarity with a culture and her or his project to distinguish herself or himself individually, and who attempts to prevent these commitments form disrupting each other by compromising between them in practice' (Arcilla, 1995, p. 22). Following Arcilla, Rorty's notion of liberal education is 'explicitly and necessarily multiculturalist' (ibid., p. 22). And so is his concept for edifying conversation: 'The longing in liberal learning is, rather, that for an opportunity where you can use various cultural resources for conversational edification to struggle heroically with a problem in your culture' (ibid.). The need to converse cultural differences in order to understand them and oneself in the context of adult education and migration (Morrice, 2013), sets the stage for engaging in edifying and transforming ourselves through conversation, facing 'the cultural stranger, whose alternative terms of self-understanding expose the self-understanding of both to questionableness. (….) Behind diversity, a common sense of strangeness' (Arcilla, 1995, p. 151) creates a bond between all who are engaged in conversation.

Final thoughts

'The need to develop, to learn and to practice the art of living with strangers and their difference permanently and daily is inescapable' (Bauman & Mazzeo, 2012, p. 3). Therefore, we as adult educators need to explore ways that allow us to model this *art of living*. One way to do this is by engaging in *non-teleological dialogue* and a *pedagogy of interruption* (Wildemeersch, 2017) within the public sphere. But, there is also another way of engaging within the private sphere through *edifying conversations*. Both ways allow us as educators to engage with plurality meaningfully. It opens a space for what I am calling transformative conversations that makes room for one's private quest for meaning by turning that quest into an opportunity for change and transformation.

In searching for a possible attitude for the transformative educator working with migrants, the concepts of edifying and transformative conversation has been introduced and explored. Concepts that invite the educator to transform her or his self-understanding by becoming a fellow conversationalist, one who has an opportunity to learn deeply from others, who have experienced that their formerly unquestioned way of being and living in this world is contingent, one way to live among others. In these conversations one may learn to listen to the highest hopes and deepest fears, the *'Sea Prayers* and discover other's ways of achieving a sense of self-direction while having lost one's way in the world. It is through edifying ourselves that we learn that '[o]ne is not trapped by one way of looking at the world or being in the world that is forced on us, but we are free to create new vocabularies and to transform our guiding assumptions' (Eschenbacher, 2019, p. 258).

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Knowledge 'transfer' as sociocultural and sociomaterial practice: Immigrants expanding engineering practices in Canada

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Abstract

Research on migration and knowledge transfer predominantly focuses on expatriate and return migrants, who are acclaimed for transferring knowledge from the west to the rest of the world. Not only does the literature reinforce the west as the epistemic centre, but it conjures a realist image of knowledge as an objective thing. To interrupt these images, this paper examines the knowledge transfer experiences of 22 immigrant engineers in Canada. Theoretically, it posits knowledge transfer as an effect of immigrants' enrolment in sociocultural and sociomaterial practices within professions. Empirically, it pinpoints three ways in which immigrants help expand engineering practices, i.e., assembling knowledge, mobilizing the capacity of learning to learn, and negotiating being and becoming. The process of transfer, as accounted by research respondents, is enabled through access to epistemic and boundary objects, reception of peer professionals, and the rise of (niche) needs. The paper draws on a narrative case study.

Keywords: Immigrant studies; knowledge 'transfer'; practice turn; sociocultural theories; sociomaterial theories

Introduction

Migrants, by virtue of their corporeal mobility, have been celebrated as boundary spanners (Williams & Baláž, 2008), and knowledge spillover agents (Trippl & Maier, 2010). Managerial and organisational studies, for instance, have documented how expatriate elites – often deployed by transnational corporations – help forge social, cultural, and knowledge networks through intra-company movements (e.g., Beaverstock, 2002; Haas, 2006). Migrant and development studies have also highlighted the crucial roles that return migrants play in knowledge transfer, technological innovation, and economic development in their home countries (e.g., Newland & Plaza, 2013; Zhou & Hsu, 2011). Some also point to the strategic position that they occupy in the diffusion of

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social and cultural capital, i.e., non-monetary forms of social remittance from developed to developing countries (Conway, Potter & St. Bernard, 2012).

In contrast, there is relatively little research on the roles that immigrants play in knowledge transfer in the west. Research on immigrants is largely drawn to the systematic marginalisation immigrants experience in the host societies. Related work is instrumental in highlighting issues such as a lack of qualification recognition, cultural distinction, racism, sexism, xenophobia, as well as how immigrants learn to negotiate the identity politics in the labour market (e.g., Maitra & Guo, 2019; Morrice, Shan & Sprung, 2018). Yet, the lack of attention to immigrants as knowledge transfer agents is problematic. In particular, it serves to entrench the image of the west as the epistemic centre of the world, where universal and authoritative knowledge emanates.

In view of these issues, this paper examines the experiences of knowledge transfer narrated by 22 immigrant engineers in Canada. In what follows, I review the existing literature of knowledge transfer as it intersects the context of migration. The review points to the prevalence of realism, which treats knowledge as an objective thing. Departing from this dominant trend, I propose a practice-based and process-oriented view of knowledge transfer. Following the conceptual section, I introduce the study, including the research methods and research respondents before I focus on the research findings. I conclude with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of this paper.

Knowledge transfer and migration

Research on knowledge transfer largely evokes a sense of realism, conjuring the image of unidirectional movements of a real 'substance that can be 'sent', 'received', 'circulated', 'transferred', 'accumulated', 'converted', and 'stored' (Gherardi & Nicolini, 2000, p. 329-330)'. In migrant and development studies, knowledge transfer – along with its variants such as human capital transfer, and technology transfer – is taken as an effect of migratory movement from the west to the rest of the world (e.g., Newland & Plaza, 2013; Trippl & Maier, 2010). In organisational studies, models of transfer have been built at multiple levels, e.g., the individual, the intra-organisational, the inter-organisational, and the transnational, to identify the factors, processes, resources, media, and conditions involved in the diffusion of knowledge from one place to another (e.g., Duan, Xu & Feng, 2011). In adult education, questions of transfer focus on *what* is being transferred in relation to both the context of origin and the context of application (Ottoson, 2009), as well as 'the learning process involved when a person learns to use previously acquired knowledge …in a new situation (Eraut, 2019, p.13)'.

Efforts to identify *what* is being transferred have led to the construction of various typologies of knowledge. In organisational studies, for instance, Blackler (1995) identified five images of knowledge commonly used in the literature: embrained, embodied, embedded, encultured, and encoded knowledge. Embrained knowledge is used to designate conceptual skills and cognitive abilities. Embodied knowledge refers to knowledge acquired through embodied experience. Embedded knowledge refers to knowledge embedded within social, systematic, and institutional arrangements. Encultured knowledge has to do with shared meanings within cultural systems that are perpetuated through socialisation, and acculturation. Encoded knowledge is understood as information encoded in signs and symbols. This typology has become the basis for Williams to address systematically the relationship between migration and knowledge transfer (Williams, 2006, 2007a, 2007b; Williams & Baláž, 2008).

According to Williams (2006), encoded knowledge is the most mobile form of knowledge. Embrained and embodied knowledge, encapsulated within individuals, is also transferrable through corporeal migratory movement. Encultured knowledge and embedded knowledge however are transferrable only in 'truncated' forms as they are socially situated. With this approach to knowledge, Williams (2007b; Williams & Baláž, 2008) further developed a multi-level (national, regional and firm-level) perspective on migration and knowledge transfer to identify the conditions of transfer. He argued that barriers to knowledge transfer exist at all structural levels. At the firm level, for instance, there may or may not be systematic strategies to leverage the distinct knowledge that migrants bring. Workplace barriers faced by migrants may also include how they are perceived by other workers, whether their knowledge is compatible with the local context, as well as their level of language competency, which affects whether their knowledge would be recognised and valued (Williams, 2007a).

The links that Williams made between migration and types of knowledge are corroborated by Burgers and Touburg's (2013) study of Indian IT professionals working in the Netherlands through intra-company transfers. This study distinguishes between codified and tacit knowledge. According to the authors, the former seems to be moving relatively easily across place, and the latter needs to be developed through immersion within different cultural contexts. However, Williams' conceptualisation can also be challenged. For instance, in a study of Mexican construction workers in the US, Iskander and Lowe (2011) referred to Polanyi's original work where tacit knowledge is considered a relational construct. They argued that knowledge, specifically tacit knowledge, is not acquired through accretion. Rather, each time the Mexican workers invoke their tacit knowledge in new workplaces, they also make new cognitive connections and hence transform, rather than merely transfer that knowledge. Iskander and Lowe's work reminds us of Blackler's original criticism of the realist approach to knowledge, namely, knowledge could not be 'sensibly conceived as separate' things (Blackler, 1995, p. 1032).

Knowledge transfer as sociocultural and sociomaterial practice: Conceptual heuristic

To Blackler (1995), focusing on distinct types of knowledge works to fragment knowing. He proposed instead that knowledge should be studied as a process that is mediated, situated, provisional, pragmatic and contested. This process-oriented perspective is echoed by Gherardi's knowing in practice (Gherardi, 2008; Gherardi & Nicolini, 2000), which frames knowledge as something that people *do together.* This paper aligns with the process-oriented and practice-based perspectives. It proposes that knowledge transfer is much more than about individuals moving knowledge across context. Informed by what Schatzki (2001) calls the practice turn, it sees knowledge transfer as an accomplished effect within practices. When considering immigrants as knowledge transfer agents, it is not sufficient to understand what they introduce to their new workplaces. It is rather imperative to focus on how they become enrolled in and become contributing members within expansive work practices.

Of note, within this practice turn, there are diverse constructs of practice, ranging from the sociocultural to the sociomaterial (Fenwick, Edwards & Sawchuk, 2011). What these constructs have in common though is a trend to challenge the traditional social approaches that dichotomise the social world into the individual versus the structural, the subjective versus the objective, and in some cases, the human versus the non-human beings (Schatzki, 2002). Instead, they project the world in the image of 'organized

bundles of human activities (ibid. p. 59)', and it is in the *relational* constitution of these bundles that we appreciate the saying, knowing, doing and being of the constituents of practices (ibid.).

A sociocultural and sociomaterial heuristic for practice

Community of practice (CofP) and cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) are two major theoretical constructs used to account for the social and the cultural relations that organise our experiences of learning and knowing. CofP refers to a group of people who share ideas, look for solutions, and perhaps experiment with innovation as they engage in a common domain of knowledge (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). From the perspective of CofP, learning takes place as a dual process of participation and identification, as people move through legitimate periphery to become old-timers (Wenger, 1998). While CofP addresses people's learning experiences in relation to their membership within CofP, it does not attend to the power differences that may impact individuals' access to CofP (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004). Further, with its sole emphasis on the cultural conditioning of learning, it may have occluded the political and economic relations that shape CofPs. In these respects, Engeström's (2001) CHAT well extends the illustrative power of CofP.

CHAT focuses on the interrelations and interactions among individual subjects, objects, and mediators of learning, in relation to the rules, community, and division of labour (Engeström, 2001). Its attention to division of labour also necessarily embeds activity within the political economy of production, consumption, and distribution. The object around which an activity pivots is more than a personal objective or motive. It is rather related to the social concern that focuses our attention, engages our efforts, and generates individual and collective actions and interactions (Engeström, 2001; Fenwick,Edwards & Sawchuk, 2011). An object of an activity is not fixed and may shift as the activity expands. In fact, when an 'objective or motive is reconceptualised to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities', Engeström (2001, p. 137) would consider that the activity experiences an expansive transformation. When considering immigrants' roles in knowledge transfer, expansive practices are used broadly to refer to any changes and transformation of existing routine practices.

Both CofP and CHAT approach practices as activities that are purposeful, ordered and regularised (Fenwick & Nerland, 2014). If we zoom in to practice as it is produced from moment to moment, sociomaterial approaches help us see more of the provisional and emergent nature of practices. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) assemblage, for instance, sees the social systems as 'wholes whose properties emerge from the interactions between the (heterogeneous) parts (DeLanda in Tamboukou, 2010, p. 685)'. In this view, there is no pre-determined or inherent hierarchy to the constituents of an assemblage, nor is there a unifying principle of organisation that can be taken as a superior ontological given (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). All constituents are in a continuous process of becoming; as they are enrolled into different assemblages, they may exhibit different properties (Müller, 2015). This continuous process of becoming and assembling can be captured using the image of a rhizome. Unlike the traditional arborescent way of thinking that insists on hierarchy and prior rationalism, a rhizome is about continuous reticulation among multiple nodes of connectivity and it flattens the ontological status of all entities constituting the world (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Of note, neither assemblage nor rhizome implies that the world is indeed flat. There is no denying that social hierarchies and strata exist. However, they highlight hierarchies are 'not the result of the (constitutive) substances and their nature and value, but of the modes of organisation of

disparate substances (Grosz, 1994, p. 167)'. Looking into the formation of assemblage as a rhizomatic process can help unveil these modes of organisation without reducing organisational issues to individual failings.

Knowledge transfer: Unfolding with non-human objects

Whether constructed through sociocultural or sociomaterial perspectives, social practices are interspersed with cultural artifacts and other non-human things. In CofP and activity theories, it is believed that cultural artifacts, i.e., language, texts, tools, and technologies, congeal a collective consciousness, and mediate the process of learning and knowing. In sociomaterial research, some researchers have gone a step further; they see non-human things as more than cultural mediators. Instead, they conceive them as actors agentic in shaping how the world hangs together (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011). Star's boundary objects (2010) and Knorr Cetina's conception of epistemic objects (2001) are two illustrating examples. Star (2010) used the notion of boundary objects when she tried to uncover how cooperation is achieved despite the absence of consensus at work. A boundary object is 'something people (or, in computer science, other objects and programs) act toward and with. Its materiality derives from action, not from a sense of prefabricated stuff or 'thing'-ness. (ibid., p. 603)'. Boundary objects are known for their interpretive flexibility which arises organically in response to the requirement for information and work (ibid.).

Knorr Cetina (2001) was interested in what, other than norms and routine procedures, makes creative work an exciting engagement for scientists. She turned to the relations between subjects and objects, highlighting the role and identity of what she called 'epistemic objects', that is, objects scientists try to study and understand, in the accomplishment of knowledge work. Epistemic objects are, according to Knorr Cetina (2001), 'processes and projections rather than definitive things (p. 190)'. They exist in their incompleteness and acquire their identities as they appear in relation to interpretive human beings. Boundary and epistemic objects are not necessarily distinct entities. Indeed, they could be used to refer to the same thing, depending on where it is positioned within the organisation of work. Both notions though require us to focus on how objects enter, relationally, organised activities.

In sum, knowledge transfer, I submit, is a continuous process of accomplishment through which knowing, doing, saying, and being continuously unfold within practice. This approach is informed by sociocultural images such as CofP and CHAT, as much as it is sensitive to the coming together of the social and the material in the in-situ production of practices. To explore immigrant engineers' knowledge transfer experiences, attention is hence directed to how individuals enroll themselves and/or get enrolled into work practices, as well as the sociocultural and sociomaterial relations, established and emergent, that are conducive to the expansion of practices.

Research methods and respondents

This paper is based on a narrative case study (Wells, 2011) that examines immigrant engineers' knowledge transfer practices in Canada. It addresses two research questions: 1) *how do immigrant engineers contribute to the transfer and transformation of knowledge and practices in the engineering profession?* and 2) *what social practices facilitate immigrants' professional learning and knowledge transfer processes?* For the study, narrative interviews were conducted with 22 respondents, each treated as an

independent case for comparative purpose. Narrative is suited for the study as it involves the collection of stories or narration of events (Grbich, 2012). Narrative is powerful not because it offers accurate account of life events, but because it entails (re)construction of these events, with a point of view of the now, and with an eye for the future (Bamberg, 2012). In this process of reconstruction, individuals necessarily take up agentic positions, accessing, and assessing life events, and formulating meaning and identities, which may move them beyond normalised and stereotypical social locations (Hallqvist, 2014). More importantly, narrative research is not only about how individuals make sense of past events, but it is also revealing of the social, cultural and material contexts shaping individuals' experiences (Grbich, 2012).

For the interviews, respondents were asked to recount their educational, professional and migratory trajectories, and describe in-depth small stories and/or large events where they made a difference in engineering practices in Canada. During the interviews, they were prompted to think about the technologies, texts, communities, and other resources involved in the production of their opportunities and professional spaces. The interviews lasted on average 1.5 hours, with the shortest one being one hour, and the longest one four hours (over two interviews). All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and sent back to the respondents for member check. Data analysis focused on the knowledge transfer stories and events narrated, each treated as a case, in relation to respondents' professional and migratory trajectories. Attention is paid in particular to the process and conditions of knowledge transfer. Themes emerging from each case were compared along two major lines of differences: 1) gender, and 2) whether immigrants came from the developed west or the developing world.

Respondents were recruited through posting in an engineering association, and approaching engineering companies and communities in British Columbia (BC). At the time of the study, majority of the respondents were based in Alberta, and BC in West Canada, three in Yukon in North Canada, and one in Ontario in East Canada. Among the 22 respondents, nine were female and 13 male. Eight came from Europe (four from West Europe and four East Europe), six from Asia, four from Central and South America, two from Africa, and two from the Oceania (Australia and Fiji respectively). All respondents held a bachelor's degree or above in an engineering field prior to immigration. Ten came to Canada as skilled immigrants. The rest came as temporary visitors (four on work holiday visa, and one regular visitor visa), sponsored family members (three), temporary immigrant with company sponsored work permit (two), students (one), and refugees (one). The majority landed in Canada after 2000, with the exception of one who came in 1983, and another one in 1997. All immigrants worked in the engineering field prior to moving to Canada with the exception of two who were under/graduate students. All had worked in Canada as an engineer for a minimum of six months at the time of the interviews. Appendix 1 shows the specific demographic information of each respondent.

Knowledge transfer as sociocultural and sociomaterial practice: Research findings

Each respondent shared at least one story or event where s/he helped bring changes to their work in Canada. The analysis below focuses on these events of transfer as they were narrated by the respondents. It starts by looking at how, in these accounts, research respondents have contributed to the expansion of engineering practices in Canada. It moves on to explore the sociocultural and sociomaterial relations that are constitutive of the knowledge transfer practices.

Knowledge transfer as continuous knowing, doing, and being

Respondents' accounts of their knowledge transfer experiences point to three interconnected ways through which they have brought about changes to their respective workplaces in Canada: assembling knowledge, mobilizing capacity of learning to learn, and negotiating being and becoming.

Assembling Knowledge

A number of respondents reported that they introduced standardised, research-based, and codified knowledge, or what Williams (2006) called encoded knowledge, to their work in Canada. For instance, Tabor from Czech Republic learned European codes at school, and worked in countries such as Germany, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand before he moved to Canada to join his partner's family. He shared:

> In many occasions… we use in our designs… codes from somewhere else… Say you're doing some…specific design … which is not covered in your Canadian codes or…standard… so you search, and someone has done some research somewhere …and … it might be [seismic design] in New Zealand. So I just grab that from New Zealand and use that in Canada because that's the best that you have… I see a lot of timber design … knowledge … coming from Europe… Canada is what, 100 years old? Europe is tens of centuries of structures. And the science and the research is way advanced beyond Canada (Tabor).

Tabor's experiences of 'grapping' research and codes from other places, and plugging them into work in Canada typifies a major narrative of knowledge transfer shared by those who have had educational and work experiences in western countries. What he shared is also a sentiment that engineering sciences and practices in other western countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and the US are more advanced than in Canada. That said, not everyone would agree that the west is the only place where people could find useful design knowledge. Lesteri from Indonesia shared '[D]esign innovation in Asia is much more advanced than… [in Canada]… What we learned in Indonesia, … there was a lot of design that is more advanced'.

Of note, in addition to scientific and codified knowledge particular to a field, some respondents also shared that their empirical work experiences proved to be of value. Jagan from Nepal for instance shared:

> Geotechnical work, survey work, in Canada, …is done by different sections…[W]hen you work …[in] a developing country, you do [everything – across sections]. [Now], when I [am]… leading a multi-disciplinary team, I [am] able to understand not only my area of service, i.e., civil engineer transportation, but I also [bring with me] an environmental perspective, [sensitive to] the challenges related to cost, or foundation or some of other [nuanced], technical [issues] (Jagan).

In the study, a few respondents, like Jagan, worked in countries where division of labour is not detailed due to limited resources. While working in Canada, they shared, they introduced not only a comparative lens, (see also Williams & Baláž, 2008) but environmental perspectives as they make conscious and cognitive connections with the new context of work (see also Iskander & Lowe, 2011).

Mobilizing the capacity of learning to learn

When using languages such as 'assembling' or 'plugging in', by no means do I suggest that knowledge transfer is a technical process that is friction free. Instead, if any of the cases of transfer that the respondents shared appears to be uneventful, it is because they have always mobilised their capacity of learning. All respondents, with no exception, prided themselves on their capacity of learning, which many attributed to their educational experiences from their home countries. Indeed, it is often their capacity of learning that served to lubricate the process of transfer.

Below, Lestari from Indonesia related how she helped expand her company's business to roundabout design.

> No one in our company can design [roundabout], at the time when I started… because I know design, I started that and because I experienced that in Indonesia - there's lots of roundabouts there… I know how it works... [interviewer: how did you start the design?] I had to learn …. especially … Canadian based standards… every municipality ha[s] different bylaws…as a transportation engineer, I had to know… bylaws, development staging… for each development, each land use… … self-learned…, I went into training for software and … [learned] to analyse …[using] a certain sort of software that's been developed in Australia and New Zealand (Lestari).

According to Lestari, roundabout design was not a common design in Vancouver when she came to Canada. She had never designed a roundabout prior to coming to Canada either. Yet, she helped her company expand into this area of business. In this process, her design training reticulated rhizomatically with her empirical experiences with roundabout in Indonesia, as well as knowledge of local policies and regulations in Canada, what Williams (2007b) calls embedded knowledge, as she developed facility in the use of a particular software developed out of Canada. Continuous learning served to fuse all these different kinds of knowing as she worked towards roundabout design.

Negotiating being and becoming

Knowledge transfer is not merely about knowing and doing. To a great extent, it is also about bringing the self to bear in a new place. This theme is most evident in interviews with women, and immigrants from developing contexts, who suggested that they contributed to their work in Canada with not only what they know, but also professional habitus such as adaptability, work ethics, and cognitive disposition as engineers. Quinn from Fiji for instance related that because he used to work in rural areas, he learned to communicate with impoverished and isolated communities beyond written literacy, which turned out to be an asset when he worked with the indigenous community up in the North in Canada. Klara from Mexico also shared that coming from an engineering background, she has a structured disposition. With this background, she was able to introduce structure across department to the sales people.

Of note, while some related their professional habitus and dispositions as 'the essence of engineers' (in the language of Ren from Taiwan), that structured their participation in Canadian workplaces, some respondents stressed that they've also experienced a process of what some would call 'growing' or becoming. Fiona from Venezuela said:

> I have grown […]. If you talk[ed] to me four years ago … maybe I was not this outgoing [...] Different fears that I've overcome over these years […] Fears of my accent, fears of not being that technical, fears of not being that grey hair [...] And now I feel more relaxed. Now I talk and I think, well if they want to hear [me], fine, if not, bad on them, not on me.

> I put my idea forward. If somebody wants to listen […] great […] If not, maybe next time. I'm more easy-going now… I guess time helps (Fiona).

Fiona apparently grew from someone who strove to be heard to someone who was confident and secure. In this process, she also developed personal mechanisms to deal with workplace politics associated with language differences, and prejudices against the young, and the new, while finding ways to voice herself.

Sociocultural and sociomaterial organisation of transfer

How immigrants bring forth their knowing, doing, and being only partially accounts for how knowledge transfer may transpire at work. Respondents' accounts also shed light on the sociocultural and sociomaterial relations that are crucial in shaping whether and how the respondents were enrolled within expansive work practices. These include access to epistemic and boundary objects, receptivity of professional community, and the rise of (niche) needs at work.

Unfolding with epistemic and boundary objects

Non-human things, including the *things* worked on, i.e., epistemic objects (Knorr Cetina 2001), and *things* to work with, i.e., boundary objects (Star, 2010) are ever present in all cases of transfer shared. These objects include, but are not limited to, engineering design, blueprints, engineering codes, protocols and manuals, researcher papers, textbooks, machinery equipment, and computer software.

Few respondents in the study located a job that matched exactly with what they did back in their home countries. Epistemic and boundary objects sometimes served as an important means for them to identify points of entry to engineering practices in Canada. For instance, Dennis from Kenya said:

> I joined the company as the person who develops the algorithms for the software because this software company produced engineering software […] I need to test the software to make sure there were no bugs … this software that they were producing I had used […] in Africa (Dennis).

In this particular case, Dennis' familiarity with the software, as a user, excited the employer and enabled him to 'plug into' a work process organised around the same software, now an epistemic object (Knorr Cetina, 2001) that needs to be continuously developed.

Wade, who had prior work experience as a contractor in Australia, worked for a principal in Canada at the time of the interview. He shared that when he worked as a contractor, he would 'pull through the drawings and the specifications [to]…find things that have changed from the tender…, cost them up, and say, 'This is how much it's going to cost,' put in a claim'. While working for the principal in Canada, he would 'identify some of those things in advance …pre-empt the changes, try and minimise them, and also be able to see through a little bit of the smokescreens they throw'. In this case, engineering drawings and specifications have served as the boundary objects (Star, 2010) that enabled Wade to cross boundaries of work with confidence. This case also suggests that there is a degree of interpretive flexibility (Star, 2010) to these documents, depending on the economic interests of the subjects/readers and the positions they hold in the organisation of the work process.

In the two cases shared above, objects such as software and engineering drawings helped articulate the respondents to particular work processes, where their prior knowledge and experiences were leveraged but repurposed. In the account shared by Oscar from Ecuador, he also transformed the nature (being) of the object that he worked on.

> I am a hands-on engineer actually. I was in very technical jobs so I got that experience… I started [in a] company [in Canada that] manufactures electronic devices. I was able to easily understand that kind of devices to repair those devices at components levels... [T]hat was helpful for the company because they used to … replace the whole controller if something failed (Oscar).

While the whole device would be treated as a defect when things went wrong, Oscar transformed the materiality of the device by scaling down problems to the component level, which constituted a significant change to the practices at work.

Reception of peer professionals

If it takes the coming together of people and objects for immigrants to expand knowing and doing at work, it takes open reception of peer professionals for at least some of the immigrants to be enrolled in expansive work activities in the first place. The majority of respondents mentioned at least one professional peer who trusted them, mentored them, involved them, and/or sponsored them, which made it possible for them to aspire for, and take up expanded roles and responsibilities at work. Karla from Mexico for instance related that her former manager not only listened to her, but also involved her fully in the work process. She said: 'From day one,… my manager [...] always told me, 'No, no, we're a team. You and me.' So everything he did, he involved me.' Given the generous induction of the manager, Karla grew quickly within the organisation to a managerial position.

Gena was a mechanical engineer from Iran. She entered a geology company in Vancouver as a draftsperson but she became the technical backbone of the company within a year. She attributed her success to the trust of a supervisor. She said:

> [My supervisor] was [...the] designated person… responsible for quality control... Although I wasn't a geologist or a mining engineer, he would sign off on my work because he would trust my data. He checked me at the beginning a few times … he knew that he could trust me (Gena).

When Gena volunteered to develop a geological model, the turning point of her career, most of her colleagues were in doubt. She said,

> My supervisor however was willing to take that risk on me…he gave me one month time and said, go home and even work at home and see what you can do. I went home and in one month I build the model and came back and said here's the model, and they were all flabbergasted (Gena).

Rise and recognition of (niche) needs

It should be noted that reception of professional peers alone does not warrant opportunities for immigrants. Where the respondents reported a significant contribution, there was often a particular and sometimes unique need at work that engaged their efforts, and generated individual and collective actions and interactions (Engeström, 2001). In the case of Gena, her opportunity to shine was in part because of a problem arising at work:

> They had a big problem technically speaking […] In mining, you need to build and model around your deposit and then use [a particular] mathematical method to estimate your resources. If you can't do that then you don't know how much gold or iron or whatever you have there underground. So in order to go fundraise or finance your project, or drill further […] the first and foremost critical thing is to have your math ready […] They didn't have that (Gena).

We know the rest of the story – Gena rose to the occasion and built the model within a month. The whole event of knowledge transfer, as recounted by Gena, was occasioned by a business exigency: the company had to choose between paying a hefty fee to an external consultant and taking a chance on Gena. It went with Gena.

A number of other respondents also related stories where they stumbled upon a niche market, which allowed them to expand their scope of work or professional responsibilities. In most of the cases, though, the onus of identifying (niche) needs was on the respondents. There are however also instances where workplace professionals also shared the responsibility of identification. Karla was trained in the interdisciplinary area of Mechatronics, which Klara believed put her at a disadvantage as the job descriptions she came across were geared towards either mechanical or electronic engineering. She had to downplay her career goal and applied for a position as a sales representative. She however had a surprise encounter when she went for the interview. She shared:

> [B]ut they saw my resume… and when I got there they said, 'We really don't see you as an outside sales person, but … the person that we had in our electric automation department left and we need someone, to look after that and that …matches your background.

In this particular case, the recruiters identified Karla as suitable for a position not posted yet. They might not have done anything extraordinary. However, by making this connection, they certainly helped reverse the politics of job search, and enabled Karla to step into a position where she could better utilise her qualifications.

Discussion and conclusion

In contrast to all the limelight shed on expatriate and return migrants who are acclaimed for transmitting knowledge from the west to the rest of the world, immigrants living in the west are rarely addressed as agents of knowledge transfer. This asymmetrical literature, together with the dominant realist approach used in studies of migration and knowledge transfer, conjures the image of the west as the epistemic centre. It also serves to fragment knowing and leaves unaddressed the fluid and developing nature of knowing and knowledge. This paper endeavors to rectify this picture through an examination of immigrant engineers' narratives of their contribution to the expansion of engineering practices in Canada. Rather than producing a typology of unique knowledge that immigrants 'transfer', it focuses on how knowledge transfer transpires within practices.

Conceptually, this paper is informed by the practice turn (Schatzki, 2001). It sees knowledge transfer as a continuous process of unfolding within sociocultural and sociomaterial practices. Of note, the sociocultural and sociomaterial images of practice do not sit easily together. The former, exemplified by CHAT and CofP, focus more on the cultural, communal, political, and economic relations that are theoretically generative of opportunities for immigrants. The latter, particularly the image of assemblage and rhizomatic thinking are more apt at capturing the immediate formation of associations without deferring to rational priors. In doing so, it also defies ontological hierarchy attributed to different entities, including ways of knowing. What these sociocultural and

sociomaterial heuristics share in common, however, is a relational thinking. They all point to the direction that it is in the constitution of practices that issues of identity, knowing and learning should be approached (ibid.). When brought together, they help unveil both the organised and emergent property of knowledge practices.

Informed by the practice-based heuristic of knowledge transfer, I examined the knowledge transfer stories and events narrated by 22 immigrant engineers in Canada. These accounts of transfer point to three interconnected ways through which the respondents made their contributions, i.e., assembling knowledge, mobilizing the capacity of learning to learn, and negotiating being and becoming. It also shows some sociocultural and sociomaterial relations constituting the knowledge transfer events, including access to boundary and epistemic objects within professions, encounter with receptive peer professionals, as well as the rise of a (niche) need at work.

This paper has both theoretical and empirical implications for knowledge transfer in the context of migration. Theoretically, it challenges the traditional image associated with knowledge transfer, i.e., the transport of knowledge as a thing across place. It instead gives rise to some rather fluid images of transfer, such as assembling, reticulating, and enrolling within practices. These alternative images are important in that they help open our eyes to the multitude of actors involved in the constitution of knowledge-intensive events where different ways of knowing and doing become knotted. The new images of transfer do not necessarily dismiss social or organisational order or rational prior. For instance, by referring to CHAT, we come to see that actors – human and non-humans - are often mobilised around a social concern or a collective problem that demands attention, efforts, actions and interactions (Engeström, 2001). Yet, at the same time, they also remind us that social orders are not self-propagating. Rather, they exist in the organisation of practices, which is enacted from moment to moment. This process-orientation in our appreciation of knowledge transfer practices may help reveal multiple points of intervention and interruption.

What should be noted though is that the practice turn, with its focus on the relational constitution of practice, does not necessarily address relations of differences, which are nonetheless significant in shaping immigrants' experiences. For instance, a number of women, and a few menfrom less developed contexts hesitated to take up the position as knowledge transfer agents at the begining of the interviews. They considered themselves, using the language of Ian from China more "in the learning mode". They were also more likely to share stories of wrestles around who they are, and how they should comport and communicate themselves. Olteanca from Romania related,

> Unless we really are put in difficult situations, we are not inclined as human beings to make those kinds of efforts… Coming here I find I had to question every single action, belief and habit that I had … I got to a point where I said 'Okay, wait a minute, I'm changing everything here, who am I' (Olteanca).

The kind of identity struggles that the respondents related are not merely about defining the self in a new context. It is more about negotiating the history in person. Individuals, carry with them a history etched with power disparities along relations of differences such as gender, race, and class. A conception of knowledge transfer solely based on the practice turn does not necessarily take into consideration the burden of history. To address this issue, further research is needed to critically investigate the relationships between identity, power and knowledge practices.

It needs to be mentioned, given the small number of respondents, this paper does not take into account of all that may have impacted respondents' capacity to participate in the expansion of professional practices. For instance, when recounting their

immigration trajectories, a few respondents from non-English speaking countries related making special efforts to enhance their English proficiency, including efforts at accent reduction. Yet, language differences do not figure significantly in their accounts of how they made a difference at work. As such, this paper does not address the relationship between language and knowledge transfer. For the same reason, this paper is not in a position to comment on the impacts of a range of other factors that might be relevant in immigrants' knowledge transfer experiences. These include but are not limited to countries of origin, immigration status, pathway of migration, specialized area of practices, years of prior experiences, and size of companies where they were employed. As well, the paper relies on immigrants' narratives and perceptions of their experiences. For a comprehensive understanding of immigrants' knowledge transfer practices, multiple voices and perspectives need to be engaged in future research.

Despite the limitations above, the paper has practical implications for professions, and workplace professionals working to integrate immigrants. First, not all respondents positioned themselves as knowledge transfer agents, although all of them had stories to tell where they helped expand professional practices. Immigrants' self-perception is often a reflection of how they have been received, percieved, and positioned in the public. It is as such imperative that professions turn a critical eye towards professional and public media and discourses. Inquiries need to be made as to who are typically positioned as the major contributors to the professions, and how these normative images should be questioned, interrupted, and pluralized. Second, while CofPs are supposedly conduits of practice-based knowing and learning, only about a third of the research respondents related that they tapped into professional associations and communities for issues others than licensing. Among them, only four played a proactive role in building professional networks for and with (immigrant) engineers. When they had questions or needed to solve particular problems, the majority of them resorted to textual materials, technical training programs, and the learning selves. Their lack of connection with professional organisations should not be taken to mean that professional CofPs do not matter in immigrants' professional practices. It however suggests that professional organisations should play a more proactive role in engaging immigrants within professional communities. Among others, open professional forums may help make knowledge objects accessible to all. Also, mentoring programs may also serve as a hospitable meeting point for immigrant newcomers and interested hosts.

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Table 1. Demographic information

Pseudonym	Place of origin	Gender	Age	Year of arrival in Canada	Immigration status upon arrival in Canada	Highest education
Anna	UK	F	41-45	2005	Temporary visa (work holiday)	Master
Caden	Columbia	M	31-35	2007	Student visa	Master
Dennis	Kenya	M	46-50	2005	Skilled immigrant	Master
Edvard	Hungary	M	56-60	1983	Refugee	Masters
Fiona	Venezuela	F	36-45	2009	Skilled immigrant	Bachelor
Gena	Iran	F	41-45	2002	Skilled immigrant	Bachelor
Hann	India	M	46-50	2002	Skilled immigrant	Bachelor
Ian	China	M	36-45	2004	Skilled immigrant	Bachelor
Jagan	Nepal	M	36-45	2001	Skilled immigrant	PhD
Karla	Mexico	F	26-35	2012	Temporary Visa (Visitor)	Bachelor
Lestari	Indonesia	F	26-35	2003	Family class	Bachelor
Mike	UK	M	46-50	2012	Work permit	Master
Nancy	Ireland	F	31-35	2012	Temporary visa (work holiday)	PhD
Oscar	Ecuador	M	36-40	2009	Skilled immigrant	Bachelor
Pablo	Czech	M	26-30	2013	Family class	Masters
Quinn	Fiji	M	36-40	2012	Family class	Bachelor
Ren	Taiwan	M	51-55	2000	Skilled immigrant	PhD
Olteanca	Romania	F	41-45	1997	Skilled immigrant	Master
Taylor	Czech Republic	M	36-40	2009	Temporary worker (work holiday)	Master
Usha	UK	F	41-45	2007	Work permit	Master
Victor	Nigeria	M	56-60	2001	Skilled immigrant	Bachelor
Wade	Australia	M	26-35	2014	Temporary visa (work holiday)	Bachelor

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Continuity and change: migrants' experiences of adult language education in Sweden

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At school
everyone realizes
that it takes more time
than they thought
you cannot learn in a year
a language is a long-term project

But everyday life
is a short-term project
and it doesn't really fit together
because you want to manage in life today
right now

Extract 1, data set A[1]

Abstract

This article aims to explore continuity and change in adult migrants' experiences of Swedish for immigrants (SFI), a state-subsidised language programme for basic Swedish. The study has a longitudinal and comparative design, drawing on discourse analysis of qualitative interviews conducted with language learners in 2001/2002 and 2015/2016. This period was characterized by important societal shifts, defined by increased migration, growing tension between discourses on rights and obligations of adult migrants living in Sweden, and an intensified marketisation of the Swedish education system derived from neoliberal principles. The study describes how these changes affected SFI as well as the conceivable impact that restructuring the language programme had on the learners. Ultimately, the study highlights tensions between various state initiatives that impacted the language programme and the SFI participants' experiences of being adult language learners.

Keywords: Adult language education; language competence; Swedish for immigrants; marketisation; neoliberalism, student experiences

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Introduction

In Sweden, adult migrants have the right to participate in state-subsidised basic language training, delivered within the language programme *Swedish for immigrants* (hereafter SFI). SFI is an educational setting characterized by diversity, and targets students from around the world with differing linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds and pedagogical needs. Adult migrants' language learning is associated with high expectations, not only from the individual learners but also from policymakers who link SFI to successful integration. However, as reflected by the quote above, learning an additional language as an adult can be a demanding process, with tension between immediate communicative needs and the insight that language learning is 'a long-term project' (Ahlgren, 2014; 2020). The tension between short-term and long-term goals, such as becoming employable as quickly as possible, versus personal and professional development, has been reinforced over time (Lindberg & Sandwall, 2017).

This study sets out to explore continuity and change in adult migrants' experiences of SFI from a longitudinal and comparative perspective. By drawing on two data sets consisting of qualitative interviews conducted in 2001/2002 and 2015/2016, respectively, the objective is to investigate how SFI students motivate their participation in the language programme, how they reflect on their language learning experiences in general, and how they relate to their experiences of being enrolled in SFI. The students' experiences are analysed against the backdrop of societal and institutional changes that have impacted on SFI.

The time period investigated – 2001–2016 – is interesting in several respects. It was characterized by increased migration; the rise of a right-wing populist party,[2] and growing tension between discourses on rights and obligations of adult migrants living in Sweden,[3] with a strong focus on the importance of and the duty to learn the Swedish language (Rydell, 2018b). Moreover, the Swedish education system underwent an intensified marketisation reflecting neoliberal principles that was particularly noticeable in adult education (Fejes & Holmquist, 2019).

In Sweden, as in most Western countries, discursive struggles over migration have become increasingly salient. This is, *inter alia*, noticeable in discourses on language and migration as well as calls for stricter policies on migrants (Kahn, 2016; Simpson & Whiteside, 2015). Adult migrants' language competence has gained increased symbolic value by indexing loyalty and belonging to the new country of residence (Blackledge, 2009; Rydell, 2018b). Recurrent suggestions to introduce language requirements for naturalization purposes in Sweden[4] (already implemented in most European countries) and the current suggestion of introducing a formal 'language duty' provide cases in point (Rydell & Milani, 2020). What is more, migrants' language knowledge is often discursively transformed into economic terms, as language competence becomes linked to economic success for both state and individuals (Flubacher, Duchêne & Coray, 2017).

Against this backdrop, Sweden provides an interesting context for exploring these issues, in particular because in 2015 the country had a historically high number of asylum seekers, which posed a challenge both to the Swedish state and to SFI. The present study makes the case that, in the wake of this increased migration, a new emphasis has been put on adult language education in contemporary society. Using a longitudinal and comparative design, the results point to tensions between different state initiatives impacting SFI and SFI participants' experiences of being adult language learners. Ultimately, the article highlights the complex role of adult language education.

Swedish for immigrants: towards a marketisation of the education system

The first courses in SFI took form in the mid-1960s starting as a pilot activity run by private study associations. In 1986, SFI became a permanent programme, targeting adult migrants over 16 years of age in need of tuition in basic Swedish. The aim of the programme is that students should develop 'linguistic tools for communication and active participation in daily, societal and working life, and continuing studies' (the Swedish National Agency of Education, 2017). The link between SFI and integration policies has always been strong but has changed character over time. In a study on SFI policy documents that regulated SFI from the 1960s to 2006, Rosén & Bagga-Gupta (2013, p. 82) point out how the discourses associated with SFI have shifted from a work-oriented focus with emphasis on what the state should do for newcomers to a focus on employability and 'what the newcomers can and should do for the state'.

Since its inception, SFI has become institutionalised and the language programme is now an integrated part of the national education system. In 1994 and 1996, graded knowledge requirements and national tests, respectively, were introduced. Meanwhile, SFI has often been surrounded by discourses of deficiency (e.g. Carlson, 2002) mainly due to an alleged low efficiency. High dropout rates have symbolized the 'failure' of the Swedish integration policy, not least in the media debate (Lindberg & Sandwall, 2017). The year 2002 saw an important change in the organizational structure of SFI with the introduction of a new system intended to meet the needs of the highly diverse student group. This reorganization offered four courses and three study paths, depending on the students' prior schooling and estimated study pace. The implementation of study paths has made it possible to achieve a grade in SFI at lower proficiency levels. This has been especially significant for learners with little or no prior formal education, for whom the learning trajectory can be long.

Since 1986, the municipalities have been the main principals for SFI, but nowadays they can outsource SFI using their own tendering criteria (Fejes & Holmquist, 2019). In 2001, outsourcing was starting to be implemented (e.g. Carlson & Jacobson, 2019), but the number of SFI participants was still rather low. In 2016, more than a third of SFI students were enrolled in tendered schools, but the percentage varies depending on the municipality (in some municipalities up to 80%). Hence, both students and educators have witnessed the entry of a new business logic in the education system, where competition and flexibility have become hallmarks (Carlson & Jacobson, 2019; Martín Rojo & Del Pierco, 2019). This new logic implies short-term contracts, and that SFI providers (in many cases private) can generate profits by developing strategies for low-cost solutions for SFI courses. This, in turn, affects the quality of the education. Consequently, restructuring the education system according to neoliberal market principles, has created a competitive system with resultant instability for students and school providers (Fejes & Homquist, 2019; Martín Rojo & Del Percio, 2019).

Increased migration to Sweden together with the historically high number of asylum seekers in 2015 has increased considerably the number of students enrolled in SFI. In 2001, 39,000 students were enrolled in the langauge programme compared to 150,000 in 2016 (the Swedish National Agency of Education, 2017). One consequence of this is a lack of qualified teachers, a factor that has contributed to the discourses of deficiency on SFI. Currently, the teacher/student ratio, the percentage of qualified teachers, and the overall quality of the education vary greatly among providers (Lindberg & Sandwall, 2017).

However, the neoliberal rationality that has come to characterize adult education is not only a question of organizational structure. As argued by Martín Rojo & Del Percio

(2019, p. 3), this rationality 'produces specific subjectivities, that is, specific ways of understanding the self'. Drawing on a discourse analysis of policy documents and interviews with teachers and students, Sandberg, Fejes, Dahlstedt and Olson (2016) argue that the ideal adult learner is constructed as a motivated, responsible, and goal-oriented student. Moreover, from a policy perspective, language learning is increasingly seen as an individual project where the learner can either fail or succeed, and as 'a simple matter of personal choice' (Cooke, 2006, p. 60). The ideal student is thus constructed as a 'self-made speaker', where language is considered a personal asset (Martín Rojo, 2019).

Theoretical framework

This study relies on a discursive approach focusing on how adult migrants reflect on their language learning experiences. When subjects talk about their experiences, they simultaneously give meaning to them, and negotiate images of themselves (e.g. De Fina & Perrino, 2011). The meaning the participants attach to their experiences is interpreted in relation to the social context, which in this case is the educational setting of SFI, including educational policy documents and discourses on second language knowledge and language learning in Swedish society. From this perspective, the subject (e.g. the SFI participant) is constituted in and through discourse (e.g. Fejes, 2019; Foucault, 1972). As sociolinguists, we pay particular attention to the key role played by discourses on language competence in boundary making and shaping subjects, both how subjects are positioned by others and how they perceive and construct themselves accordingly (Busch, 2017; Rydell, 2018a).

In general, migration entails a re-positioning of one's social position and a re-evaluation of one's social, linguistic, and economic capital. Hence, the social positioning of language learners can be impacted by the symbolic value of language competence in migratory contexts. Linguistic resources are distributed unequally in society (Heller, 2007) and language competences can serve as a mechanism of distinction, attributing social information to the speaker (Bourdieu, 1991). Perceptions and constructions of language competence are often based on a 'native speaker model' leading to a deficit perspective on second language speakers (Márquez Reiter & Martín Rojo, 2019). This view is often internalized by speakers themselves. Not being considered 'a competent speaker' as an adult can constitute a social stigma (Goffman, 1963), creating discord with the image of adults as competent speakers. Goffman defines a stigma symbol as 'signs which are especially effective in drawing attention to a debasing consequent reduction on our valuation of the individual' (1963, p. 59). Since people tend to internalize the views of others on what is considered normal and deviant, not being considered a legitimate speaker can reinforce and even legitimize exclusion (Bourdieu, 1991). Moreover, those who differ from the 'native speaker model' often inhabit social identities constructed as problematic, related to other forms of stigma associated with intersectional aspects such as country of origin, skin colour, social class, age, gender, etc.

It is beyond the scope of the present study to analyse how these intersectional aspects impact on language learning or to investigate the actual language learning of the participants. Rather, the focus is on the participants' experiences of being adult language learners within a particular setting, the SFI programme. Language learning is conceptualised as a socialization process, i.e. an increased participation in different social contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). By extending the notion of motivation, Norton (2013) foregrounds *investment* – a social construct that focuses on learner identity and how learner identities are negotiated in social interaction. As the metaphor investment implies,

language learning is understood to be a way to acquire various kinds of capitals (i.e. linguistic, social) and links the learner's commitment to practice the target language to particular social contexts. In this vein, participation in communicative practices is contingent on situated negotiations of power, i.e. how the learner is positioned by others and perceives possibilities to use the language in an including environment (Norton, 2013).

Data and method

The two data sets analysed in this study have been collected in earlier research projects and have been referred to in part in other studies, but for other purposes (Ahlgren, 2014, Rydell, 2018a). The data were collected after informed consent had been obtained from all participants.

Data set A

The first data collection, here referred to as data set A, comprises 17 conversational interviews, and was collected in 2001/2002 (by Ahlgren). Some of the participants were on the final SFI course, while most had recently finished SFI and were enrolled in a continuing language course in municipal basic education. The learning centre was located in a smaller suburban municipality close to the capital. All participants had studied together in SFI in the same class with the same teacher, who was a qualified and appreciated teacher with long experience of teaching in SFI. Several of the participants had experience of shorter work placements. Most of them had at least 10 years of prior schooling, and a few had studied at university level before migrating to Sweden. They had all lived in Sweden for at least one year, with an average of two years. There were nine first languages reported, the most frequent being Arabic, Persian and Spanish. The youngest participant was 18 and the oldest was 44.

Data set B

The second data collection, data set B, comprises 6 conversational group interviews with 31 students and was collected in 2015/2016 (by Rydell). At the time of the interviews, most of the participants were on the final course of SFI, and only a few had recently enrolled in a continuing language course in municipal basic education. The interviews were conducted at two learning centres with 5–7 participants in each group. Several of the participants had experienced a number of teachers since some of them had been enrolled in more than one learning center and some had interrupted their SFI studies and resumed them later. One learning center was located in the inner city of the capital and the other in a medium-sized town in Middle Sweden. Data set B represented the three different study paths, and the students' level of prior schooling varied from none to completed university degrees. They had all lived in Sweden for at least one year with an average of four years. Nine first languages were reported with Somali and Arabic being the most frequent, and the age distribution was 21 to 54 years.

Method

The interviews were conducted in Swedish and can be described as semi-structured conversational interviews, organized around the participants' motivations for participating in SFI, and their experiences of language learning and language use in and outside the classroom. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for content analysis. To identify themes relevant for this study, the authors have returned to the recordings and transcriptions looking for significant patterns. The two data sets have then been interpreted in relation to emergent themes relevant for the aims of the study, and to earlier documented observations on the social and ideological context: the SFI language programme and discourses on migration and language in the Swedish society (cf. Heller, Pietikäinen & Pujolar, 2017).

Interviews are viewed as a social event and an interactional achievement (Talmy, 2011). In oral interviews, the told experience and aspirations of the participants often have a narrative character and are always to be seen as jointly constructed by the interviewer and the participants (De Fina & Perrino, 2011). Although the interviews have been conducted differently (individually for data set A and in groups for data set B) the outcomes have a similar structure in many respects in the form of shorter accounts of experiences, perceptions and emotions. In data set A, these sequences tended to be longer and performed more independently, while in data set B the group dynamic gave room for more interaction between students. Hence, the main difference between data set A and B is that the participants in data set B had several addressees – both the interviewer and each other – and they constructed not only individual but also joint accounts in the interviews. Since both interviewers have work experience from SFI, our 'insider' perspective has been useful in all phases of the research process. However, we have been aware that it requires a high degree of *reflexivity* (Bourdieu, 1992) in order 'to see the point from which you see what you see' (Salö, 2018, p. 24).

Our aim is to depict general tendencies in the data, so the extracts in the analysis have been selected to illustrate the findings. All extracts have been translated adhering closely to the participants' way of speaking Swedish, which often means a linguistic form that indexes non-nativeness.

Analysis

In the following, we analyse 'continuity and change', e.g. similarities and differences observable over time, based on the following significant themes that emerged with respect to the participants' language learning experiences: 1) expressed motivation to participate in SFI and rationalisations for learning Swedish, 2) language use as a perceived key to language learning 3) experiences of the changing organizational structure of SFI and 4) the gatekeeping function of SFI.

Motivations for participating in SFI and reasons for learning Swedish

One of the most striking similarities across the data sets is the expressed motivation of participating in SFI in the form of statements about the importance of learning Swedish as well as gaining knowledge about Swedish society. The participants also shared the view of language learning as a 'door opener' to present and future life opportunities, as illustrated in the following extract:

MR Why do you study SFI?

Student I want to contact people and I want to speak with my son… I want to get a job.

Extract 2, data set B

As can be read from Extract 2, SFI is not primarily associated with a school subject or even formal education. Rather, the claimed rationale for studying SFI is linked to the speaker's current and future life world. In both data sets, learning the language of the majority society was constructed as crucial for the participants' capacity of 'managing on one's own' (data set A and B) in everyday life. Not 'needing an interpreter' (data set B) was also formulated as an objective in relation to more formal encounters with authorities and in healthcare settings. In this sense, language learning was motivated by immediate communicative needs in order to participate in different social contexts. In addition, SFI should prepare for a future position where one is able to have social relations, enter the labour market and function as a parent (see similar findings in Carlson, 2002; Cooke, 2006; Norton, 2013; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002). The emphasis on being a parent and providing good opportunities for one's children contributes to a relational aspect of language learning, exemplified by the following quotation: 'If we don't know the language and can't help them how will they succeed in the future?' (data set B).

Other participants referred to SFI as a 'first step' in a process of 'validate a former education' (data set A) to be able to return to previous professional activities. Gaining knowledge about Swedish society was another common rationale, as expressed in the following extract where the student also expressed a need to develop everyday language:

I need to know more about culture… how Swedish people think. Not only Swedish traditions Christmas… Midsummer… How to do and think in every day… how young people talk… slang and so…

Extract 3, Data set A

Overall, the participants' claimed motivation for participating in SFI and learning Swedish match the aim of SFI, which mainly situates the targets' domains outside the classroom (e.g. to develop a 'functional language' and to be able to participate in 'daily, societal, work and study life') and the political intentions framing adult migrants' language education as a 'process of integration' (Kahn, 2016; Lindberg & Sandwall, 2017). The participants from both data sets constructed language learning as *relational*, pertaining to *present*- as well as *future*-oriented goals. Hence, the language learning aspirations were seen as an investment in a better future (cf. Norton, 2013). These findings resonate well with previous studies on how adult language learners talk about their language learning trajectories (Abdulla, 2017; Carlson, 2002; Cooke, 2006) and how language competence is discursively constructed as a personal asset (Martín Rojo, 2019) and key for entering the labour market and a catalyst for social inclusion.

Social interaction as a perceived key and constraint to language learning

The syllabus of SFI is based on a communicative approach. A central tenet in the communicative teaching paradigm is the objective for students to be able to use the target language efficiently in different social contexts (Rydell, 2018b). This view, where language use is key to language learning, was present in both data sets. However, in the interviews the formal language instruction within SFI was constructed as insufficient to

fully develop one's linguistic repertoire in Swedish. As stated by the participants: 'SFI is not enough' (data set B) and 'we only talk with the teacher or with each other… but we always make mistakes… if you talk to Swedes it gets better' (data set A).

In both data sets, the participants expressed a desire to interact more with 'native' speakers of Swedish in order to acquire what they perceived as the legitimate language. However, this was not described as an easy task because Sweden was perceived as a 'closed society'. One of the participants suggested that interaction with Swedes should be scheduled in SFI: 'my suggestion is… to have one or two lessons a week when [Swedes] are invited' (data set B). Several of the participants in both data sets had experience of participating in communication training organized by NGOs, churches and public libraries (i.e. language cafés) and appreciated the opportunities to meet 'native' speakers. However, some participants evoked frustration due to the lack of progression in the discussions: 'they repeat the same thing: where do you live, what's your name?' (data set B).

In both data sets, communicative experiences were central in shaping how the participants perceived themselves as speakers and their possibilities to participate in social interaction with native speakers of Swedish. The participants' experience that they were subjugated to evaluation by others was frequently brought to the fore during the interviews, and was constructed as a constraint to participation in social interaction. Their awareness of 'speaking Swedish with error' (data set A) or 'broken Swedish' (data set B) were in the interviews constructed as a discrediting feature (cf. Goffman, 1963). Several of the participants reported choosing to be silent rather than revealing their proficiency level in different social contexts, which is expressed below:

> When they talk at my job and say something interesting… I not understand all… I can't find the worlds… I get nervous. I get ashamed. Then I prefer to be quiet.
>
> Extract 4, data set A

These kinds of internalized linguistic surveillance were commonly reported in both data sets. Hence, the reported self-censorship was due to a recognition of the symbolic value of linguistic correctness (Bourdieu, 1991), ultimately impacting the participants' participation in communicative practices and their investment in the learning process (cf. Norton, 2013). In that sense, perceptions of language competence played a role both in the participants' self-perception and their evaluation of their language learning. Becoming a speaker of 'good Swedish' was in both data sets constructed as a desired subject position. Desired subject positions confer a vulnerability on those trying to achieve it, and a feeling of constant frustration and failure for those not able to live up to their expectations (Rydell, 2018a). This dilemma is reflected in the following quotation, where language learning is constructed as a condition for social inclusion:

> Sometimes you think… I can't speak Swedish… I have to study more to integrate here you have to talk perfectly… there is no other way…
>
> Extract 5, data set A

Another common feature is that learning the receiving country's language was constructed as a form of *respectability* in relation to the majority population since the participants witnessed that 'people accept you more if you talk Swedish' (data set A). At the time of the interviews, the participants had started to realise that the learning process was much more 'time consuming' (data set A) than first expected, since 'language comes slowly slowly' (data set B). Accordingly, learning Swedish was considered a 'long-term

project' (data set A, see also the quotation at the beginning of this article) and 'a struggle at least for the next five years' (data set A, see Abdulla, 2017 for similar accounts). Following this line of thought, the *lived experience of time* becomes central in the adult language learners' perceptions of their learning trajectories (Pujolar, 2019). While it was widely accepted that language learning can be difficult and time consuming, taking too long or not showing signs of progression was considered problematic, as expressed in the following:

> I don't think it's good if you stay at a level… and I think Swedish people don't like it very much. If you live here for ten years… then it's important to speak good… but not perfect… it is not possible…
>
> Extract 6, data set A

As stated in Extract 6, several participants (from both data sets) considered it to be important to 'speak good', especially after living in Sweden for a longer period. And the expectations of attainment are negotiated in relation to a native monolingual norm. Thus, the comment on the impossibility to speak 'perfect' in Extract 6 points to a frequently expressed need of negotiating one's linguistic acceptance and speakerhood in relation to Swedish society (Marquez Reiter & Martín Rojo, 2019). The participants from both data sets frequently allude to such alternative and more achievable models of speakerhood.

In sum, on the one hand SFI was considered insufficient for the participants to develop their linguistic repertoires in Swedish. On the other hand, involvement in communicative practices outside the classroom was characterized by limited participation or by a sense of not leading to language progression. This, in turn, reinforced the role of formal language instruction.

Students' changing experiences of SFI: from a 'stable space' to an 'area of confusion'

While many similarities across the data sets pertained to how the participants rationalised their motivation to participate in SFI and their expressed experience of language learning, significant differences were found in relation to how the participants perceived the SFI organizational structure and classroom. One noteworthy organizational change in SFI is the introduction of three study paths in 2002, which was implemented right after the collection of data set A. Another significant change is the restructuring of SFI and the proliferation of SFI providers, which has enabled the municipalities to outsource the provision of SFI to a greater extent (Carlson & Jacobson, 2019). These changes have affected the students in different ways.

In 2001, the participants of data set A were referred to the geographically nearest SFI and had few opportunities to switch to another learning centre. In contrast, in 2015, the municipalities investigated for data set B contracted providers among which the students could choose from. Moreover, the SFI open enrolment policy had been implemented to a higher degree to minimize the waiting time for aspiring students. At the time of data collection B, this policy had become a form of 'competitive advantage' for SFI providers, and consequently some learning centres received new students every week. One consequence of the open enrolment policy in SFI is unstable student groups. In a recent survey, teachers pointed out that this was the main pedagogical challenge in adult education (Swedish Teachers' Union, 2017).

Hence, a major difference between data set A and data set B is that the participants in data set A were a heterogeneous group that remained stable over the academic year. The

participants' in data set A had a permanent classroom and a permanent teacher who followed them throughout the SFI education. Some of the participants articulated the classroom as a 'home' a 'friendly and stable space', and the teacher (in humoristic tone) was called 'mother' since she was at the students' disposal with help, sometimes even outside the classroom. However, the continuity and stability reported in the experiences of being enrolled in SFI in data set A sometimes led to participants referring to each other in fixed terms, for instance 'the talkative', 'the clever' or 'the silent one', constraining classroom participation by imposed fixed positions. Moreover, teaching at that time was not differentiated through study paths. Hence, some participants referred to the classroom as 'problematic' because of the students' different education backgrounds and, thus, different needs. Consequently, some participants asked for 'quicker progression' while others required a 'slow tempo'. The following quote illustrates this dilemma:

> In our school they mix levels… almost no education with university educated… Nobody has perfect level. That is problem here… maybe better in big schools.
>
> Extract 7, data set A

By contrast, the participants in data set B had the possibility to choose between different SFI providers. This was something several of the participants could relate to, either because they had participated in SFI organized by different providers or they had friends or relatives who had attended different learning centres. However, for some students, choosing 'the right school' was not always described as an easy task. Towards the end of one of the group interviews in data set B, the students started to ask the moderator questions, such as beliefs on best practices to learn a language. One of the participants explicitly asked the moderator about her perception of SFI and what could be considered a 'good SFI teaching':

Student	I want to ask what do you think of SFI?
MR	Laughs…
Student	Because I study in different SFI. So it depends on the school teacher. Much differences from eh… different method…
MR	Method?
Student	Method good or not so good. Sometimes teachers come too late after thirty minutes. Pauses over thirty minutes.
MR	No that's not so good.
Student	Boring course boring teacher. But I understand it's free but eh I don't know… Repetitions… Which SFI is better, good for you, suits you. I can change… but I can't change every week and every month so…

Extract 8, data set B

This discussion took place in a learning centre in the inner city of the capital where a majority of SFI is run through private tendering, with fixed-term contracts. The students are thus presented a variety of learning centres and are expected to choose which school they wish to attend. As shown in Extract 8, the student is aware of this right to 'freedom of choice', but a too-frequent change of school is not considered a viable strategy in the long run ('I can change but I can't change every month'). One of the consequences of

changing schools is the experience of different 'methods' associated with different teachers, that may be 'good or not so good'. In addition, in Extract 8 the fact that SFI is free of charge is associated with an uncertainty about what kind of quality standards the students can expect.

According to the Education Act, SFI schools are not allowed to take fees. It follows that the learning centres should provide students with teaching materials. In data set A, each participant had their own textbook with integrated grammar exercises that they could keep after completing the course. However, the book was not always referred to in positive terms since it was considered to be of limited help in developing a functional language. As one of the participants said: 'one book only, we need to read newspaper and other material'. In data set B, providing students with photocopies (copied from different sources) instead of books seemed to be common practice in the investigated learning centres. Possible reasons for this are the increased number of students and the instability in the student groups and/or the fact that textbooks are a cost that can be reduced. From the students' perspective, being provided with numerous photocopies presented a challenge when trying to grasp the expected learning outcomes. As can be read in Extract 9, the textbook had become a symbol of coherence:

> Like you see we never have books. We just have like papers. Everyday paper, paper, paper… After I'm finished I'm gonna throw it 'cause I don't need so many papers. Like today we're taking this kind of lesson. Tomorrow another thing. It's confusing.
>
> Extract 9, data set B

A similar struggle for coherence is noticeable in a group interview from another learning center:

Student 1	We don't need many books but we cannot do without a single book. We need a book for the whole SFI. When I start I can explain to my student…
MR	My friend.
Student 2	Yes and he can explain to others. We can't just have a teacher.
Student 3	I agree.
Student 1	I can explain to others… I can help my friend. But I don't know what is happening in his class.
Student 3	Yes.
Student 1	Maybe they will be discussing news, maybe about other countries… After the course, all information is different. And I can't explain and I can't help. This is not good. If we just had a book I could explain what will be next.

Extract 10, data set B

Extract 10 also points to a significant difference between the data sets, namely that the participants in data set B to a larger extent underscored the need to learn Swedish in order to help other newly arrived migrants. This can possibly be explained by the recent high numbers of migrants entering Sweden in 2015 or to migration patterns where one family member settles first before the rest of the family arrives. Being able to help others linguistically can be seen as a sign of one's own proficiency and social position (Rydell, 2018a). However, in Extract 10 above, Student 1 points out the frustration because the

content in SFI classes is perceived as unpredictable, which makes it difficult to know what the expected learning outcomes are and how to help others with their studies.

These observations illustrate how restructuring SFI has affected the language learners. According to our data, in 2001/2002 the SFI classroom was constructed as a 'stable space', even though this stability had its constraints (heterogeneous student groups, less variation, little possibility to change school, fixed roles in the classroom). Conversely, in 2015/2016 the classroom was articulated as an 'area of confusion', and the students have become 'clients' entitled to switch learning centre and responsible for finding 'good education' on the education 'market' (cf. Marín Rojo & Del Percio, 2019, Dahlstedt & Fejes, 2019). However, the image of the 'entrepreneurial self' responsible for one's education (Martín Rojo, 2019) can be difficult to live up to.

The gatekeeping function of SFI and increased testing practices

So far, we have seen how the participants in both data sets assigned SFI great importance for enhancing language learning, despite different perceived experiences of the language programme. Furthermore, SFI was frequently described as an important gate-keeping function, in terms of a 'barrier' [Sw. *spärr*] (data set A) [Sw. *bom*] (data set B), in particular in relation to the labour market. As stated by one of the participants:

> When your try to apply for a job, the first thin they aks: Have you finished SFI? Do you have a grade?
>
> Extract 11, data set B

The fact that SFI is part of a nexus of agencies (the National Agency of Education, the Employment Agency, and the Social Security Agency) adds to the institutional character of the language programme and the symbolic value of passing SFI. Students who are dependent on social benefits are subject to government control, and the learning centres report their attendance to different state agencies. Thus, the gatekeeping and boundary making function of SFI is multifaceted (Carlson, 2002). These tendencies characterize both data sets. What has changed over time, is the increased control system materialised in standardised testing.

When the national test was introduced in the final course of SFI (intermediate level) in 1996, the objective was to support an equal and fair assessment nationwide. Over the years, the test apparatus has grown, with the introduction of national tests in 2009 for another two SFI courses, thereby covering three proficiency levels. In addition, the status of the national test has gained significance and been institutionalised during the investigated period, changing from being voluntary and advisory to mandatory in 2009 and, pursuant to a change in the Education Act in 2018, decisive for the final grade in each course that it is given. The national test in SFI is not officially an exit exam, but in practice it is treated as such (Lindberg & Sandwall, 2007).

As a consequence of the increased test regime in SFI, the participants in this study related differently to the national test. All of the participants from data set A had obtained the SFI grade and most of them had also passed the national test (with more or less good results). Some of them commented on the content of the test, arguing that is was 'very different' from what they had learned in the classroom:

> In class we do not work with these things… what comes in the test is something else… listen for example we never listen to news in school or never we write a form.
>
> Extract 12, data set A

In 2001, this discrepancy was not seen as a major problem since the test was optional and had no decisive impact on whether the students could obtain a grade. Fifteen years later, when data set B was collected, the national tests had become obligatory and were assigned greater importance. Not one of the students in data set B mentioned that the test content did not correspond to the teaching in the classroom.

Due to the open enrolment policy, the national tests are administrated on a recurrent basis, up to once a month in some municipalities. As it is up to the teachers to decide when each student is ready to take the test, many SFI providers have now developed their own 'pre-testing' system that students must pass before taking the 'high stakes' national test. Preparing students for tests and administrating the test has thus become a major part of the organization of SFI teaching. Accordingly, there is a growing market for 'training for the test' textbooks (e.g. Bernhardtson & Tarras, 2012). Another tendency related to the importance given to standardized testing is a growing illegal spread on the Internet of national tests under secrecy (the Swedish National Agency of Education, 2019).

In the interviews in 2015/2016, tests were constructed as an acknowledgment of one's proficiency. 'Passing a test' came up on several occasions as an answer to the question 'How does one know whether one is good in a language or not?' in data set B. By passing tests, students could claim competency and legitimacy. No such observations were made in data set A.

We can thus observe that even though the gate keeping function of SFI was foregrounded in both data sets, this aspect seems to have been reinforced over time. This is, *inter alia*, materialized in increased testing practices impacting the organization of the SFI teaching.

Concluding remarks: Continuity and change

Following increased migration, adult language education has become a central element in Sweden's integration politics and is seen as a space for 'forming the citizen of tomorrow' (Olson & Dahlstedt, 2014, p. 200). High expectations are placed on SFI and language learning, from the perspective of migrants who perceive language competence as a 'door opener' to the majority society, as well as from a social and political perspective where language learning should enhance economic and social integration (cf. Fejes, 2019). In this study, we have observed tensions between those high expectations in relation to language learning and the participants' struggle for coherence and for opportunities to develop their language proficiency in contexts outside the classroom.

Despite the limited number of participants and differences in the composition of the two data sets examined, this study shows some clear tendencies. Primarily, we have found striking similarities with respect to how the participants construct their motivation for participating in SFI and language learning as *relational*, both present- and future-oriented. The necessity to participate in social interaction outside the SFI classroom was in both data sets constructed as crucial for language learning. In this vein, SFI was constructed in a complex way; both as necessary – but not sufficient – to fully develop one's linguistic repertoire in Swedish. At the same time, the students' experiences pointed to how participation in communicative practices outside the classroom were limited, thus reinforcing the importance of SFI. As argued by Kerfoot (2009), the adult language classroom is often one of few spaces where adult language learners are seen as legitimate speakers.

The observed main differences concerned the restructuring of adult education according to neoliberal market principles which has increased over time and resulted in

SFI changing character (Carlson & Jacobsson, 2019). In 2015/2016, in municipalities with several SFI providers, students had more possibilities to choose which school to attend. Consequently, they had become 'clients' with the responsibility of finding a 'good education' but also the possibility to change school if it did not live up to their expectations. By providing free language courses, the state enables learning, but the responsibility for learning lies with the student (Fejes, 2010). This focus on responsibility is not new (Carlson, 2002), but has been emphasised and changed character over time. Having the opportunity to change school for various reasons is a positive effect of the marketisation, but it has also led to a situation where the participants described SFI as fragmented and pointed to difficulty in navigating among different providers. This should be interpreted in the light of the gatekeeping function of SFI, *inter alia* materialized in increased testing practices. Thus, the symbolic and institutional importance of passing (national) tests and official policies emphasizing 'the duty' of migrants to become competent speakers of Swedish (Rydell, 2018b) has been reinforced.

In 2018, the Swedish government has proposed an official language duty for adult migrants, stating that they can lose their social benefits if they do not take part in assigned language instruction. The reason for this is to 'increase the incentive' for migrants to learn Swedish (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2019). These kinds of suggestions construct language learning as an individual project that can be 'pushed' (Rydell & Milani, 2020). More and more, adult education has been politicized and there is a tendency in the Swedish society (as in many other Western countries) to use educational programmes such as SFI to 'control' migration (Khan, 2016). In our study, we do not find support for the assumption that migrants lack motivation to learn Swedish, or that this would have changed over time and thus would motivate increased requirements. Instead, as discussed in this paper, the participants construct language learning as essential for better life prospects.

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Notes

[1] This extract (using a poetic transcription practice) has been published earlier (Ahlgren, 2014).
[2] In the 2010 elections, the Sweden Democrats entered parliament (with 5,7% of votes) and since then the party has increased their scores in elections, such as 12.9% in 2014, and 17.5% in 2018.
[3] Following a historically high number of asylum seekers in 2015, an important turn in public and political discourse occurred and a temporary law was urgently implemented intended to decrease the 'immigration flows' by targeting an EU minimal level with temporary residence and constraints on family reunification.
[4] Language requirements for naturalization purposes have been repeatedly discussed in Sweden since the electoral campaign in 2002 (Milani 2008) and a decision was taken in 2018 (to be implemented in the coming years).

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Debt, learning and migration in the time of crisis

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Abstract

This paper discusses the issue of learning in adulthood by those who were indebted during the financial crisis of 2008-2009. The field research was conducted in Iceland, where interviews with indebted Icelanders and migrants were conducted, along with a broader ethnographic study. The result of the study is a model of learning based on Peter Jarvis' model, but adjusted when it comes to the context of social crisis and the possibility of migration.

Keywords: Financial crisis; Jarvis' model of learning; migration studies; pedagogy of debt

Introduction

Debt is an element of life, connected with education and learning in many ways. There are many types of debts – one can be indebted to one's parents, teachers, friends, and grateful to them, but there is also a financial debt, which also takes part in learning processes. In some countries, it has become a prerequisite for access to education, because people get indebted *en masse* in order to study (Ertl & Dupuy, 2014). Jeffrey Williams (2006) identified 6 lessons people learn when they get indebted in order to access education. He called them "pedagogy of debt". It consists of: treating education as a consumer good; directing one's career so that one can be sure to pay off the debts; creating a worldview in which everything has a price and is, therefore, exchangeable; replacing the figure of an entitled citizen with a subscriber to certain services, who in order not to lose access to these services (regarding health, housing, education, safety and legal protection, etc.) – must take care of his/her image in front of financial institutions; judging other people through the prism of their creditworthiness; intimidation of indebted people so that they continue their efforts to earn more. In addition, in Western culture, debt is

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partly related to growing up, particularly to leaving the parental home, and taking personal responsibility for one's life and children (Oksanen, Aaltonen, & Rantala, 2016). Being indebted is, therefore, strongly connected with learning and with going through the life stages in the Western culture – which is why I have decided to study its learning outcomes for adults.

Some claim that a new type of subjectivity arises due to debts. It is a subjectivity of an indebted person ("Indebted Man", Lazzarato, 2012), who no longer requires external disciplining, because his/her environment is a control society in which coercion reaches the individual indirectly, but without limitations (Deleuze, 1992). The indebted person will not be a superhero, because one of the basic consequences of over-indebtedness is poor physical and mental health (Dubois & Anderson, 2010; Ochsmann, Rueger, Letzel, Drexler, & Muenster, 2009). Financial crises are crucial events in the lives of indebted people, because they may destroy their life plans and put their (class) aspirations into question. These aspirations were previously created thanks to long formal education (both educational successes and failures). Crises are a natural part of the capitalist system, and therefore, studying how indebted people have responded to the previous financial crises. might help us predict debtors' reactions and their learning outcomes in case of the next financial turmoil.

I conducted field research in Iceland, between September 2009 and June 2010, at the time of a financial and social crisis. Iceland was one of the countries where the 2008 economic crisis came early, so its institutions had a chance to adapt to new conditions earlier than elsewhere. Iceland's indebtedness was one of the highest in Europe in 2004-2014 (Hauksson, 2015) and it was the first Western country in over 30 years to be assisted by the International Monetary Fund. At the same time, expectations regarding the quality of life in Iceland were high, taking into account the fact that the country had the highest social development index in the world in 2007 and is still in the forefront of such ratings (6th place in the world in 2018, United Nations, 2018). This specific time of research allowed me to gain insight into the processes that were considered marginal in other societies or much more extended in time. The financial crisis made it impossible to treat debt as an individualized problem, solvable at the household level. Getting into financial troubles went fast in Iceland, so many of the indebted people had too little time to get personally ashamed, physically sick and socially degraded from the middle class.

Learning of the indebted

Life crises and difficult experiences are an important though unpleasant learning time for adults (Brookfield, 1986). We usually recognize their significance over time, and researchers conceptualize it as learning through experience (cf. Illeris, 2002; Jurgiel-Aleksander, 2013; Salling Olesen, 2006). The idea of Gert Biesta, who proposes a departure from the perception of learning as a repetition of what already exists, to treat it as an answer to what we meet, can be considered a development of this concept.

> We learn because we respond to whatever and whoever we encounter; we learn because we respond to whatever and whoever challenges, irritates or disturbs us; and we learn by finding our own response to such events and experiences. (Biesta, 2007, p.11).

If people try to give these answers collectively, then learning in social movements becomes a variant of learning through experience. And if it is possible to bring these difficult experiences of indebtedness down into solvable tasks of payoff, then learning is

limited to problem-solving. However, a specific historical time (a financial crisis melting into a social crisis) was not conducive to treating individual indebtedness as an arithmetic problem. It would be, in itself, a political declaration to treat debt as a problem defined by its measurability (a specific amount to pay off), for which specific procedures (eg consumer bankruptcy) are sufficient, and as a problem which can be solved by a given family through taking care of their household budget, thanks to the standards provided to them by social welfare institutions. Much of the "confusion" in Iceland was due to the fact that organised parts of the society did not want the problem to be defined this way (Ólafsson, 2011). It was not about immaturity or "running away from problems", but about mature recognition, shared globally (Pianta & Gerbaudo, 2015), that this situation should not be normalized. Treating debt as an individual problem of the indebted would, for many of my interlocutors, not only be a failure, but an injustice. The significance of social change in Iceland could suggest that it was on the ground of transformative learning. However Mezirow's (2009) transformative learning process seems to me impassably individual, processual and optimistic when it focuses on growing more inclusive consciousness. It is optimistic to the point that transformative learning is often posed as a goal in itself for adult education (Taylor, 1997). Transformations during the crisis were, contrariwise, sudden and discriminatory against the perceived villains, i.e. “the banksters”, and eventually they seemed to be just one of many ways of adaptation. Therefore, in this work what I found useful was Peter Jarvis' concept of learning through experiencing a disjuncture between the real and the obvious. According to Jarvis (2009), adults usually treat the world around them as self-evident, and the experience of disjuncture requires that they give meaning to things and sensations which they do not recognize. Adults learn in order to resolve this disjuncture.

Materials & methods

As part of the project, I conducted 16 recorded interviews with indebted inhabitants of Iceland (both with Icelanders [10], and migrants [6]). These were semi-structured biographical interviews, conducted in English or Polish. There were 12 men and 5 women among the interlocutors. One of the interviews was conducted with a married couple, and their contribution to the conversation was similar. I conducted 5 interviews with people aged 20-30, 7 interviews with 30-40-year-olds, 1 interview with a person in her 40's, and 3 interviews with 50-60-year-olds.[12]

I also conducted interviews with employees of institutions offering assistance to indebted people: such as a social welfare office, a debt-advisory institution, one of bankrupt banks and a company conducting specialized educational courses for indebted households. My research also had an ethnographic character. I kept notes on meetings, discussions and seminars devoted to the problem of poverty and from conversations with Icelanders about the debt among their relatives, because it was often easier for them to discuss others' situation than their own. I took part in Icelandic language courses, which enabled me to find newspaper articles about debt and invite authors to a conversation. For interviews, I invited those inhabitants of the island who identified themselves as indebted. In this work, I only use data from these interviews.

Having access only to what the participants wanted to say about their experiences, one can only get to know the aspects of learning that they were able to articulate. They may have been preliminarily analysed by the participants themselves and during the interview the result of this analysis was connected to the idea of learning the way they understood the term. Thus, we are dealing with a record of people's efforts to give meaning to their experience. Although the pre-condition for participation in my research, i.e., being a person with debts, was formally met by all the interlocutors, the perceived annoyance of indebtedness was subjective.

The learning category was triggered by an explicit question: Have you learned something from this crisis? And because people usually have difficulties to answer such an open question, and to articulate (for some participants – in a foreign language) a reflection which might not be conscious, the question was often accompanied by a request for a piece of advice to people living outside the island who have not experienced a crisis. This procedure, introduced *ad hoc* during one of the first interviews, but repeated later, influenced the way the learning was presented by the participants. Namely, forcing the relationship between personal learning and formulating advice (for strangers in an unfamiliar context), that is, teaching others, sometimes resulted in a high level of generality of statements, which occasionally were close to a *cliché*. This, in turn, required additional unpacking of meanings with further questions. The participants talked also spontaneously about their learning under the burden of debt in the context of the financial crisis.

The following analysis will result in identifying groups of meanings given to the process of learning by people whose indebtedness rose rapidly. On this basis, I will present suggestions about what variables should be taken into account when choosing or creating a theory of learning, that might explain how adults cope with a crisis caused by the state of their finances.

Results

Identity & ideology

Among the participants, a sharp increase of debt triggered reflections about the condition of the world they had lived in. These reflections consisted of comparing life before and after the financial disaster, and many of the articulated thoughts can be reduced to experiencing an end of a certain illusion:

> Mi1: It surprised me little bit how gullible..., you know... that we took everything for granted. We thought that nothing could really harm us. We thought like we were safe. We had our place in the universe, in this Western system or whatever. And I think, nothing could harm us really. I think that's like being over-positive.

Interestingly, the new situation in which Icelanders found themselves during the crisis, caused this participant to reflect not so much about himself, but about the collective identity of the island's inhabitants, as indicated by the narrative in the first person plural. The sense of security rooted into belonging to larger, supranational structures, is seen by him as a fiction that people were fooled into. At the same time, he uses a rather elaborate English word "gullible" (naive), which might suggest he suspects he trusted someone too much, someone who misused this trust – probably the beneficiaries of this bygone exaggerated optimism. It could also mean that the domination of a certain ideology – in the case of Iceland, of neoliberalism – collapsed, revealing the void of its promises rather than previous coherence and trustworthiness.

Learning at the point of disjuncture

The scale of changes caused by the crisis, in particular the drastic changes in the value of indebtedness to banks, meant that Iceland before and during the crisis were two completely incompatible worlds. People did not recognize themselves in them, especially when they realized that warning signals had been articulated before. As Eirikur Bergmann (2014, p.7) explained: "[before the crisis *P.K.*] all criticism […] was dismissed as ill-intentioned whining by envious foreigners […] Any voice of caution and classical wisdom was thus dismissed as old-fashioned". And one of my interviewees exclaimed with a dose of subjective amazement:

> Mi3: Now people think, okay, it's easy to be wise afterwards. But Jesus, why didn't we see this.

This feeling of guilt arose only among some of my Icelandic interlocutors. This was accompanied by a sense of absurdity and helplessness in relation to the condition of debtors, and was expressed in the shortest way in the opinion: "It's like a big joke, so don't take anything for granted" (Mi3). The statement that the situation in which he found himself is comic does not mean that the participant was particularly cheerful, it was rather an irony. The crisis was perceived as a breaking of the time's continuity, because it created the need to start one's adult life again. After a period of tumultuous demonstrations called The Pots and Pans Revolution (Bernburg, 2016), people had to think both individually and collectively about the aspects of the reality they wanted to sustain or change. This was well reflected in this excerpt:

> Mi1: I don't know if I should call it a shock. It's just happened so fast that it wasn't really a shock. It's like you get an injection of some sleeping pill or something. It was very silly because you couldn't do anything. It was just like two or three days and everything collapsed. So it was like a shock [which, P.K.] came a couple of months later, when we really started to understand what happens. So I think the main thing that Icelanders are feeling now is this disappointment of themselves that they […] believed that everything was fine and good. The system and the banks.

Do whatever, wherever

Going through a collective experience of a financial crisis resulted in both getting a deeper understanding of the world and having some collective decisions to take, especially in the case of indebted people and their families. That is, in addition to talking about what they think, the interlocutors also talked about what they (will) do. And maintaining the ability to act is important for people who are under the pressure of debt. The indebted realised this by themselves:

> Mi5: If you do something about it [i.e., debt], yes it does [help *P.K.*], but if you don't do anything, it just enslaves you, and you are less capable of growing and maturing.

One of the places where people with debts tried to wait out the difficult period of the financial crisis, was the university:

> Wm13: I came to the conclusion that it makes no sense to tear your hair out. What happened? Why did it happen? To analyze. No! [You have to] learn from your mistakes and go on. I went to school. I could not find a job, so I went to school. I work my way a little, here and there.

> P.K.: To the university, not to school?
>
> Wm13: Well, to the university. And I'm just doing something, you know. Life goes on. You cannot sit and just wring your hands. I have two hands, two legs. It's important that I'm healthy.

In this case the decision to return to formal education was made in the perspective of accepting the responsibility for one's own financial situation. We do not know, however, what she meant by learning from her own mistakes, since she categorically refused to analyze them. The university in this perspective is not only reduced to school one goes to instead of working. It is also a place providing automatic and almost physical mobility ("You cannot sit..[…] I have two hands, two legs" Wm13). The place where life goes on. Whatever one does there - "I'm just doing something" (Wm13), this is a place of a very physical activity where stillness is forbidden: "You cannot sit and just wring your hands." (Wm13). Interestingly, although it is not known what the consequences of this choice are, it has emancipatory character for the participant, because she speaks of it as of overcoming limitations. She managed to choose and pursue her own goal in life, rather than subordinate everything to paying off the debts. The participant's (a migrant's) motivations and her expectations seem, however, vague and as if only tactical, especially in comparison with the strategic assessment of the situation in Iceland, which became the basis for other participants' (an Icelandic couple's) decision to migrate to Norway:

> Mi3: We started thinking about it after we saw that the new leftist government wasn't going to do what they said they were going to do. That, let's say, this was mid-summer of 2009. Then we really started thinking that Iceland is not going to be the smartest thing to be around for the next year. And then actually we were also starting to hear figures about the IceSave[3] accounts and how much that would cost the Icelandic population.

Perhaps the comfort of this type of analytical perspective is reserved for people rooted in a given place and familiarised with a dominating political discourse, whereas for migrants, everyday life is full of strategic choices, and therefore the connection with traditional institutions such as the university is more important to them. Media reports were important for this couple. They understood the significance of the news and they were aware that the international scandal over savings accounts in bankrupt banks (the IceSave case) was a historical precedent. They focused on strategy. The numbers that they sometimes mentioned during the interview, were given with decimal accuracy, which was rare among my interlocutors. At the same time, the whole decision-making process was not typically rooted in the social context of the place, i.e., the interlocutors did not take into account their friends, children, nature or their own habits. Even with their own work, they did not identify themselves with either its technological aspect or their professional education. They accepted that one cannot use all of this in a new place. The only thing that mattered to them was macroeconomic data, i.e., unemployment figures, without breaking them down into economic sectors or ethnic background of the unemployed. Ernst Jünger attributed such metaphysical identification with the national economy to the bourgeoisie (Jünger, 2010). What is new, however, is that – faced by the crisis – the indebted representatives of bourgeoisie were ready to identify with the national economy, but not necessarily of the country in which they lived. It was crucial for them that average numbers indicated better employment opportunities in a given country. After making a strategic decision to leave the island, the couple needed to decide on the direction of

migration. Their preparations, of which the most important element was learning, were described by my interlocutors as follows:

> Mi3: We have job offers now from abroad, but of course it helped, all the preparation we did. We have everything translated to Norwegian. We started sending out our CVs and everything in Norwegian. And since December I have been able to write all my emails in Norwegian. […] It would have taken us a lot more effort to move into the Dutch society, because they are more different from us than the Norwegians, who are our closest neighbours.

The interviewees undertook a series of activities preparing them to look for a job. First of all, as part of non-formal education, they began taking part in a Norwegian language course. It is worth noting that we are dealing here with learning languages before emigration. The choice of the country was made due to the effort needed for the language acquisition and the cultural distance between the countries. The easier and closer, the better. The language course was professional, i.e., the interviewees did not count on self-study or informal meetings with native speakers. The expedition was not planned in a convention of intensifying earnings which I found was typical for the indebted (Kowzan, 2010). During the whole interview the issue of earnings was not discussed at all. However, it was important for the interlocutors to get any work beforehand. Freedom of movement within Europe and formal integration of both countries through Nordic cooperation makes migration to Norway a relatively easy and reversible process for Icelanders[4]. Choosing easy ways of life could be a political choice, because the ease indicates the level of democracy and justifies the risks of migration. As mother of three, who spent half of her life in other Nordic countries and planned to move to Norway for PhD studies, explained:

> Ki1: [A democratic country I want to live in] has to be truly democratic. Not like it was here: you can vote and then wait 4 years, and […] they just lie until next time to vote. [...] In Denmark, if the politician did something wrong, even if their husband or wife did something wrong, they have to resign and do something else. […] I don't know so much about politics in Norway. I just lived in Denmark for [several] years. I don't know how it is underneath [but] it's easier for people to live.

Learning resilience

The migration decisions of the participants were accompanied by mental dissociation with Icelandic society and politics, which resembled the state of some sort of inner emigration (cf. Teo, 2018) or exit strategy (cf. Hirschman, 1970). The participants explained how they refrain from action, for example:

> Mi9: Actually, I decided to leave. We are trying to go to Norway. Currently, I distance myself more and more from the society. Before, I used to write several articles [for newspapers] and in this way I tried to influence the society, but I do not care about it anymore. Or at least not so much.

Given the scale of indignation and disappointment the interviewees expressed, such withdrawal could be a conscious and possibly a collective exit strategy, but it was similar to a more personal activist burnout. One interviewee explained:

> Wi10: R: I was at the protest every Saturday [in the] winter. […] I did a lot of things. I found in the end [that] I got so frustrated and felt so bad about everything, and all these rotten things that come up, so now basically I don't watch any news, I don't read anything on the internet, nothing. I just live in my own world now. It was too much.

Withdrawing from the political life of the country and limiting one's activity, also cognitive, to the private sphere, concerned those of my interviewees who had been politically active and had such interests before. They reported unlearning participation in emotionally engaging activities. Taking part in the research apparently did not belong to this category. Inner emigration also meant avoiding anything that would remind one of their previous activity: "I don't watch any news, I don't read anything" (Wi10). The decision to choose inner emigration was determined by fatigue and lack of sense of specific actions, i.e., attending street protests. Family life was understood in this case as an alternative to political life, because both of them need resources, such as time and attention. Political involvement became overwhelming to the point where people realised they neglected their private needs and started failing in their careers.

The model

Among contemporary theories of learning, Peter Jarvis' model seems to be closest to the experience of people with debts. First of all, he took into account a situation typical in the context of the financial crisis, when an individual is getting detached from what he or she had considered to be obvious. The analysis of his model will help us understand the experience of people burdened with debts in turbulent times. They could have been under financial stress before the crisis, but the specific historical time made it clearer and let them see economic oppression around. The analysis will show how these unusual biographical events result in typical learning processes for adults.

The situation of treating reality as obvious is the starting point (and the endpoint) in Jarvis' model of learning from primary experience. The adoption of such a learning model has the consequence of skipping learning experiences that would be more cumulative in character. The sense of obviousness, which is key to the model is in itself an effect of the cumulative experience of living in a given reality, in a place with particular ideology and other elements of culture. Therefore, although it is a model of adult learning and adults are usually familiar with their environment, it will have some limitations in the case of migrants who may lack the initial sense of obviousness (for more on translocal learning of migrants see Zielińska, 2019). The learning process begins in Jarvis' model with an impression of detachment from reality, that is, the emergence of a difference between reality and obviousness. Later, the person passing through this process gives meaning to the new impression, trying to explain what has happened. When this is successful, the process of testing correctness and social acceptability of the given solution begins. Reality becomes obvious again. Although it is worth noticing that it might be a different reality and something else may become obvious at the end than at the beginning.

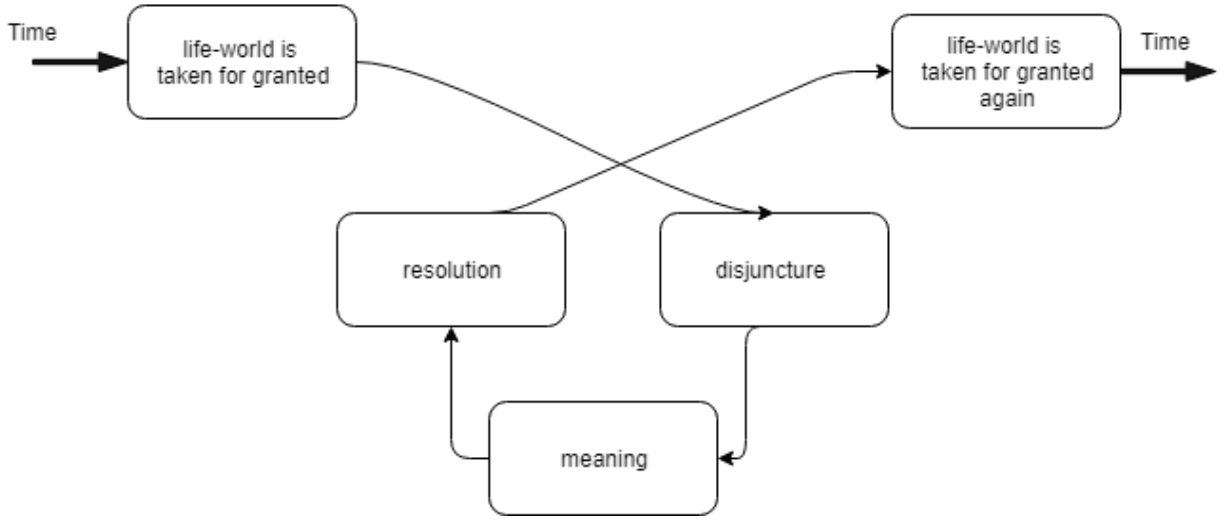

Figure 1: Jarvis' model of learning from primary experience - transformation of sensations (Jarvis, 2009, p. 26)

The main difference between this model and the states described by the interviewees is that in the case of financial, social and political crisis the movement of detachment is performed by the reality (changing rules, norms and values), and not by an individual consciousness. Apart from that, similar processes of learning are taking place simultaneously among many individuals, which is not taken into account in this model. This disjuncture of reality was perceived when Icelanders lost access to their bank accounts, nevertheless people still paid with their credit cards and shops accepted them. For some time people managed to function as if nothing had happened, but in the context of incoming media alerts their formerly obvious behaviours took on new meanings. The financial crisis has the characteristics of Badiou's Event, i.e., it must be assumed that although invisible, it did take place (Badiou, 2005). And when people accepted that it had happened, they became confronted with a new reality, because the past began to be perceived from the perspective of the Event. Looking from the perspective of the Event is called the procedure of truth in Badiou's terms. The Event revealed the (rotten) foundations of the life-world. For some, the Event meant the end of the world they had known, for others it was a beginning. The beginning of the struggle in social movements, because social change was at stake (Burgess & Keating, 2013).

The loop in Jarvis' model would mean the time when one can carry out previously unimaginable changes. It is a fundamentally unstable but open window of political possibilities. Time flows faster during the crisis, which is why the interviewees complained about the slow response from the government. More happens at such times. Some everyday-life events become life-changing experiences. Sudden twists and raises of consciousness were the result of both social and individual learning about the decaying past reality.

It is difficult to assimilate this accelerated version of the world with existing cognitive schemes. According to Jarvis, religious experiences may start to appear in this case. My interlocutors did not mention it. The crisis has opened a new realm of creativity in the Icelandic literature, though in the eyes of Alaric Hall it started from "the crisis of realism" and went through anxiety into utopianism (Hall, 2017). However, even during an unregistered interview with a representative of the local clergy, no mention was made

of any increase in religiosity at that time. Still, the decision of some interlocutors to enroll to the university, to retreat to family life, their dreams of going out into the wilderness, as well as some of the migration decisions could be attributed to attempts to understand from a distance what was happening on the island.

Migration is in itself a challenge for Jarvis' model, because the model identifies learning with adapting to reality. This reality is never the same before and after going through the learning loop, but it seems that Jarvis meant the reality of the same place, as he wrote: "[N]early all the meanings will reflect the society into which we are born" (Jarvis, 2009, p. 25). Meanwhile, people seeking a match between reality and taken–for–grantedness can get it elsewhere, in another society. In the case of island with a crashed economy, some people decided that yes, they will have to learn new skills, but it would be the skills they want to learn, and not the ones, which they are forced to learn in a given place. For example, instead of learning to live a frugal lifestyle, while unemployed, some prefer to learn a foreign language and culture in Norway, where the unemployment rates are close to the old Icelandic ones. The same model might apply to other sorts of crises, especially to those related to climate change, because then migrants may seek for a habitat, similar to the one they used to take for granted. Learning would have more sensorial character in that case.

For the above reasons, I decided to modify Jarvis' model. I wanted to implement a minimal number of changes, emphasizing only those essential from the perspective of the study, so that both models correspond with each other.

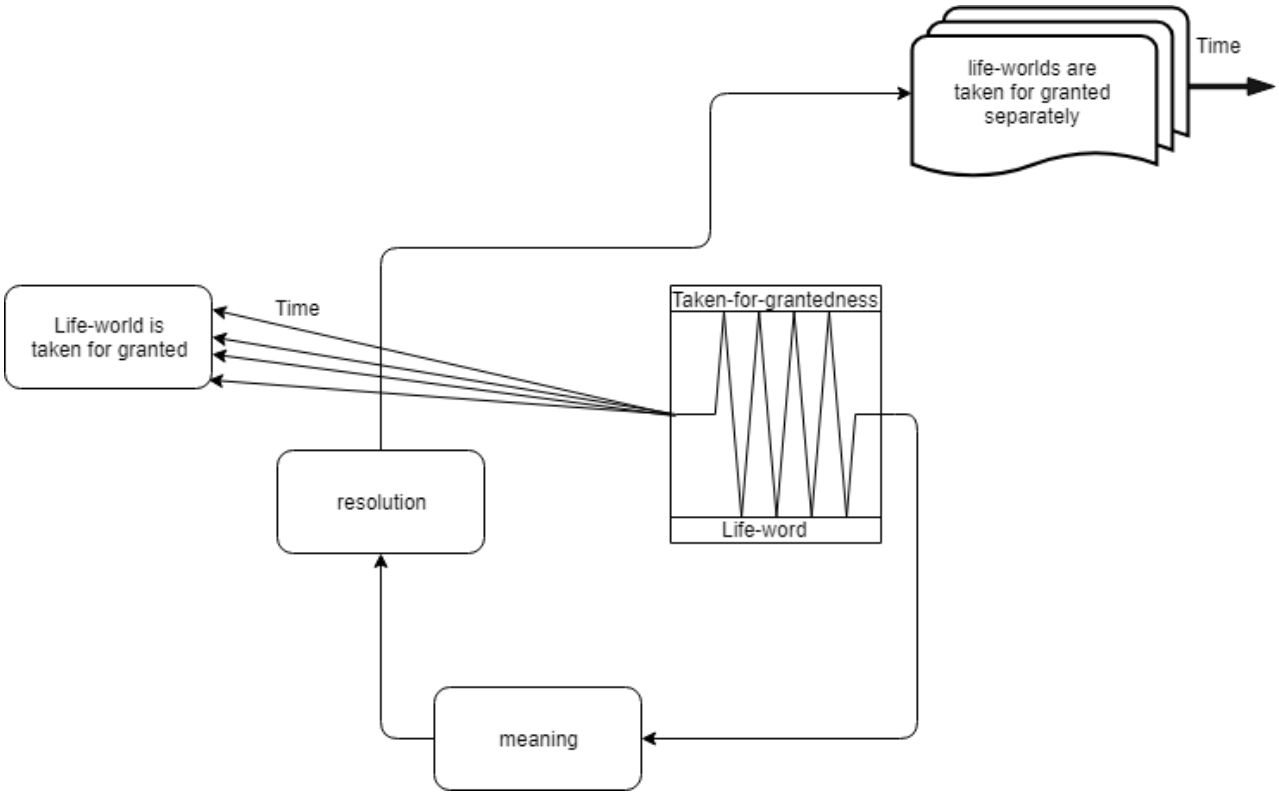

Figure 2: Model of learning from the experience of indebtedness. Modification of Jarvis' model (own elaboration)

In this model, more people are experiencing similar sensations at the same time, while Jarvis' model concerned individual experiences. The starting reality is one and common, but it is a look back, made by interlocutors after the Event, i.e., the outbreak of the crisis. In the present model, reality is detached from the imagination about it, which is accompanied by resistance (a line passing several times up and down). This resistance may be both reactionary, i.e., demanding past to return, or may require progress along with the cut-off from the past that preceded the Event. It is worth to remember that time is more dense during the crisis, i.e., the occurrence of many different events in its course. Giving sense to experiences takes place in relation to the newly read past. In both models the practice of making decisions is derived by the interlocutors from the past, thanks to the power drawn from earlier events, usually personal ones. While the meanings and even the resolutions of individuals may be common or somehow similar in content or form, in the new model it is stressed that the end result of the learning process is not a return to a slightly modified primary reality, but settling in different realities (abroad, countryside, social movements etc.), which for individual people have the value of obviousness. For many, this reality will remain Iceland, though their life will not necessarily continue in the same location. Some interviewees chose Norway as their country, the country where everything will be presumably obvious (again). Jarvis' model of learning is rather romantic as the human being eventually always somehow accepts and understands the world. But when the model is checked in a dynamic environment in which people feel oppressed, e.g. economically, it needs a social learning component to be added and it loses its optimistic character.

It seems that in its present form, the model would also fit into the situation of any crisis, war conflict, climate catastrophe or any other disaster that will affect the population. It fits to situations, when the obviousness of reality is being pulled from under one's feet. It requires people to respond. And a conscious response to a challenge means that people are learning. The predictive power of the model depends on the content of what learners would like to keep obvious in their lives. To some extent, life-worlds can be chosen according to given parameters. Places can be secondary to the sense of obviousness. Going through a crisis, people have to decide what they would like to forget about and find a place where these things work, so that, consequently, they will not have to be bothered about them.

Summary and limitations of the model

It seems obvious that people learn during crises. What seems less obvious is that adapting to new conditions can mean abandoning a given place. Jarvis' model of learning romantically assumed the ultimate reconciliation of the human with the reality and some new understandings of it by the learner. In the context of a financial crisis, followed by a political and social crisis, the restoration of the state of obviousness to the world is not the only possible reaction to the event. One can learn that the reality has to be abandoned, that one needs to get away from it in order to live their obvious world of life.

We know that learning takes time, but the learning loops in Jarvis' model do not show how much. We do not even know if the quantitative understanding of time really matters here. Learning can follow Jarvis' pattern, but it can take place in both several-minute and long-term cycles. Perhaps the final state assumed in the model can be articulated only when it is sufficiently dramatic or significant, but the result of a such learning could consist of many small loops of learning. Therefore, I cannot be sure if what I have illustrated with the improved model is not just a fragment that people experience at the level marked in Jarvis' model as a "resolution". It can be assumed that the end of one loop

means a new beginning of learning, though perhaps according to a completely different pattern. When it comes to the utility of the model in case of future crises, we got migration as a proof that learning has taken place. The individual dimension of such learning can be detected through using migration as a topic in individual conversations. The social dimension can be detected through the actual movement of people or by the number of people taking specific courses, especially language courses.

Both Jarvis' model and mine have a structure of a ritual, in the anthropological sense. That is, it is a process, which usually consists of "going to the woods", doing something extraordinary and coming back as a different person. Also the crisis has been compared to the ritual (Mendel & Szkudlarek, 2013). However, the ritual needs to have an end, it should result in a desirable outcome. This does not necessarily need to happen in the situation of the indebted. Some people may get stuck "in the woods", and the whole learning process might not be passable for them. This is an important limitation of both models and something that should be kept in mind while reading and using them. Finally, the model is based on a case study, rooted in a particular place, and needs to be verified in other environments.

Discussion

At the beginning of this article, I referred to Jeffrey Williams' concept of pedagogy of debt. Learning through indebtedness is often analysed from the perspective of student loans, as this is an area where learning and debts are very closely connected (cf. Querrien & Rosso, 2012). The analysis of learning I have presented here goes beyond this type of debts, as my interlocutors were indebted in various ways (mostly through mortgage, but there were also loans for cars or to run a business). Here, the relation to learning has not been so obvious. Looking at learning from indebtedness during the crisis and showing a model of such learning might be considered another aspect of pedagogy of debt.

Pedagogy of debt was created as a fundamentally negative concept. It is an expression of certain helplessness of culture and higher education towards a situation in which young people are submitted to the requirements of their creditors. The results of the study I have presented are more optimistic. The indebted are not helpless – they learn to find their way to escape helplessness and to find their refuge – in a different country, in the countryside or at the university. Yet, the fact that they learn to change their life in order to cope with the burden of debt should be attributed to the effects of the crisis. It is the crisis – it's speed and the scandal and shock associated with it, that makes people stop treating their debt as an individual tool of submission to the creditors. The rapid and shocking way that the crisis change the lives of the indebted needs a rapid and sometimes shocking response. And this response is critical for learning. Such learning is sometimes emancipatory, but it is definitely not simply submission to the overarching pedagogy of debt.

Notes

[1] I use the term "Icelanders" for those who were born in Iceland. Some people spent most of their lives outside the island.

[2] I use the term "migrants" here for participants born in Central and Eastern Europe (Poland or the Czech Republic), regardless of their Icelandic citizenship.

[3] IceSave is the name of the online branch of one of the bankrupt Icelandic banks, which, offering high-interest deposits, accumulated funds exceeding Iceland's annual GDP. The British and Dutch governments have tried in various ways to force the Icelandic government to extend state deposits to IceSave.
[4] For more on the situation of migrants in Iceland during the financial crisis see: Wojtyńska & Zielińska, 2010.

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Aims & Scope

The European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults (RELA) is a refereed academic journal creating a forum for the publication of critical research on adult education and learning. It has a particular focus on issues at stake for adult education and learning in Europe, as these emerge in connection with wider international and transnational dynamics and trends. Such a forum is important at a time when local and regional explorations of issues are often difficult to foreground across language barriers. As academic and policy debate is increasingly carried out in the English language, this masks the richness of research knowledge, responses and trends from diverse traditions and foci. The journal thus attempts to be linguistically 'open access'. Whilst creating a forum for international and transnational debate, contributions are particularly welcome from authors in Europe and other locations where English is not the first language.

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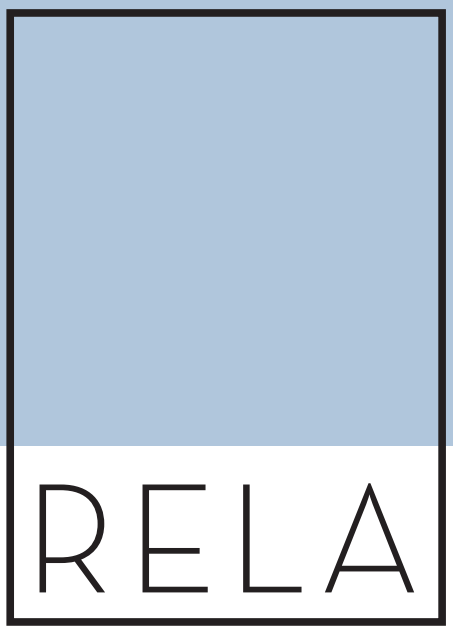

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