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DEALING WITH DIVERSITY AND ANTI-RACISM IN ADULT EDUCATION

An institutional perspective

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses organisational development in institutions of adult education aimed at enhancing diversity and preventing the discrimination of migrants. A critical analysis of three approaches, intercultural opening, managing diversity and fighting institutional racism, will be presented and amplified in the light of critical whiteness studies. The concepts differ in terms of their main goals, traditions, fields of practice and discourses of legitimation. The paper is based on the theoretical and empirical results of an Austrian applied research project, which explored how adult education institutions deal with migrant-related diversity. Finally, a strategic approach for opening up Austrian adult education for migrants, which was developed as part of the project, is presented.

Keywords: migration, institutional discrimination, diversity management, intercultural opening, critical whiteness

SOOČANJE Z RAZNOLIKOSTJO IN ANTIRASIZMOM V IZOBRAŽEVANJU ODRASLIH: INSTITUCIONALNI POGLED - POVZETEK

Članek obravnava organizacijski razvoj v ustanovah za izobraževanje odraslih, katerega cilj je krepitev raznolikosti in preprečevanje diskriminacije migrantov. Kritičen pretres treh pristopov, interkulturalnega odpiranja, upravljanja raznolikosti in boja proti institucionalnemu rasizmu, je predstavljen in poglobljen z vidika kritičnih študij belskosti. Koncepti se razlikujejo glede na svoje glavne cilje, tradicije, področja prakse in diskurze legitimacije. Članek je nastal na podlagi teoretičnih in empiričnih rezultatov avstrijskega raziskovalnega projekta, ki je raziskoval, kako se ustanove za izobraževanje odraslih soočajo z raznolikostjo v povezavi z migranti. Ob koncu je predstavljen strateški pristop, razvit v okviru projekta, ki bi avstrijsko izobraževanje odraslih naredil bolj odprto za migrantsko populacijo.

Ključne besede: migracije, institucionalna diskriminacija, upravljanje raznolikosti, interkulturalno odpiranje, kritične študije belskosti

INTRODUCTION

European discourse on migration has been dominated by the issue of refugees for the past two years. Apart from this contemporary phenomenon, migration has been contributing to the demographic diversification of many countries for a long time; it is a phenomenon which causes social change and poses new challenges for host countries as well as for countries of origin. New patterns of mobility, including transnational migration, are appearing and changing our ideas of identity, space and relationship building (Pries, 2008). European policies address these phenomena in a variety of ways. They encompass both restrictive and inhumane border regimes aimed at ‘defending’ the EU against refugees or third country immigrants, as well as anti-discrimination strategies and the facilitation of mobility within the European Union (e.g. through the development of the European Qualification Framework). The EU-28 foreign-born population was about 54 million in 2015. Of these, 19.8 million people were born in a different member state, while 34.3 million were born outside the EU-28 (Eurostat, 2017). In Austria, where my research takes place, the percentage of the foreign-born population was 18.3 % at the beginning of 2016 (Statistik Austria, 2016, p. 23).

Dealing with migration has become a topical issue in every sphere of society, one which also impacts the field of adult education. Migration regimes assign a specific role to adult education as a tool of so-called integration policies. The role adult education is expected to play in these regimes often implies functions of control and selection, sometimes with serious existential consequences for the migrant participants. For example, immigrants from non-EU-countries are obliged to pass certain language tests to acquire a residence permit in Austria. Refugees must participate in so-called ‘values courses’, a new programme which has recently been implemented in Austria and has been accompanied by highly problematic discourse on the cultural ‘otherness’ of refugees. In my view, the whole debate implies the notion of the ‘backward’ Oriental (as described, for example, by Edward Said, 1991), who must be ‘civilised’ by adult education. Interestingly, there was hardly any critical discussion on the issue within Austrian adult education circles when these programmes were implemented. It can be stated that, in general terms, migration has created new areas of work for adult education, new target groups and new requirements for teaching and training. Additionally, new actors and institutions are appearing on the scene.

The dominant perspective concerning migration and adult learning still focuses on immigrants as a *target group* in education, often in a deficit-oriented manner. In contrast, migrants rarely seem to be thought of as professionals, decision makers or leaders in the field of education. This is framed as an unquestioned ‘normality’ in most cases, with ‘native’ instructors on one side and migrant learners on the other (Kukovetz and Sprung, 2014). But there are also other issues that seem to remain less acknowledged, such as the perspective on the *institutions* of adult education, which in themselves cause and reproduce exclusion. The most common debates in adult education concern the appropriate methods and concepts for teaching migrant learners, predominantly framed by the

on-going debates on integration. Meanwhile, another important aspect remains largely underdeveloped: there are still not many programmes that also address the ‘native’, majority population and which deal with social change through migration, for example, in terms of fighting racism and prejudice.

My paper discusses how adult education can deal with the topic of migration and the related issue of racism within its *organisational* dimension. I want to emphasise the issues enumerated above, which seem to have been neglected both in research and practice – that is to say, the challenges that especially institutions and their development face in terms of enhancing diversity and avoiding racism and discrimination. A critical analysis of the three main approaches is presented, which are described in the literature and referred to in the practical field (my point of reference here is mainly the German-speaking context). The concepts I employ are ‘intercultural opening’, ‘managing diversity’ and ‘fighting institutional racism’. The approaches differ in terms of their main goals, their traditions, their fields of practice and the discourses of legitimation that underlie them (for example, social justice, recognition of differences, economic success, etc.). I will also look critically at the increasing popularity surrounding ‘diversity’, and its consequences in terms of de-politicisation. In the second section, I will focus on the situation in Austria. This part draws on selected empirical outcomes of an Austrian applied research project I conducted with a transdisciplinary team between 2012 and 2014. The project involved numerous stakeholders from the field of Austrian adult education and led to the development of a strategy to raise awareness about the topic of migration and institutional discrimination in adult education. This approach will be presented in the final part of the paper.

CONCEPTS OF ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A MIGRATION SOCIETY

Intercultural opening

The first approach I want to describe is known as ‘intercultural opening’ in German speaking countries (Griese and Marburger, 2012). It was developed in the 1990s in Germany within social services and public administration. Empirical studies had shown that these services did not reach migrants to the same extent that they were accessed by native residents, although the social situation of the immigrant population indicated an even higher need for support (Barwig and Hinz-Rommel, 1995; Schröer, 2007). Several analyses identified the presence of various barriers, and so the concept of ‘intercultural opening’ (interkulturelle Öffnung) was developed in an effort to change the situation. The novelty of this approach was that *the institutions* were asked to take responsibility and to become ‘open’ for all citizens by adapting their strategies and the services provided. Before this time, many tasks concerning migrants had been delegated to specialised institutions for integration issues (which is still partly the case). The normality of a diverse society should be recognised and met in an appropriate way by *all* organisations. At first, such new concepts were implemented in public social services for children and youth, and later in other

organisations, such as hospitals and educational institutions. The public administration of the city of Munich, Germany, was one of the first organisations to develop a strategy of intercultural opening for its youth welfare office. The idea is to promote change at all levels of the organisation, including a clear mission statement, new procedures, human resources development and more concrete programmes and activities geared towards the users (Schröer, 2007; Hagemann and Vaudt, 2012). Many concepts suggested that changes should be implemented in the processes of quality management (Göhlich et al., 2013). The discourses underlying these approaches can be labelled as *equality* and *inclusion*. If we look for terms such as anti-discrimination or racism in papers on the topic, we hardly ever find anything. Some parts include implicit ideas of anti-discrimination, but the dominant wording is about inclusion.

One of the areas that can be viewed critically is terminology: when we speak about ‘intercultural opening’, the focus is on ‘culture’. Critical migration research has generated analysis on the dangers of setting up ‘culture’ as the most important category in this context. Analysing inequality in terms of cultural difference quickly leads to the ‘othering’ of migrants and to the concealment of aspects like social status and structural deficits (Mecheril et al., 2010). Another point of criticism concerns practice: we can see that most institutions that claim to work on their openness simply delegate this responsibility to their employees and tell them to become more qualified in the intercultural field (Foitzik and Pohl, 2009; Sprung, 2011). The challenge thus becomes individualised and personalised. Finally, from an intersectional viewpoint, this approach does not consider other aspects of inequality, for example, gender and age to mention only two (Winkler and Degele, 2010).

Diversity management

The second approach is diversity management, which takes into account several dimensions of diversity: not only ethnicity and religion, but also gender, age, class, disabilities and others. There has been a significant increase in the popularity of diversity management in recent years, and it is interesting to reflect on the reasons for its success. For example, it can be supposed that the idea fits rather well into the (neoliberal) semantics of managing, administration and measuring, which are also influential trends in adult education. Furthermore, the vagueness of the term might also be the reason for its high interconnectedness to many actors and institutions – in many contexts, diversity has already become a buzzword (Baader, 2013).

Diversity management originates from two sources. On the one hand, it was developed in the company management context and relates to economic goals by handling diversity as a resource. I like to call it, in reference to Abdul-Hussain and Hoffmann (2013), the *market approach*. On the other hand, it is rooted in the empowerment and civil rights movements in the USA, and aims to counter discrimination. Abdul-Hussain and Hoffmann (2013) call this the *political-normative approach*; in other words, we can identify the two poles as ‘equity’ and ‘business’ (Emmerich and Hormel, 2013). Many concepts – and this

is a central point of the critique – place the issue of economic profit at the forefront and neglect issues concerning power relations and inequality. The trend of mainstreaming processes could be seen as the ‘normalisation of difference’ (Kessl and Plößer, 2010). Consequently, programmes which focus explicitly on exclusion and discrimination could be seen as expendable (likewise affirmative action, etc.). Because of criticism in the pertaining discourse, many institutions today simply claim that they are able to combine both concerns (profit and anti-discrimination). It is doubtful whether this is even possible, or that they seriously uphold their claim (Emmerich and Hormel, 2013; Gomolla, 2013). Finally, we should reflect on whether the potential inclusion of all dimensions of diversity leads to a lack of attention being paid to specific aspects, the differences, and also the various needs that could be linked with those aspects. In practice, we often find solely a gender strategy behind the label of diversity management and merely isolated actions are realised. In many cases, an enhancement of the institution’s image is at the centre of their concerns, so we must always ask critically if this is just ‘diversity talk’ or if there is more to it. The question cannot be easily answered because the label of diversity management is used to cover different practices, which means that every case needs to be looked at more closely. I would claim that diversity itself has become diverse!

Fighting institutional racism

The third perspective is the dismantling of institutional racism, which is not a very common concept in the German/Austrian context (Gomolla, 2010). Nevertheless, I discuss it here because I think it contains important ideas in terms of fighting racism and discrimination and should become a key approach in adult education. Institutional discrimination and racism have been intensively discussed in the UK for almost 20 years. The well-known Macpherson Report drew attention to the fact that organisations and services may fail to provide appropriate support to certain people simply because of their ethnic origins (Gomolla, 2010, pp. 68ff.). Discriminatory practices are often embedded in institutional and organisational contexts. Moreover, institutional discrimination does not encompass only one organisation but a whole set of laws, political strategies, professional norms, organisational structures, established practices and values in the socio-cultural context.

Discrimination comes from prejudice as well as from ignorance and small-mindedness. Non-recognition of discrimination leads to such practices becoming an important part of an organisation’s culture (Gomolla, 2010). Racial and ethnic stereotypes act as sources of discrimination. Furthermore, sources of discrimination could be gender constructions or the category of social class (among others), which often intersect with racism.

Institutional discrimination occurs, for example, if a general rule appears to be ‘neutral’, yet nonetheless is discriminatory in its effects. This is because the different living conditions and circumstances of the people concerned are not taken into account. Institutional discrimination involves forms of direct discrimination as well as inequality that results from ‘neutral’ regulations (Hormel, 2007, pp. 79ff.). A simple example are the entrance examinations used in vocational training, which sometimes put people at a disadvantage

because they are not native speakers, or because questions might be posed in a specific way that favours the dominant cultural understanding. Equal conditions do not automatically ensure equal opportunities. Such practices ignore the fact that there are privileged and disadvantaged groups predisposed to different outcomes in realising their agency.

Compared to the two other approaches, managing diversity and intercultural openness, the idea of fighting institutional discrimination focuses explicitly on discrimination, racism and power relations. It is important to be aware of the phenomenon as not only an individual challenge but also to emphasise its structural side. A critical objection against this perspective is the risk of victimising migrants and neglecting the perspectives of the actors and their strategies.

Another difficulty – and this is especially true for Germany and Austria – concerns the fact that racism and discrimination are somehow taboo, not least because of the Nazi history of the region. When talking about racism, many people show immediate resistance and are no longer open to reflection. Nevertheless, I am convinced that we should not be too cautious or too diplomatic in this respect: it is necessary to put a name to such phenomena and to act against them. By using specific and clear terminology, we contribute to establishing new ways of understanding things and create better opportunities for appropriate action.

General challenges

We now look at some more general aspects concerning the approaches described above. What should be reflected on critically in any case is the starting point of all the concepts – strictly speaking, the idea of a specific meaningful *difference*. Difference is constructed in reference to certain characteristics, which then leads to the definition of categories and ultimately to the attribution of (educational) relevance to these categories. Consequently, reactions occur in relation to the concepts of diversity and multiculturalism and are mainly expressed in the semantics of recognition (Emmerich and Hormel, 2013, p. 13): diversity is reinterpreted from a potential problem into an opportunity. The problem is that an affirmative way of dealing with differences reproduces practices of labelling and the categories themselves. However, the practices and patterns of differentiation and ascription that underlie the approaches should generally be questioned and deconstructed (Mecheril and Tißberger, 2013, p. 69). In this way, the analysis of the social context and the interests of the different actors, including power relations, come to the fore. Without reflection on and deconstruction of the basic categories, all three concepts tend ultimately to contribute to de-politicisation.

CRITICAL WHITENESS STUDIES¹

Theories of institutional discrimination explore discrimination not only as prejudice or particular acts performed by individuals (or groups) but as embedded in the structures, rules and culture of organisations. They point to institutional responsibility to prevent racist practices. Theories of critical whiteness add a similar but in some ways different perspective to the discussion because they also analyse invisible and unquestioned norms (Colin and Lund, 2010; Tißberger et al., 2006; Röggl, 2012). White privilege becomes manifest under certain hegemonic structural and institutional conditions. But whereas theories of institutional racism mainly address the consequences for the subjects who are disadvantaged by these structures, we learn from critical whiteness theory to also draw attention to the question of how the agents of the dominant context profit from the exclusion of others. In concrete terms, these are the institutions of adult education and their representatives.

Before I discuss some ideas from critical whiteness studies, my use of the term ‘whiteness’ has to be made clear. This is important because there are several critical arguments that concern the transferability of the concept of critical whiteness to the European context – especially the German speaking one, where ‘race’ terminology has a strong biologicistic connotation in connection with the history of the Nazi regime. Furthermore, terms like ‘Black’ or ‘White’ are not often used in terms of race as a construction which refers to the heritage of slavery or white supremacy. European racism goes back to colonialism and the concept of ‘foreigners’ in terms of postcolonial migration, etc. According to Dietze (2006, p. 221), in Europe it is not ‘colour’ but ‘territory’ (in an ideological sense) which marks the meaningful difference. In addition, the new and dominant modes of racism we face in many countries today (e.g. culture-based ascriptions) are mainly directed towards Muslims or people who emigrated from certain regions which are viewed pejoratively in public discourse – this could be migrants from less developed third world countries as well as from ‘poorer’ European states. Besides this new racism, we also still find the ‘classic’ forms of racist exclusion, for example, towards people of African descent. Thus, when I talk about critical whiteness studies, I define ‘non-whites’ as those people who do not correspond to the dominant norm of white individuals in the broader sense I have explained above.

‘Whiteness’ was already at the centre of analysis in early 20th century in the critical reflections of Black authors and civil rights activists, e.g. W.E.B. Du Bois and James Baldwin. It was further developed as so-called Critical Whiteness Studies in the early 1990s (Walgenbach, 2008, p. 46; Giroux, 1997, p. 289). The concept of whiteness refers to the relation between racial categories and power, ‘concentrating on the privileges granted only to whites’ (Lund, 2010, p. 16). Generally, studies of white people presume that the subjects

¹ This chapter is based on parts of an earlier publication: Sadjed, A., Sprung, A. and Kukovetz, B. (2015). The use of migration-related competencies in continuing education. Individual strategies, social and institutional conditions. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 37 (3), 286–301.

of the study are racially neutral if racism is not being directly addressed (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 18, referred to in Lund, 2010, p. 17). Therefore, whiteness is invisible, but at the same time very powerful as it is connected with a wealth of privileges in everyday life.

As previously mentioned, the concept of white privilege is strongly related to theories of institutional racism and discrimination. Both point to invisible and unquestioned norms. White privilege becomes manifest under certain hegemonic structural and institutional conditions. Therefore, the claim of critical whiteness reflecting on white privilege has to be strengthened in theories of institutional discrimination. To change their structures, institutions must become aware of the advantages they have because of the exclusion of certain groups and be ready to give up those benefits. McIntosh (1990) compared the notion of white privilege with her experiences in the gender debate. Even though men recognised the disadvantages of women, at the same time, they did not acknowledge their own privilege; they could not see that they gain from women's disadvantages and were not willing to withdraw their privileges. McIntosh makes us aware that the same is true for white privilege. She describes this oppression as more than individual acts of racism, but as invisible and unconscious systems conferring dominance on whites. The system works by pretending that the lives of whites are the norm and even the ideal (McIntosh, 1990). McCann (2008, p. 4) puts it in a nutshell: 'The invisibility of whiteness exemplifies how whiteness is constructed as a norm, and neutral; thus, it is accepted as a universal standard.' Significantly, white privilege should also be seen in terms of intersectionality (e.g. McIntosh, 1990; McCann, 2008, p. 7, 10).

APPROACHES TO PROMOTE ANTI-DISCRIMINATION STRATEGIES IN ADULT EDUCATION – AN EXAMPLE FROM AUSTRIA

Selected findings

In a research project we conducted in Austria between 2012 and 2014, we explored how institutions of adult education deal with social change through migration. A special focus of the study was the access of professionals with migrant biographies to employment in the field of adult education. We asked participants about limiting and beneficial conditions, structural (political, institutional) frameworks and the individual strategies to develop their careers. We conducted qualitative interviews, online surveys, participatory research workshops and focus groups with experts from migrant communities and from adult education. The results concerning the individual experiences of professionals have already been presented in several publications (Kukovetz and Sprung, 2014; Kukovetz, Sadjed and Sprung, 2014). What mainly concerns us here are our findings from the interviews on institutional influences and three case studies we conducted in institutions of adult education.

Our empirical (non-representative) research suggests that most adult education institutions in Austria have not implemented far-reaching reforms of diversity or anti-discrimination. Many of them offer specific programmes for migrants, or are generally facing increasing diversity in terms of languages and cultures amongst their participants. But

there is still a kind of ‘division of business’ between the providers who feel responsible for migrants, and others who don’t make an active effort to address this target group. Besides implementing specific courses, some organisations have also reacted by suitably training their employees. Migrants seem to be underrepresented not only in educational professions but in qualification programmes for occupation in adult education as well (Kukovetz, Sadjed and Sprung, 2014).

Examples of good practice in institutions that already act on different levels to open up their organisation can be found, but these are unfortunately isolated cases. In general, providers who traditionally deal with disadvantaged learners have made more progress than others, for example, some of the folk high schools in Vienna, which has a high immigrant population. We also found some institutions in the field of women’s education to be more up to the challenge. The diversity management approach turned out to be most common and accepted. In contrast, explicit strategies aimed at anti-discrimination were found to be extremely rare.

Opening up to diversity and anti-discrimination essentially includes appropriate strategies in human resources development. Besides the necessity of continuing education for adult educators, institutions also have to reflect critically on their hiring policies. The findings of our study showed that professionals with a migrant biography face several obstacles in their access to skilled jobs in adult education. Language skills seem to be a crucial point. For example, the requirement of speaking ‘perfect’ German turned out to be a widely unquestioned norm in all institutions we talked to. Furthermore, the employers neither tried to establish the level of language skill that would actually be required in different fields of work, nor provide any support structures for migrant professionals after they had joined the organisation. These could include concrete measures to continuously improve their German skills or support strategies for certain tasks such as drafting written reports.

Another factor that proved to be difficult for the professionals was that certificates from their countries of origin were not recognised. In general, they often had the impression of not being perceived as competent people, and felt that they had to continually prove that they were effectively skilled and doing a good job. Furthermore, institutions of adult education have mostly not developed systematic procedures to protect and support migrant employees when it comes to concrete issues of discrimination (amongst colleagues or in interactions with participants).

In particular, our study identified some discriminatory effects that emerge from general regulations. For example, many institutions are funded by public employment offices within a competitive, point-based system. Institutions have to apply for funding by submitting concrete concepts for vocational training courses. Amongst other criteria, the qualifications of the educators are a crucial factor in receiving points and therefore funding. Consequently, institutions would avoid employing professionals who do not have an Austrian diploma, which disadvantages professionals with migrant backgrounds, even though they are skilled and the institution would like to employ them.

Guidelines for adult education in migration societies – development and outlook

The methodological setup of our research enabled us to use on-going participatory processes. Based on an inspiring exchange with stakeholders from adult education and migrant communities, and following intense discussions during the project's final conference in 2014, we decided to develop a strategy to raise awareness to promote anti-discrimination and diversity in the field. The participants of the conference wanted 'guidelines for adult education in migration societies' in connection with our research to be drafted. We suggested setting up a participatory process to develop the guidelines in a shared, communicative setting. This process ranged over a year and led to several meetings of working groups in different regions of Austria. The final document was agreed upon in 2015; the guidelines should evoke reflection and discussion within institutions but also provide concrete starting points and examples for change; they point to the general principles of an institution, aspects of human resource development (e.g. recruiting), language policies and so on.

The 'Bundesinstitut für Erwachsenenbildung', which is the leading Austrian institution of adult education, took on the responsibility to promote and distribute the guidelines to other institutions in the field. There have been three follow-up conferences so far, but unfortunately the process has stalled somewhat at present. We are convinced that more activities are needed to provide concrete support for institutions that are interested in taking concrete action to promote anti-discrimination. Lack of funding has meant that we have so far been unable to undertake a project to continue our work and hope that this encouraging process will be developed further soon. Nevertheless, every institution can potentially draw on the guidelines, which have been published and are now available on the Internet².

If we aim to overcome racism, white supremacy and inequalities in migration societies, and engage in establishing structures of equality, it is important to also raise awareness about these issues as institutional phenomena. Austrian adult education, as is probably the case in many other countries, has strong tendencies to reflect the white supremacy of its society. Aspects of institutional discrimination and white privilege have to be analysed in society in general, as well as in the adult education system in particular. In conclusion, I would like to mention that universities should also be a target group for the processes described in this paper and develop strategies to reflect on institutional racism and their responsibility to take action. Various efforts can be made to reduce barriers and the guidelines offer some ideas and concrete suggestions to be taken up.

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² <https://migrationsgesellschaft.wordpress.com/>

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