Title: The migrant society – and dimensions of (non-) participation in further education

Abstract

In our globalized world, the importance placed on migrational issues is rising at all levels. Especially questions of social equality and inclusion challenge the fields of educational science and practice with an ever increasing urgency. The idea of providing equal access to education for everyone seems to be one of the main tasks which educational policies and educational institutions have to achieve. Unlike in school settings, the field of adult education is confronted with the requirement of reaching their participants on a voluntary basis. Current statistics like the Adult Education survey, which involves data from 29 European countries, shows that participation among migrants is still low compared to native inhabitants (cf. Bilger 2013). And even though most of the institutes of adult education see themselves as basically open for everyone, socially marginalized groups are not reached by the offers and therefore social disparities are not reduced but widened by the system of adult education as it is presently structured.

In the following paper, research findings of a qualitative project addressing issues of participation in adult education will be presented. The project, which was completed in November 2013, focusses on the subjective reasons of German women with a so-called migration background living in Germany related to their active participation in the field of adult education. In Germany approx. 20 per cent of the population has a so-called migration background (cf. Statistisches Bundesamt 2012), but their participation in courses offered within adult education is far below the participation of those without such a background. Even though the findings of the project focus on the current situation in Germany, they can give important impulses for further thoughts for other European countries dealing with a high immigration quota.

The theoretical framework which was used for analyzing the interview data is based on two pillars. One is the social theory of Pierre Bourdieau who developed instruments to analyze power relations, disparities and social injustice, which make it possible to review the interview data within a higher social context. The second are concepts derived from postcolonial theories. Here it was especially the reception of the postcolonial theories by Paul Mecheril, professor of intercultural education in Oldenburg that was significant for the analysis. Most important were the concepts of "othering" in the form of the "natio-ethno-cultural" - other as well as the "global focus" and herein the still present impact of the colonial history on present migration issues.

On the basis of the Grounded Theory (Corbin/Strauss 2008) a qualitative research design was chosen, and in semi-structured in-depth interviews women were asked to give their personal reasons for participating. All of the women are part of the group defined by the Mikrozensus (the largest German
demographic statistic) as the group with a migration background. But according to the idea of maximal variance in the sample given in the grounded theory, they differ from each other in aspects of age (25-50), formal education, profession, motherhood, nationality, residency status, participation in adult education, etc. Especially interview data gained from women living in Germany with an illegal status, which are for obvious reasons very difficult to reach for research, made the data basis wide and interesting.

During the evaluation process of the interviews, four dimensions of reasons could be marked as central, although all can be related to the key dimension of belongingness. This key dimension includes one’s own perception of belonging as well as attributed belongingness. Another central dimension is that of civic capital which comes with a certain scope of action. This includes civil, social and political rights not only stated in the international convenant on economic, social and cultural rights of the United Nations (1966).

The third dimension relates to the role of German language proficiency, formal education and knowledge of the field of adult education. A good knowledge of the German language is the premise for most courses offered within further education. Formal educational and professional certificates have an impact depending on their official recognition in Germany. Only a recognized certificate has a positive impact. Those not accepted even have a negative effect on participation.

The last quite comprehensive dimension of the so-called migration-unspecific reasons named by the interviewees includes the following areas: Interest in the course subject, utilisability of course contents in personal and professional life as well as restrictions especially relevant to women as mothers when they have the main responsibility for child-care. All four dimensions which turned out to be relevant for the interviewees are closely intertwined and cannot be viewed as separate or independent areas if one wants to gain a thorough understanding of participation in adult education.

The dimensions are located at the level of discourses which are powerful in society (belongingness): at a political level (civic capital), the level pertaining to infrastructure and development of services by the institutions of adult education (offers in multiple languages, further-training guidance, child care etc.) as well as at the personal level (interest in the subject, utilisability of course contents in personal and professional life etc.).

As could be shown in respect to praxis-related implications, the central moment of pedagogical professionalism seems to be to act on all of the above-mentioned levels with a critical-reflexive attitude which counteracts culturalisations in a way which makes racism disputable and at the same time identifies limitations. So in the future, more work has to be done in respect to the professionalisation of anti-racist work as well in respect to the empowerment of those who still retreat from the invisible social borders formed by racism, gender and class issues.

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