

Second language learning in campaign organisations: means for endorsing students' social involvement.

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Abstract

The provision of second language courses is a means through which campaign organisations promoting a more egalitarian, integrated and inclusive society are trying to achieve their aims. It is expected that, through these classes, migrant students will be enabled to break their isolation and to become more socially involved. This paper explores whether this can actually be achieved and if so the pedagogical factors and conditions that can endorse migrant students' social involvement. The findings are based on a qualitative research conducted in two such organisations. Choices of pedagogy regarding teaching methods, curriculum and extra-curricular activities are some of the most eminent factors that have emerged as influencing students' social involvement. These are all issues that can offer the basis for a critical examination of the social effects of our teaching, whatever the nature of our discipline or students.

Key Words

Migrants' education, second language education, social participation, social purpose adult education,

Introduction

Historically, adult education has been influenced by each era's socio-political circumstances. At the same time, it has endeavoured to influence these circumstances. The distinctive experiences, responsibilities and agency associated with adulthood, render adult education a space where social issues can be contested and fought for. This is especially the case in the "social purpose" tradition of adult education, which envisages the progress of society towards a more egalitarian form, through contesting and reworking notions of citizenship (Martin, 1999). Accordingly, proponents of this tradition aim to construct "really useful knowledge" (Johnson, 1988), which can inform ordinary people's struggles for social change. In the past, the working classes and women have used adult education, both individually and collectively, to better their position in society (Fieldhouse, 1996). Similarly nowadays, adult education is often employed by migrants¹ as a means for fighting against their socio-economic exclusion.

¹ In this study, by the term 'migrant' is meant any person who has left their country for push reasons, whether that is ill-treatment, persecution or poor conditions of living, given that people's circumstances cannot fall neatly under legal categories and may change back and forth through time. Castles (2000) argues that any previous distinctions between types of migrations are becoming increasingly meaningless, as economic push factors in an area of the world are increasingly intertwined with national and international political issues. The ambiguity of the Geneva Convention's definition of the term 'persecution' creates a further paradox in the way refugees are distinguished from economic

Solidarity and the building of alliances are important elements of this adult education tradition (Thompson, Shaw & Bane, 2000). Accordingly, this approach to adult education holds a dialectical and organic relation with social movements and campaign organisations (Martin, 1999). Some campaign organisations provide adult education courses as part of their strategy. In the case of organisations that support migrants' rights, these courses often focus on second language learning, considering the ability to communicate in the dominant language as key to empowerment and inclusion.

Adult educationalists hold different views in relation to the actual contribution adult education can have towards the process of social change. Nonetheless, while generally agreeing upon the limitations of adult education in generating social transformation, most theorists do not doubt the learning nature of the process through which people become subjects of change (Thompson, 2000; Torres & Freire, 1993). Having myself been a tutor in campaign organisations, it felt important to explore whether and how migrant students become subjects of social change through second language courses in such organisations. This study² thus looks into:

- the extent to which migrant students' social involvement can be actually endorsed through second language courses and
- the pedagogical factors and conditions that endorse migrant students' social involvement.

Social involvement: a means for migrants contesting their social position

Social involvement, within the framework of active citizenship, is one of the limited avenues for migrants to claim a place in society. Active citizenship on the other hand refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities actively participate in their community in an attempt to influence their socio-political environment (Chanan, 1997). The term social involvement embraces any non-solitary activity outside work and family that the individual chooses to engage with. As such, it refers to both conventional and interventionist forms of social participation. Not all students will be interested in social involvement to the same degree, in the same way or for the same ends. Some will perceive participation as a channel for challenging social realities. Others will just want to get on with their lives, but this still entails a certain level of participation both in small networks of people and in wider social structures. Literature links theoretically adult education to active citizenship (Field & Bron, 2001; Martin, 2003; Tobias, 2000). However, it does not explain how this link works. To explore this link practically, issues of pedagogy and curriculum are examined comparatively in the following two educational settings with migrant students.

Second Language adult education in campaign organisations: Glasgow and

migrants. For some social groups the ill-treatment is more likely to first manifest itself in serious economic deprivation and marginalisation (Dobe, 2000). Lastly, economic migrants and refugees enter the host country through similar legal routes and often both face similar experiences in the receiving country, such as material deprivation, legal problems that exclude them from participating in the country's socio-political life, uncertainty surrounding their stay and experience of living in two cultures simultaneously – mentally in one and physically in another (Stead et al, 1999). Still, in the analysis of our data there will be recognition of the differences between economic and political migrants, regardless of their legal status but depending on how each person defines themselves as.

² This study is part of a wider research, which explored the same issues but also included second language providers beyond campaign organisations. The findings of the wider research reinforce the conclusions presented in this paper.

Athens

Glasgow and Athens have both experienced in the last decade an unforeseen arrival of significant numbers of newcomers. However, these cities have had a different tradition in adult education as well as a distinct political culture. Yet, in both societies we find campaign organisations that offer legal and social support for migrants, part of which are the English and Greek language courses respectively.

Second language classrooms are a major space for migrants' interaction with others, as well as one of the first sites of establishing dialogue with members of the local community. Moreover, these courses provide a gateway to informal networks and voluntary sector organizations that students might be interested in (Bellis & Morrice, 2003). As such, they provide the linguistic, cultural and social basis for migrants' socio-political involvement, whether that is conventional or interventionist. This is expected to be the case especially in the language courses that take place within campaign organisations – like the ones in this study.

The particularities of second language courses that take place within campaign organisations relate to the fact that their founding mission is the empowerment of migrants and the integration amongst communities. It is expected that the tutors volunteering in such courses will also share these aims. Besides the tutors, migrants in such courses will come into contact with other supporters and volunteers of the organisation, who will be active citizens. As such, it is anticipated that, in addition to the learning of the language, these courses will also promote students' the social involvement.

The goal of the campaign organisations of this study is the filling of the gap found in both cities in relation to language courses provision, especially for the most vulnerable migrant social groups. These are mostly women in Glasgow, who either because they have young children or because of fear to leave their area, are unable to attend the English classes provided in the further education colleges, which are funded by the state and can lead to certification. The students of this group tend to be jobless. In the case of Greece, the target-groups are undocumented migrants and people whose working hours do not allow the participation in the publicly funded courses that can lead to certification. In both cases, the classes comprised of both economic and political migrants and of a variety of nationalities. Thus, the main differences between the two groups were gender and employment.

The courses in both these organisations are open *gratis* to all, regardless of language level, legal status or ability for regular attendance. They are funded by volunteers and supporters, and are therefore free from state or private funders' restrictions, that could be found in more formal educational institutions. As such, they are not linked with certification or citizenship requirements and do not follow the interrelated language curricula. Instead, tutors draw from a variety of language resource books and develop their own material based on the level and interests of their students.

The Glasgow organisation is a voluntary organisation focusing on refugee issues. The courses take the form of outreach work in areas where asylum seekers have been dispersed. The non-formal setting of the classes means that even if there is a crèche provision, younger children can be present in the classroom. A coordinator is always

present during the lesson, providing advice on legal or other issues and informing students of other activities and events in which they could participate. The class is a two-hour session twice a week, but students are encouraged to participate in other local activities, such as women's groups, assertiveness courses and youth clubs.

The campaign organisation in Athens is an explicitly political organisation, based in the city centre. Many migrant communities direct their members to this organisation. No childcare facilities are offered during the twice a week two-hour sessions. In the building, there is a café/bar, which is frequented by both migrants and members of the local community and where meetings of campaigns related to minority rights take place. The co-location of the classes with the café/bar offers to students stimuli for their own social involvement in these activities.

Methodology

This study is a critical educational research, which endeavours to create knowledge that is situated and which has the capacity to generate praxis (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Hence, its value lies in its connection with the tasks of progressive social forces (Horkheimer in Williams & May, 1996:121). A critical methodology embarks on an inquiry of a transactional nature, involving a dialogue between the investigator and the objects of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

For the purposes of the study, 12 semi-structured interviews with both students (8) and tutors (4) of these two courses were conducted, which were supplemented by observation of the lessons (4). The interviews with the students included questions on their perceptions of what the course should entail, issues discussed in the classroom, contact with other students outside class hours, and changes in their social participation as a result of this experience. The tutors were also asked about their ideas on what the lesson should entail, their motivation for volunteering in this kind of work and the perceptions of their role. The answers of the interviewees were analysed comparatively between organisations. In addition, the answers of students were analysed in relation to the answers of their tutors. Finally, the interview data were compared with the notes taken during the observations.

Second language adult education and social involvement

The interviews reinforced the starting premise of this study, according to which second language courses are essentially social spaces. Apart from the incentive of acquiring better communicative abilities, equally prevalent for enrolling in these courses was the social motive to meet new people – whether classmates or others. As a Adlin,³ a student in Glasgow, said:

I need the language. It helps in making friends, and the teachers help in many other ways.

Similarly, Irene in Athens argued that the reason for coming to the class was that he wanted:

to meet Greeks and talk with them about all sorts of things.

³ The names are pseudonyms.

These motives might not be directly related to active citizenship, but they are an important first step for social involvement. Research has identified two ingredients as key for any social involvement to take place. The first is the actual creation of human affiliations, contact with existing social groups and the creation of new communities (Holford & Van der Veen, 2003; Coare & Johnston, 2003). The second is dialogue on social and political issues as a means of generating ideas, building solidarity and creating visions for the future (Merrifield, 2002; Schuller et al, 2002; Holford & Van der Veen, 2003). Within this framework, we can see that fulfilling the expressed migrant students' motives is a first step for endorsing social involvement.

Similarly, tutors consider the encouragement of interaction among students as important. Yet, they are confused about the degree to which this is part of their role. In Glasgow, empathy, a desire to help and an interest in other cultures were the motives behind becoming a second language tutor in the campaign organisation. As a tutor, Sandie, explained, she wanted to become involved with the asylum issue and also she:

always had an interest in getting to know people from other parts of the world. But also because [she] lived in Thailand before, [she] felt empathy for people arriving in Glasgow unable to speak the language. So, when a friend who used to be a volunteer was trying to find someone to cover for him, [she] offered straight away.

However, when asked whether encouraging students' involvement is part of the tutor's role, she responded in a conflicting manner, claiming that:

It's not my job. I haven't really thought about it. All the students here have children and their participation is through them. I don't think it's my role.

On the other hand, the other tutor, Catherine, argued that although she volunteered to practice teaching and not to support the social or political aims of the organisation, she considered the endorsement of involvement in the form of creating a community as part of her role as an second language tutor. From the above, we see self-contradiction in the way tutors in the Glasgow organisation perceive their role in relation to endorsing social involvement.

Very different aims and perceptions were expressed by the tutors in Athens, who took an overtly political stance and their motivation was correspondingly political. Their wider aims were coexistence and acceptance among all communities. Thus, both tutors from this organization argued that their role was to support those students who want to be socially involved and that the reason for doing this work was to actively show solidarity towards migrants:

It's volunteer work. I do it because of a feeling of solidarity towards migrants and because of my political principles.

Danai

From the above, we see that social involvement – to a greater or lesser extent – is a key motive for participating in a language course in campaign organisations for both students and tutors. This supports Bellis and Morrice's (2003) argument about the

importance of the social aspect of adult education courses for migrants. It also coincides with my own experience as a tutor in campaign organisations and it is the reason behind embarking on the exploration of the extent to which achieving social involvement is possible, as well as of the ways through which it can be achieved.

i. Educational Methods

Jarvis (2002) argues that adult education can encourage social involvement using both teaching methods and the curriculum. In relation to methods, he suggests that there should be an emphasis on collaborative learning and the use of democratic teaching styles. Yet, he does not specify how this link works. Jarvis's opinion is shared by tutors in Glasgow, who aimed to help their students build social networks amongst themselves through non-formal educational activities. It was expected that in this way students would increase their social capital,⁴ which in turn would further their social involvement. In this way, the Glasgow tutors articulate the link between social involvement and teaching methods. As Catherine said:

It's a social thing, a key to the community itself. Through casual learning they turn into a group, and they'll be hopefully helping one another even out with the centre.

This perception coincides with the claim of Schuller et al. (2002), according to which the social space of an adult education class provides an excellent opportunity for network building. An interesting observation was that the more a tutor perceived the social aspect of the course as important, the more successful students were in developing such networks. Yildiz, a student of such a tutor said:

I've made friends, I feel part of [the neighbourhood].

Thus, it was discerned that using non-formal pedagogy to create social networks generates a friendly climate amongst students within the classroom, yet it is insufficient for endorsing interaction beyond the class walls.

A student-centred pedagogical approach is also linked to a less hierarchical relationship between educators and students. When this relationship allows students to contribute towards matters related to the course, students gained confidence to voice their ideas and to take the initiative of organising by themselves extra-curricular activities or events. Similarly, the only student interviewees who expressed a personal opinion and made recommendations about the course were from the classes that encouraged students to think about and to contribute towards class matters. In a similar way, Martin (2003) maintains that adult education classes, in order to endorse active citizenship, should become themselves models of democracy in practice. Nevertheless, for students to get a voice "it does not suffice to 'let' them have it, for they still have to *take* it" (Castoriadis, 1997:10). Tutors need to help students believe

⁴ The concept of "social capital" often appears in adult education literature for citizenship and mostly draws from Putnam's theory (e.g. Merrifield, 2002; Mayo, 2000; Johnston, 2003; Dekeyser, 2001). Putnam (2000:19) defines social capital as the 'social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them'. In other words, social capital for Putnam (1995:67) is the 'features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit'.

that what they think actually matters, and for this to be achieved necessitates more than the breaking down of classroom hierarchies through the use of teaching methods.

ii. **Extra-Curricular Activities**

Providing information about events, as well as exhorting students to involve themselves in these activities, are further means through which tutors in this study try to endorse social involvement. In Glasgow, the coordinator of the course offers the students further information about activities, classes and events in which they can take part. These are very important for students' social life and as a student said:

I go to the Women's Group meetings and to parties organised, I go to whatever is organised [by the campaign].

Maya

In Athens, the tutors organise social and educational activities for the students, such as visits to theatres and archaeological sites. Apart from these extra-curricular activities, tutors sometimes organise parties and invite students along to meeting and demonstrations. In particular, activities related to folk and popular culture (e.g. visits to folk museums, outings to taverns) have helped students recognise similarities between their country's culture and the local community's culture:

It makes me realise that there are common things between Greece and Moldavia. Things that I saw in the Museum, for example, the loom. We had the same in my village in Moldavia.

Eugen

I see how people here are like in my country. Syrians and Greeks are actually quite alike.

Raed

This requires a critical interculturalist approach (Papageorgiou, 2010), according to which diversity is a resource, whilst at the same time learners concentrate on common purpose. In this way, we move beyond the superficial celebration of differences of multiculturalism, which was found in the Glasgow class and which demotivated students from socially involving with the local community. Accordingly, we see a very different impact of the discussion of culture in the Glasgow class in Adlin's reply on whether these discussions are of value as discrete elements of the course:

I like talking about the different cultures. It's very important to know the culture my children grow up in, even if I want them to remain Tamil. I see the Scottish culture where they marry at 16 and I don't like that.

One could say that the reason for the different responses is the degree of proximity between host and migrant communities. Yet, the elements found as culturally similar or diverse can be found anywhere. It is therefore a matter of perspective and of teaching approach.

As follows, the recognition of even small commonalities was found to lessen students' feelings of cultural alienation, thus increasing their interest in the wider culture and encouraging the development of an identity that is less bound by national characteristics and that is instead future-oriented. This identity, in turn, can connect students with other people and ideas, which according to Holford and van der Veen (2003), is key for social participation.

Accordingly, the class is an important space for building one's social circle. Half of the students interviewed have developed contact with classmates outside the class and most of them consistently attend extra-curricular activities arranged by the organisations. Students prefer that outings are planned by their tutors. Beginners are especially apprehensive about what to do and where to go given that they find it communicatively difficult to make arrangements. Furthermore, if the tutors themselves are present at the events, the possibilities for the students to attend are far greater. Extra-curricular activities can be organised either in a more impersonal manner by the organisation or more casually by the tutors themselves. In the latter case, not only are students keener to participate, but they also start arranging activities themselves. It was in such a class that:

a student organised a Turkish night for the International Women's Day. This =grew out of the class and they all went to that.

Sandie

As that student said, this would not have happened if her tutor had not been organising other events for them beforehand.

iii. Society and politics in the curriculum

As mentioned above, Jarvis (2002) claims that, apart from the teaching methods, choices relating to the curriculum can encourage or discourage adult students' social involvement. Discussions on cultural and social themes can enter the curriculum of second language education either as an integrated or as a dedicated element of the course. Social themes can be integrated as topics of communicative activities. In this way, when practising oral skills, the tutor can encourage students to discuss social issues. Alternatively, social issues can be discussed separately. Nowadays it is widely accepted that the teaching of language should be accompanied by that of culture/society (Byram & Grundy, 2003; Corbett, 2003). In this way, culture/society becomes an independent component of the class, in the same way as are grammar, reading comprehension or listening. It is in this course component of culture/society that the tutor has the choice of discussing high or popular culture, political institutions or political culture, customs or social problems affecting the students' lives.

Although all tutor interviewees discuss social and cultural issues to a certain extent, the tutors in Athens proclaimed their dedication to expanding the content of their teaching in order to include topical political and social issues:

It's not just a matter of language. They need to use this language within the context of their life here. They need to know what is going on in this country for practical reasons but also they need to be able to discuss about it. Just like we do. It's necessary for their integration.

Anna

These tutors intended to set their students thinking about social and political problems. Obviously the linguistic ability in a beginners' class limits the possibilities for dialogue on such themes, and we cannot ignore the power issues affecting a dialogue that takes place between second and first language speakers (students and tutors). However, this does not prevent tutors in Athens from broadening the curriculum as soon as it becomes possible. After focusing on developing communicative speech, which is essential for the students' daily life, tutors in Athens encourage the exchange of experiences and opinions. Literature, songs and articles from newspapers that tutors and students bring along to the class are materials used to initiate dialogue. In this way, topical political and social issues grow to be elements of the class with the intention of exchanging opinions, and sharing views on the future possibilities of society.

In contradistinction, the Glasgow tutors include elements of culture and society in the curriculum in order to further their students' understanding of the local community. To do this they transfer knowledge about institutions:

I maybe tell them about the background of the UK, but that's all. I avoid politics and religion, as would be the case in any educational setting.

Catherine

The argument for tutors avoiding political themes is that of neutrality, which is seen as a prerequisite for professionalism. Yet, the incompatibility between neutrality and education has been acknowledged by many educators and will not be discussed here any further (Freire, 1972). More specifically, in relation to minority education, Arshad (1999) comments how multiculturalism has gained force over anti-racism as the latter has a political thread, whilst the first can appear to be neutral and therefore professional. However seductive, though multiculturalism can be in providing the illusion of respecting diversity, it conceals the reality of everyday inequalities and constructs ethno-cultural barriers (Malik, 2001). This choice of neutrality raises serious questions, especially when it is being made by *volunteer* tutors and particularly volunteers in a *campaign* organisation.

Obviously society cannot be shut off from the classroom. Social problems related to students' lives crop up in all second language classrooms. Where the tutors agreed to discuss social issues as long as these were not politicised, problems were treated as personal rather than as social:

There's no time for such discussions. I can talk about problems, like racism, with my social worker.

Adlin

A description of personal problems in itself remains a therapeutic process and, even though it might bring people closer together, it has limited possibilities for building solidarity amongst a group. This attitude, therefore, does little beyond generating a pedagogical comfort zone (Ecclestone, 2004) that makes the oppressed feel good about their victimisation, thus limiting the potential for social involvement.

When students were asked if they considered the discussion on social or cultural issues as an element of the class, their answers consistently mirrored the views of their tutors. So, students of tutors who spend time on the discussion of such themes, all saw

society and culture as an integral part of the lesson. On the other hand, those students whose tutors avoid such discussions dismissed the appropriateness of such elements as course components.

We don't talk, and I don't want to talk about social problems in the class.

Adlin

Yet, even students in classes where social and political issues of the host country entered the classroom in a purely informative manner valued the inclusion of these elements in the curriculum. Awareness of these subjects was perceived as necessary for functioning in society and – for those students in particular who were already socially involved – it was perceived as valuable for furthering their socio-political engagement.

I've been doing political fight for twenty-five years. I want to learn how the Greeks think, and a good teacher wants to know about us. I want to discuss more about politics. And generally everything, because I want to have the language to speak with the Greeks about everything.

Haşim

This finding supports Elliott's (2000) argument that adult education curriculum should include topics relating to the nature of the civil society and institutions, and that it should provide an informed understanding of participants' social rights. Given that it is unavoidable for tutors to indirectly put forward their views on social reality, this study found evidence that an open and critical discussion of socio-political issues does not mean that students will adopt the views of their tutors more than if such conversations are avoided. Evidence could actually direct us to the opposite conclusion, as the students who were the most confident in expressing their opinion, were the students whose tutors welcomed dialogue. This conclusion is also backed up by students' responses, which attributed importance to the sharing of experiences and exchange of opinions with one another, and which indicated that it was this internal interaction that contributed towards their understanding and interest in the wider society.

Therefore, the exclusion of the political from the classroom can be immensely detrimental to students' social involvement. Holford and Van der Veen (2003) have identified three prerequisites for the learning of active citizenship and social participation. These are a sense of agency, coping with social issues and developing opinions and ideas that connect the student to others. Drawing from the above, all these aspects of the students' learning are seriously undermined if the educator is unwilling to engage in critical discussions relating to social problems and political issues. Finally, the ability to question and the interest in public issues offers migrants the capacity "to interrogate the claims and activities done on their behalf" (Crowther & Tett, 2001:108), and is therefore a key objective of any adult education course that reflects the "social purpose" tradition.

Conclusions

Accordingly, second language courses in campaign organisations can indeed provide a first step for migrants' social involvement. The degree of student involvement depends on the extent to which students are encouraged by their tutors to participate to events and to discuss social issues. Through the exploration of socio-political curriculum, students become more aware of topical issues, feel less alienated and grow to be increasingly interested in the host society. This is a first step towards developing a critical understanding of society and towards accessing an informed understanding of social rights (Elliott, 2000), necessary elements for a more interventionist form of social involvement. Moreover, with the development of social networks, students are enabled to break their social isolation, whilst with the appropriate stimuli, in some cases students form alliances and foster collective identities that could potentially develop into interventionist social involvement (Coare & Johnston, 2003).

Although interventionist social involvement might be a goal, the value of conventional social participation should not be undermined. Commonplace interaction and communication that takes place on an everyday basis, "in the context of neighbourliness and of learning together as an everyday process of dwelling in the real world" (Phipps, 2007:26) is particularly important. This interaction, not only is genuine and a fact of life, but it is also influential in encouraging a cosmopolitanised frame of mind (Beck, 2002).

There are undoubtedly further issues that need to be explored in relation to students' social involvement. On a structural level, these can be the impact of a society's educational tradition and the influence of immigration policy. On an individual level, we could explore the effect of a student's legal status or of their previous socio-political experience. Still, the findings discussed in this paper could be expanded to other educational settings, whatever the nature of the subject or the situation of the students. Considering the impact educational experiences have on students' social involvement, adult educators should carefully reflect on their pedagogical choices. Moreover, the nurturing of social actors should not be simply seen as a side aspect of the lesson, but as an integral part embedded both in the activities, methods and content of the course. Only in this way can adult education reclaim its socio-political significance and role.

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