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COUNSELLING IMMIGRANT ADULTS AT AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

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Introduction

The principle of promoting free mobility of citizens has been written into European educational policies. Additionally, the philosophy of educational equality has been clearly included into the educational regulation of most European countries. Furthermore, at the beginning of the twenty-first century the ideas of lifelong learning have been defined to be the goals of improving practice within the educational systems. This means that teachers all over Europe are increasingly facing students with various ethnic backgrounds of all ages and having varied educational backgrounds, life situations and work-experiences and accordingly, being in the need of diverse educational support within educational settings.

The growth in demands for equal educational rights for all inevitably strengthens the demands for the development of each teacher's skills for meeting the individual needs of learners emerging from diverse reasons and counselling them accordingly. However, with this new concentration on the needs of diverse students emerging on issues like immigration, age, race, gender, special educational needs or the like, there seems to be some uncertainty with regards to what the development of these skills might mean for practices of educational settings, their teachers and other staff and, accordingly, for teacher education.

In this article we will provide the reader with a couple of examples of how these challenges have been met within educational settings as well as a challenge to training professionals and in particular to teachers working within these provisions. However, we start with a brief introduction to adult learners, after which we continue with practical examples of dealing with immigrant students

Immigrant Adults

Diversity is characteristic of adult education. There are big differences among adult learners in ages, occupations and educational backgrounds, working life and life experiences, world views, attitudes, values and present life situations. Free and easy mobility within Europe and the rest of the world, in addition to wars and oppressions, increase immigrant populations. Furthermore, a paradigm shift has taken place in education: inclusive education emphasises that all kinds of students should have access to education, including different ethnic groups, people with disabilities, sexual minorities etc. Thus adult student groups have become increasingly diverse and multicultural.

Adulthood is one of the basic factors that brings certain aspects to work with students and shapes the educational process. It is essential to consider how we see the different aspects of adulthood and what meaning we give them in counselling. Adults as learners bring the following matters into the process:

1. Adults have much experience in education. A good number of them have obtained more than one degree or other qualification during their adult years. The need to educate oneself comes from the changes in society and working life, which demand new know-how and create new jobs and occupations, while at the same time old jobs disappear. Increasing lifelong learning opportunities in adult education also offers easier access to education for the adult population.

Immigrants often have difficulties finding adequate work relating to their education. Accordingly, they search for alternative ways to become full members of society through educational possibilities. There are wide differences in educational experiences among immigrant adults. Education systems, educational thinking, roles of teachers and students, levels of use of technology in education, as a few examples, differ from one country to another. The educational culture, which the adult immigrants have learnt, affects the students' actions in a new environment. The learners' prior socialisation to learning has to be taken into consideration (Lee & Sheared, 2002).

2. Adults have gained work experiences, which strengthen and deepen their knowledge, professional and other skills. They have learnt how to manage in different kinds of work communities.

3. Adults have life experiences, learnt to live and face different matters, joys and problems.

4. Adults are involved in many arenas of life at the same time. They have arenas of family, work, hobbies, studies and social activities and these all include different roles and responsibilities. The socio-cultural context of the learners' lives is something to take into account in the learning process (Swaminathan & Alfred, 2001).

5. Immigrant adults often have to study in their second, third or even fourth language. This fact has an impact in the educational process.

All of these matters bring several possibilities and resources into education and counselling and that is the way they are seen in our case. On the other hand, we are aware that these matters also present challenges to overcome during the educational process.

Working with immigrant adults – grounds and strategies

It has been highlighted that educators working with immigrants should have a multicultural perspective. What is meant by a multicultural perspective? Wurzel (1984) defines it as a critical and reflective understanding of oneself and others in historical and cultural contexts, an awareness of both differences and human similarities. For educators and counsellors, it means infusing practice with an awareness of their own personal and cultural background and experiences as well as those of their students or clients (Kerka, 1992).

Kerka has formed five strategies, which synthesise approaches to multicultural education, career education and development from a number of sources. The strategies are related to the atmosphere of the learning environment, curriculum, bilingualism and the language used in teaching, teaching and counselling methods, and a balanced view of students as individuals and cultural group members. We agree with Kerka that the issues mentioned are relevant in multicultural education, but we want to stress those strategies that we have found essential in adult education and working with immigrant adults.

1. Educators establish a climate of acceptance (Kerka 1992). Students have to be able to be themselves in the group. Teaching with a multicultural perspective encourages appreciation and understanding of other cultures as well as one's own (Gomez, 1991).

2. The promotion of a positive self-concept is essential. Seeing every student as a unique individual, with something to contribute, is an important strategy (Gomez, 1991, Kerka, 1992). The sense of progress and success is one of the support factors.

3. The group is an educational resource for all. Adults with very diverse backgrounds bring a lot of different knowledge, skills and views to the group. Multicultural adult groups are mixtures of different occupational fields, expertise, cultural backgrounds, languages and a wide spectrum of life experiences. It is valuable that the students learn to share their expertise and experiences.

4. Network building during education is one of the key strategies that promotes the establishment of relationships with working life and colleagues working in different organisations. The members of a diverse and multicultural student group are part of the network, which the students can turn to during the education and later on after their education. This is very important especially for immigrant adult students, who very often lack contacts, friends and relationships with surrounding communities and working life.

5. The curriculum is a kind of framework for the students. It is flexible and gives space to approach the wider issues from the students' own point of view, which is meaningful for

each of the adult students and their professional development. It is extremely important to develop a curriculum that addresses the lived experiences and real concerns of the programme participants (Lee, 2001). Lee also stresses that the underlying assumption is that if a curriculum is relevant to its participants and reflective of their needs, learners will be more motivated to participate. According to Gomez (1991) the appropriate curriculum for understanding diverse cultures is a multicultural curriculum. It promotes recognition, understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity and individual uniqueness. This curriculum is based on concepts such as cultural pluralism, intergroup understanding, and human relations. It is not restrictive or limited to a specific course, set of skills or time of year.

Best Practices from Culturally Diverse Learning Environments

Having explained the general situation relating to adult learners, we shall now provide a couple of specific examples how these challenges have been met within educational settings relating to adult immigrant students

The first of these examples regards university level education. Educational settings in UK cities have already faced the questions of a really diverse student population for a long time and no doubt the history of dealing with these questions has invented a magnitude of educational approaches. As a beginning, therefore, Dr. Pamela Clayton enriches us with some of these good practices found within educational provisions in London.

Pamela's part is followed by an example written by Ms. Irmeli Maunonen-Eskelinen about facing these questions within teacher education in Finland, which truly cannot be claimed to be a real multicultural society. Accordingly, the issues teachers face with multicultural students on a daily basis are quite different from those of their London colleagues. Irmeli's part of the article provides us with examples of training vocational teachers at Jyväskylä Polytechnic in Finland in a way that promotes prospective teachers' ideas of being counselled themselves and so being better able to understand their students and their individual needs within education and training.

Overwhelming cultural diversity challenges

The following two examples are both of universities in London, a city with the most diverse population in the United Kingdom and hence where multicultural counselling offers great challenges. Potential service users could speak any one - or more - of any of the world's languages and follow any religion, or none; have proficiency in English ranging from zero to complete; be recent migrants or asylum-seekers or be born in the United Kingdom of parents from overseas; be men or women; be of any age from sixteen upwards; have any level of formal education from none to doctoral; have no work experience or extensive professional careers; and so on. In other words, stereotyped preconceptions of a given individual based on country or ethnic group of origin are unhelpful. At the same time, however, a working knowledge of other cultures and their similarities with and differences from British culture is essential in understanding the journey of an individual from one environment to being at ease in another. To support this transit requires some kind of map - but a very complex one which recognises that 'culture' itself is many-faceted and that within a single country layers of different cultural practices and beliefs co-exist, overlap or are in conflict.

One particular culture sphere is that of the university itself. British (or more specifically, English) universities on the whole can be seen (from inside and outside) as elitist, esoteric, dominated by white middle-class males, distant from 'real' work in the sense of not producing useful goods and services but incomprehensible knowledge, and distant from the people who live close by but are not a part of the university's sphere. Academics are presumed not to live in 'the real world' or to have 'real knowledge' (or 'really useful knowledge'); and whatever their mission statements might claim, universities are not seen as working for the good of society or even of the local community. These are stereotyped perceptions, of course, but as with all stereotypes there is at least a grain of truth in them, however distorted.

If the 'native' population sees the university as alien, how much more so do the many migrants for whom there are the additional barriers of language, accepted entry qualifications, finance and the general strangeness of being perceived as an 'outsider' with tenuous rights to the benefits open to citizens. The unapproachable image of the university is not, of course, shared by many international students or highly-qualified migrants who already have a university education or come from countries where university attendance is more 'normal' than it is in the United Kingdom.

There is an apparent gulf, nevertheless, not only between community organisations and the university but also between many migrants and the university; but one bridge into the university for 'ordinary people' is via adult and continuing education, which forms an accessible and acceptable interface between 'town and gown'. The education offered can range from short courses taken for interest to master's or doctoral degrees and may include access and pre-access courses for mature students who opt for academic preparation before entering degree courses. Such a department should have a guidance and counselling worker - and in a country with an increasingly diverse population, such a person should be skilled in multicultural counselling. The two case studies which follow are of universities which specialise in meeting some of the needs of an ethnically diverse population through such multicultural counselling, the first to support educational progress and the second to support labour market entry. Where the term 'integration' is used, it means being 'at ease' in the new country and does not mean assimilation.

The first example is from **The University of East London**. With campuses in Stratford, Barking and Docklands, it is ideally placed to offer multicultural counselling. London's population includes people from every part of the world, every religion and possibly every language group. Many of these live in the East End, where over one hundred and fifty languages are spoken and where the majority of people in many areas are from ethnic minorities, whether born outside the country or in the United Kingdom to parents from outside. Indeed, the borough of Newham has the most diverse population in the United Kingdom. The University itself reflects this diversity in its activities, its staff and its student body. It offers the Africa Studies Centre, the Asian Women's Project, the

African and Asian Visual Arts Archive, the Refugee Council Archive, the Refugee Studies Centre, the Centre for New Ethnicities Research, the East London Research Group, the Health for Asylum-Seekers and Refugees Portal (HARP WEB, in partnership with other agencies) and postgraduate degrees in refugee studies.

Its staff includes experts from a range of Schools on racism, multiculturalism, human rights, migration issues, 'mixed-race' identity, multi-ethnicity, diasporas, race and community care, refugees and displaced people and migration; on bilingual children, multilingual families, multicultural education and trans-'racial' adoption and fostering; on African enterprise; and on Islamic law and feminism.

There are two aspects of the University of particular interest here. It offers counselling psychology training to a multicultural group of students by staff who are experts in multicultural counselling; and it offers multicultural counselling to individuals and groups of women, for example through programmes like New Directions¹.

Counselling activities include:

- an Immigration Advisory Service on all three campuses (drop-in or by appointment by phone or email); this is available not only to registered international students but also to prospective students, including asylum-seekers and refugees;
- information, advice and guidance on post-16 education in partnership with local communities and community organisations.

The other example of good practice summarised here is the **Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU)**. It is located in London Metropolitan University which is the

¹ I would like to thank Jasbir Panesar for introducing me to some of the women who completed one of these programmes and for much of the information on the counselling of migrant women, including that contained in *Migrant Women*, edited by Jasbir Panesar and Tony Wailey, published in 2004 by SoftNet Books .

largest unitary university in London with over 37,000 students. It has several sites, in the City and in North and East London. With students from nearly 150 countries, and located in areas of in-migration, both recent and historic, its research includes migration, integration and citizenship; social inclusion, ethnicity, access and participation in education; and human rights and social justice. Through its London SME Centre it focuses on business development and support in Black and Minority Ethnic businesses, Women Entrepreneurs and Social Enterprise organisations. As far as this paper is concerned, however, its most interesting aspect is RAGU.

The Unit was set up in 1995 for refugees and asylum-seekers arriving with higher-level and professional qualifications and seeking employment. The majority of forced migrants in the United Kingdom are well qualified but their chances of finding good-quality jobs are extremely low. The Unit aims to improve these chances through a number of measures.

For example, it works with London employers to find work placements for highly-qualified refugees. These placements are unpaid but they are supported and well-structured and, following preparatory workshops at RAGU, last for a minimum of three days a week for three to six months, thus allowing a useful depth of work experience. Another activity consists of a one-to-one advice and guidance service for highly-qualified refugees (and asylum-seekers with permission to work) who live in Greater London. This is a tailor-made programme which can last up to twenty-eight weeks and covers all the relevant aspects of seeking education, training and employment.

The RAGU team, headed by Azar Sheibani, comes from a range of ethnic and national backgrounds and the provision of a welcoming and empowering environment is one of its core values. It is not only the highly qualified whom it aims to help. It also supports and provides training for refugee community organisations and enables refugees to access higher education.

The focus of this short account, however, is a training course, which leads to the Certificate of Professional Development and lasts six months. It is aimed at refugees and asylum-seekers with permission to work, who have, or had started, degrees from their own countries, or who wish to discover where their skills and abilities fit into the British labour market.

The methods used are the Assessment of Prior (Experiential) Learning in order to identify each individual's strengths and abilities and enhance self-confidence and self-esteem; targeted training; one-to-one guidance and advice; and continuing support in the quest to find appropriate education and employment.

At the heart of the APEL process are the value of the students' past experiences and the self-discovery of their existing skills and competences. These are the foundation stones of the future employee or university student and over the course are written up into a portfolio of evidence that can be presented to employers or used to gain exemption from some university requirements or courses. On to these are added: personal development through the identification of further or more developed skills needed for employment or education; self and group awareness; improvement of communication and IT skills; labour market preparation; and cultural re-orientation to British systems and practices, including the higher education system and equal opportunities law, policy and practice. There is a combination of group and individual activities, with an individual advisor for each student and one-to-one tutorials for portfolio-writing.

The essence of multicultural counselling for migrant women and qualified refugees and asylum-seekers

Having focused on multicultural counselling with migrant women (whether forced or unforced migrants) and qualified refugees and asylum-seekers, I would like to broaden the scope. All migrants risk a degree of fragmentation and disorientation in their lives: for women, the journey to be made might include some change in gender identity, if she is to take advantage of the relative freedom on women in Europe. Migrants come from a range

of backgrounds in terms of class, wealth, education, religion, codes of behaviour, social activism and so on. It must be stressed, therefore, that the following points are general and it is hoped that the language used reflects this:

- *The metaphorical framework*

Migrants are travellers who may make many journeys before achieving their aims. Maps are essential, including a detailed map of the new country's institutions and structures. The counsellor's role is that of translator and travel guide. Whatever the starting point on the journey, the goal is a person who can direct his/her own life and organise his/her own learning. Active citizenship is at the core of this goal and is the welcome sign at the gateway to integration. Family pressures are the biggest single impediment to women's travel and for many women, marriage is an important, and can be a difficult, transition on that journey. One useful route may involve collective action with other women.

- *Approach*

Empathic: students feel that their qualifications and experience are of value, and these feelings must be encouraged and supported - it is common for, for example, a refugee doctor, to feel disheartened and disillusioned to learn that they cannot begin practising medicine again without overcoming difficult hurdles.

Practical: students need to learn that their qualifications, whatever their actual value, may not be accepted in the United Kingdom and that they may require further vocational education and training in communication skills; they also need to learn about the education and employment systems in the new country.

- *Practice*

The implications of the heterogeneity of migrants need to be taken into account, for example, in the handling of mixed groups and the choice of counsellors and outreach workers. Women-only group sessions may be essential for some women and desirable for others. The starting point for counselling is the person's own experiences and knowledge, gained at different stages of the journey - s/he is not a blank slate. It is desirable for staff to have the same ethnic background as counselees, but where the population is very

diverse this may not be practical in the short term - this has implications for the training and recruitment of counsellors. Accessibility is key - of location, of timing, of atmosphere, of support for childcare, of bilingual support. Even where a migrant speaks English there may be occasions when s/he will benefit from communication in his/her language of origin.

- *Knowledge*

Inequalities, albeit perhaps of a different nature, exist at both ends of the journey, from, for example, sex discrimination in the country of origin to racist and sexist practices in the new country - the counsellor needs to understand the nature of inequalities at different stages of the journey. Differences between groups even from the same country need to be understood thoroughly. In addition, knowledge of the educational systems and qualifications in the country of origin is essential for translation. Knowledge of the system for assessing overseas qualifications in relation to British awards and knowledge of the labour market is also needed.

- *Networking*

Close relations with employers and institutions of higher education are needed.

As a concluding remark for the examples described above it can be said that the growth in demands for equal educational rights for all inevitably strengthens the demands for the development of teachers' skills in order to meet the individual needs of diverse learners. With a new concentration on ideas such as the educational needs of immigrant students, there seems to be some uncertainty with regards as to what the development of these skills might mean for educational staff, teachers and accordingly, for teacher education.

Prospective teachers or teachers involved in their in-service training often question how they should meet a student with special educational needs, how an adult student can benefit from previous experiences, or, how to support the immigrant student's transition into society.

Accordingly, Irmeli Maunonen-Eskelinen describes how improvement to teacher education programme can help teacher trainees to meet these challenges. The Personal Learning Plan (PLP) is based on both educational theories in addition to providing teacher trainees with the practical experience of being counselled themselves, which enables them to counsel their own students in the future.

Training vocational teachers to counsel immigrant adults

When discussing what counselling is, how it is implemented and what the key principles are, we have to keep in mind that it is only one element of the learning environment as a whole, but an important one nonetheless. Counselling arises from the educational thinking, philosophy and theories that become visible through the curriculum, teaching strategies and methods, facilitation practices and support factors of learning as well as the learning atmosphere. In this article we approach counselling from the immigrant adults' point of view, using the Finnish experiences of the Jyväskylä Polytechnic, Vocational Teacher Education College, which have been acquired over more than ten years of teaching and working with immigrant adult students training to become teachers. In the following example we highlight a few grounds and principles behind the everyday practice of training teachers and introduce the Personal Learning Plan (PLP) as a tool in counselling. In this context, counselling is considered as a normal part of teachers' work, a way of facilitating students' learning, and as an element of the students' learning process. It is worth emphasising that even though the following example is from teacher education we prefer to focus more on the usage of PLP as a suitable tool also for other students. Therefore instead of speaking about teacher trainees we just talk about students.

Personal Learning Plan as a tool of counselling

How can the diversity of the students, in addition to their different needs and strengths, be taken into account in education? What are the arrangements, strategies and tools in multicultural teaching and counselling? We would like to stress that working with multicultural groups requires a wide range of methods from educators (in this article we

introduce only one tool) that have been successfully used in teacher education in Finland with multicultural groups. The starting point is that the teacher has to be able to make a class a community and involve the learners in thinking about what they want and need to learn (Lee & Sheared, 2002). Lee & Sheared argue that in so doing the teacher can begin to capitalise on both the formal and informal learning arrangements that affect students' learning and academic achievement. In the following paragraphs the nature and aims of Personal Learning Plan is described.

Personal Learning Plan (PLP) is a plan concerning the contents and forms of the studies: how each student can reach the aims of the education, taking into account their starting point. From the very beginning of the studies the intention is to explore those issues through which the student constructs the contents of their own studies. Drawing up a PLP is based on continuous and active reflection and assessment on the goals of education set. The aim of the PLP is to analyse and follow up the individual progress of the student's studies.

At the beginning of the studies the aim of the PLP is for the student to outline the paths of their professional growth and become more aware of the roads taken by analysing their background: what kinds of professional and educational phases the student has had in their life and how they have moved on through them to this education. Simultaneous with this aspect of looking back, the PLP includes a strong future perspective. The intention of initially mapping out one's professional growth is to guide the student into analysing those skills, knowledge and attitudes that they have already learnt during different phases of their life and to find new learning challenges in the context of this education.

It is important that through PLP student analyse what they have learnt during their life, which competencies they have gained, what views they have developed and get support for their self-esteem accordingly. The other important side of PLP is the future building aspect: the contents of education, learning methods and assignments have to be defined from the point of view of working life. Thus, the opportunities, demands and requirements of working life are present in the PLP process. The core idea of the PLP is

to help the student to increase their awareness of their knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and interests, and also increase awareness of working life possibilities and demands, and to work on a concrete plan to meet these demands through education.

The Personal Learning Plan includes three parts: 1) the student's study orientation, 2) the content issues of the education and 3) a concrete plan of studies. It is essential that students start to work on the PLP right at the beginning of their studies. The following questions help the students to get started in defining their study orientation:

- What phases of my educational and professional career have been especially meaningful and given direction from my development point of view? Why? What phases have been especially problematic and stifling? Why?
- What are my motives concerning this education?
- What are the most important goals in my professional development? Why?
- What are my strengths as well as developmental needs and challenges as a professional?
- What are my personal goals in this education? How can I reach them? What are my expectations? What am I, myself, ready to contribute in order to reach the goals?
- What matters will I resist during this education process? Why?
- What is my view of the educator's role and my own role as a student during the educational process?
- How suitable are the methods of the educational process (for example technology integrated learning, group working) and the implementation of self-directed learning for me, and what do they demand from me?

Multicultural education begins with the premise that students must see themselves reflected in the curriculum and must see the potential for themselves in the field in question or various fields (Iowa Department of Public Instruction. 1986). Making the PLP means commitment to the educational process and to one's own professional development.

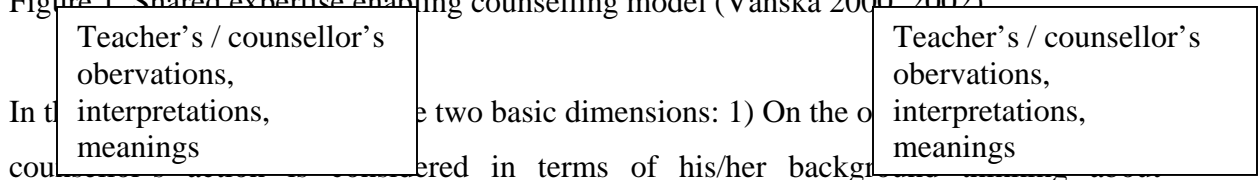
Although PLP is an individual tool for the students, they have to include their multicultural group as a resource into their learning plans. The great diversity of students' groups highlights the need for understanding and accepting the differences among all people. A multicultural group offers an excellent cultural learning arena for the students. In PLP, multicultural experience is part of the learning process

Counselling discussions

PLP is a tool of continuous dialogue between educators and students. The dialogue starts on the very first day of the course and ends when the course is finished. The counselling discussions are based on the idea of shared expertise: both the teacher and the adult learner are experts (Vänskä, 2000, 2002). The expertise of the teacher is that s/he is an expert in the learning process – for the learner's own part s/he is the expert in their life situation and context. During the counselling discussion the use of both sets of expertise becomes possible. For the educator a PLP provides much information. The role of the educator is to bring up questions and to ask the students to clarify, deepen and reconstruct their PLPs during their studies. The educator helps the students to widen their views, see alternatives and possibilities and solve problems. The educator also helps the students to recognise their progress and successes.

Vänskä (2000, 2002) has developed a counselling discussion model that allows the implementation of the idea of shared expertise. The model aims to analyse teachers' or counsellors' action in terms of learners' learning process and its different phases.

Figure 1. Shared expertise enabling counselling model (Vänskä 2000, 2002)



counselling, and 2) on the other hand it considers the intention of the counselling discussion – i.e. the purpose of discussion is to orientate the student's context or to contribute to it. The teacher's or the counsellor's ways of counselling are viewed from

the point of view of charting, inquiring into the relationships between different parts of the chart, reconstructing and supporting transformation possibilities.

The progress of the counselling discussion and the selection of counselling methods depend to a great extent on the concept of learning and, through that, the concept of counselling that a teacher or a counsellor commits him/herself to. At opposing ends of the spectrum of learning lie the constructivist and behaviourist concept of learning. The dimension of counselling contains empowerment at the one end and the traditional approach at the other.

The counselling discussion starts with orientation to the student's life context. The teacher or the counsellor becomes acquainted with the learner's thinking, language and everyday life. The teacher listens to the learner's story, history, the themes, questions and viewpoints that the learner wants to bring up in the discussion. The aim of active listening is to find a common language and develop a mutual counselling reality as much as possible, in addition to building up a confidential and respectful atmosphere and helping the student to engage in the counselling process.

Orientation to the student context could be either expert-oriented or student-oriented. In the expert-oriented way of working the teacher brings up his/her own interpretations and observation of the learner's reality, and the counselling situation continues from the basis of meanings defined by the expert, i.e. the teacher. In student-oriented counselling, the learner provides their own meanings for their reality and the ways they work, as well as clarifying, analysing and questioning their actions. The discussion continues from the learner in a student-oriented manner.

If the aim of the counselling is to affect the student's context, the teacher or the counsellor can choose as the basis of their counselling thinking to employ either a reconstructive counselling approach to the student's context or supportive counselling of a learner's transformation. When the teacher chooses a method, at the same time s/he chooses whether s/he supports the learner's autonomy or dependence. In reconstructive

counselling the teacher acts as an expert giving information, advice, models, alternative courses of action and instructions from the basis of interpretations and observations formed during the discussion. In transformation-supportive counselling the shared expertise is emphasised: the teacher acts together with the learner, activating the reflexive thinking and action of the learner. Together with the expert (the teacher), the learner creates new meanings, new possible ways of action and discusses the applicability of them to his/her own reality. The meanings, interpretations and understanding given by the learner for his/her own actions are essential in the discussion. The learner is truly concerned in the decision-making process and action related to him/her. This way of counselling requires of the teacher an empowerment approach and a constructive view of counselling.

Conclusions

The examples provided show that Europe is very diverse in its ways of meeting and living with multiculturalism. There are big differences from one country to another, between separate areas within a country and even within neighbouring districts of the same town or city. We have countries that are not only richer in their population in general but are also really multicultural, and indeed small countries with very large proportions of immigrants. In contrast, there are countries with smaller populations and only a small number of immigrant citizens. There are also countries which do not have so many immigrants but in which the population originates from several ethnic backgrounds. Accordingly, educational settings within these diverse areas face different challenges related to the provision of education and training for multicultural students. These settings are themselves in a different stage of development regarding the needs of multicultural students from the point of view of their history and the skills and experience of their staff.

Additionally, when talking about multicultural counselling, it is worth emphasising that European countries and their educational settings not only differ in their 'stages' of being multicultural but also the question of counselling itself varies from one country to

another. There are countries where the questions of counselling with its wide dimensions have been included into educational policy and theory and have also been adapted to educational structures and daily practices, as might be interpreted from the two examples provided earlier in this text. On the other hand, there are countries where these kinds of structures are yet to be developed. It is not worth trying to evaluate which of the countries, areas or individual schools might be 'on the top' in this process. More likely, we should carefully reflect what we can learn from the many diverse ways of meeting the challenge of counselling multicultural adult students.

For an individual teacher the challenge is to understand the needs of learners and to combine this knowledge with his/her teaching. Organising one's own teaching to meet the diverse needs of adult students challenges profoundly teachers' professional skills. This refers not only to pedagogical skills but also to the skills related with the content of what s/he is teaching, be it mathematics, language, carpentry, cookery or high technology. However, in the case of the learners from a multicultural background, our mind might be bound in such a way that it prevents us from seeing beyond the ethnic issues. To take a more holistic approach to educating and training our immigrant adult students might lead us – or even force us - to rethink the entire function of our own work as well as the practices of our school or university.

Building this type of courage should be one of the basic foundations of pre- and in-service teacher training programmes. There are no ready solutions for the education of multicultural students. As teachers we are facing the lifelong task of considering the most reasonable goals for learning and teaching. The basic question, however, is about human life and learning. The way in which we understand learning also opens up goals for ourselves and requires that we consider the ways in which these may be achieved.

The changes towards improvements in the quality of life for immigrant adults start primarily from the changes occurring in their environment. The starting point is to change the attitudes of those working with immigrant students to realise these students' opportunities for learning and find clear aims and methods for reaching these. For this the

teacher must have the sensitivity to detect the personal needs of someone who might be dependent upon them. The challenge for teachers in developing their own practice is targeted largely on gaining more personal understanding. To learn to acquire more autonomy is a lifetime challenge – both to immigrant students and to those who are teaching and counselling them.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

The following questions can be discussed in pairs and/or small groups after having read the article above.

1. Imagine you are a refugee or a migrant who has just arrived in a new country. You can speak the language well enough to communicate with a guidance counsellor. You want to be able to get a job when possible. What do you need to know?
2. Imagine you are a guidance counsellor and a refugee or migrant has just walked into your office. S/he speaks your language well enough to communicate, and wants to get a job when possible. What do you need to know in order to be able to give the best guidance?
3. Imagine you are a trainer in vocational guidance and counselling. You are developing a course in guidance for refugees and migrants. What activities will you design for your students?

SOURCES

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USEFUL WEBSITES

Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit, London Metropolitan University:
www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu/home.cfm

University of East London: www.uel.ac.uk

The Equal Development Partnership 'Asset UK': www.asset-uk.org.uk

Mainstreaming vocational guidance for refugees and migrants: www.gla.ac.uk/rg (in progress)

Development of European Concepts Concerning the Qualifications and Competences of Women Immigrants Useful for their Vocational Training: www.gate-hh.de