

Development of new approaches to migrants' education and exchange of practical pedagogical models

“What can the education system do to promote the personal and academic growth of young people with flight and migration history and to create social cohesion and peace in a diverse society?”

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to describe a process of international collaboration between two Universities, one located in Lower Austria and the other in New York City. The goal of this joint research project is to develop a Toolkit as a resource guide for all stakeholders in migrant youth education. This comparative study (NYC and Lower Austria) is aiming at designing new and effective pedagogical approaches to promote educational success among young migrants in two different regions of the world, and to contribute to social cohesion in educational institutions and in societies they are living in. The theoretical framework that guides our work is the Social Ecological Model. The methodology employed included a qualitative data collection through moderated group discussions with students, headmasters, school directors, teachers, and parents.

Die Wege junger Migrant*innen im schulischen Bildungssystem von Niederösterreich und New York City

„Was kann das Bildungssystem dazu beitragen, das persönliche und schulische Wachstum von jungen Menschen mit Flucht- und Migrationsgeschichte zu fördern und den sozialen Zusammenhalt und Frieden in einer Migrationsgesellschaft zu schaffen?“

Zusammenfassung

Die Absicht dieses Artikels ist die Beschreibung eines Prozesses der internationalen Zusammenarbeit zwischen zwei Universitäten, eine Hochschule in Niederösterreich und die andere in New York City. Das Ziel dieses gemeinsamen Forschungsprojekts ist die Entwicklung eines Toolkits als Leitfaden für alle Interessengruppen in der (Aus-)Bildung von Migrant*innen. Diese vergleichende Studie (NYC und Niederösterreich) zielt darauf ab, neue und effektive pädagogische Ansätze zu entwickeln, um den Bildungserfolg junger Migrant*innen in zwei verschiedenen Regionen der Welt zu fördern und zum sozialen Zusammenhalt in Bildungseinrichtungen und in Gesellschaften, in denen sie leben, beizutragen. Der theoretische Rahmen, der unsere Arbeit bestimmt, ist das „sozioökologische Modell“. Die Methode umfasste eine qualitative Datenerhebung durch moderierte Gruppendiskussionen mit Schüler*innen, Schulleiter*innen, Direktor*innen, Lehrer*innen und Eltern.

Keywords:

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Schlüsselwörter:

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1 Introduction – Background and Purpose of the Study

Based on the report of the independent Migration Council, the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior has set the goal of communicating the results of this report broadly and in depth. In collaboration with the Federal State of Lower Austria and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, represented by the University College for Education of Lower Austria (PH NÖ), the plan is to establish a so-called “Migration Centre mc²” in Melk, Lower Austria. The centre will provide tools for migration education/pedagogy and serve as a meeting point for relevant educational stakeholders to learn more about migration topics in a wider context. It should attract teachers, parents, students, and other relevant educational stakeholders and support their work with information on migration, integration and inclusion related topics.

On the initiative of Rector Univ.-Prof. DDr. Erwin Rauscher (University College for Education of Lower Austria) in collaboration with Dr. Alfred Posamentier from the Long Island University (LIU) in Brooklyn, this research project was initiated. The main objective of the project is to provide essential outcomes and results that feed into the planning and development of the “mc²” in Melk.

The outcomes of this research project will impact teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders like the Austrian Federal Ministry of Interior and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education on how to manage migration within various contexts (in the school, in the communities and in the society) and how education contributes to achieving integration, inclusion and social cohesion in a migration-society. This research aligns with the Report of the Migration Council in Austria and is a comparative study between Lower Austria and New York City.

1.1 Objectives and Expected Outcomes

The goal of this comparative study is to gain insights into experiences and strategies of young migrants that promote a successful development in formal and non-formal educational settings and to investigate what factors contribute to educational success and social inclusion.

The joint research project is a comparative study (NYC and Lower Austria) aiming at opening new approaches to the global and local understanding of migration, learning from each other, developing and exchanging practical examples that help educational stakeholders to deepen the topics of migration, integration and inclusion in their work practice.

The main activities are:

- To identify good practices and successful experiences and strategies of all target groups to build on for future success;
- To develop and disseminate a “Migration Toolkit” for all educational partners and stakeholders: the toolkit will include ideas, suggestions and concrete implementation examples for practitioners as well as provide findings and recommendations;
- To advocate for schools and education: to highlight the important role of schools in educating and integrating young migrants and refugees which has strong relevance and importance to the entire society;
- The above activity outputs should feed into the future “Migration Centre mc²”.

1.2 Research Questions

The research project will address the following research questions:

- How does education contribute to create and sustain social cohesion and peace in a diverse society and within migrant communities?
- What are the factors of success in personal, academic growth, and career development?
- How does education (schools) contribute to personal growth and (career) development?
- What experiences and strategies of young migrants promote success in formal and non-formal educational settings?
- What factors contribute to personal growth, social integration and educational success?

2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

A literature analysis was conducted to describe the state of the research on the topic. The analysis included research articles, reports as well as grey literature if relevant and with a focus specifically on the recent

publications since 2015. The findings of the data collection and literature analysis were compiled in a report and serve as a background for the analysis of the data collected.

The Social Ecological Model was selected to guide the development of the structured qualitative interviews and group discussions. This model has been widely used across disciplines of psychology, sociology, social work, public health and anthropology, among others. It is flexible and provides a framework that is cross cultural. As such, it is well suited for multi-purposes and can easily be applied to cross cultural studies. It is recommended also by the CDC¹ and used by UNICEF² in the work with violence prevention.

The Social Ecological Model (SEM) is a theory-based framework for understanding the multifaceted and interactive effects of personal and environmental factors that determine behaviours, and for identifying behavioural and organizational leverage points and intermediaries for psychosocial health promotion with individuals, family and interpersonal networks, communities and organizations.

There are five nested, hierarchical levels of the SEM: Individual, interpersonal, community, organizational, and policy/enabling environment (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1: Social Ecological Model (SEM)

Within this model, we can develop questions that target each of the five levels of SEM to create a comprehensive “Migration Toolkit”. Questions can be developed for interviews with individual children (level 1); with interpersonal immediate figures in the child’s world (friends, family, parents, etc. (level 2); questions that examine communities that shape the child’s world, i.e. school, faith-based organizations (level 3); questions that examine organizational and social institutions (level four); and finally, local, state, national policy considerations (level 5).

Table 1, below, provides an outline of the kinds of questions we can develop for the corresponding level. We can adapt this model to suit our needs. We may choose to include or exclude the variables associated with each of the levels. This is intended as a general guide that we can shape according to our specific needs.

SEM Level	Description (can be extended)
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Characteristics of an individual that influence behavior change, including knowledge, attitudes, behavior, self-efficacy, developmental history, gender, age, religious identity, racial/ethnic identity, sexual orientation, economic status, financial resources, values, goals, expectations, literacy, stigma, and others.
Interpersonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal (and informal) social networks and social support systems that can influence individual behaviors, including family, friends, peers, co-workers, religious networks, customs or traditions.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationships among organizations, institutions, and informational networks within defined boundaries, including the built environment (e.g., parks), village associations, community leaders, businesses, and transportation.
Organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizations or social institutions with rules and regulations for operations that affect how, or how well, for example, educational services are provided to an individual or group.
Policy/Enabling Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local, state, national and global laws and policies, including policies regarding immigration, the allocation of resources for access to healthcare services and education, restrictive policies that limit resources.

Table 1: A Description of Social Ecological Model (SEM) Levels.

3 Research Design and Methods Used

To better understand the systems and population of migrant children, researchers from Austria and New York City conducted exchange study visits. Since the school systems and access to public schools and study population in Austria and the US are different, the participants of both studies were/will be selected through different processes. It was agreed that the Austrian study will be conducted in German, and all transcriptions and data will be translated into English.

To collect the data it was decided to conduct group discussions with students and expert group discussions with stakeholders. The aim of the group discussion was to discuss challenges and solutions related to the research questions (see above). An assessment of the actual needs of individuals, school partners and school communities in relation to the subject described was included to the group discussion.

3.1 Study Participants of the Austrian Study

The aim of the group discussions with students was to examine collective experiences and orientations of groups (see Bohnsack, 2010). To this end, it is necessary that participants have a free-flowing discussion, relating to each other. Contributing in a group discussion is determined by the willingness of participants to open and by their trust in the researchers and moderators as well as in the other participants. Consequently the composition of the group is a crucial factor determining the outcomes of a group discussion and hence the quality of data. In the literature it is discussed controversially whether a homogeneous or a heterogeneous group (gender, age, social class background etc.) will generate more valuable data (O. Nyumba, 2018). However, real live settings are expected to be promising since they should be more appropriate to allow free flowing discussions because the participants know each other and may be more trustful and willing to open in this constellation. In addition, it is expected that they will behave and act more freely and without inhibition in their natural environment.

For this project, it was chosen to hold the group discussions with students in real live settings (e.g. classes) if feasible and that the groups consist of students with and without migrant background and some groups (classes) of students with migrant background exclusively who migrated to Austria in the year 2015 (including first generation born in Austria). As a criterion it was defined that they must have been in the Austrian school system for at minimum of one year.

In Austria, the focus was on young people with refugee and migration background age group 11 to 14 years old (secondary school I) and 15 to 18 years old (secondary school II). It was planned that the group discussion will be taken part by 8 to 12 participants maximum.

In addition, one expert group discussion with headmasters, school directors, teachers, school board members (e.g. school inspectors) and one with parents were conducted. The participants of the expert group discussion should be diverse regarding the school types they are coming from e.g. from general-education schools, secondary education level I (NMS) Polytechnic school (PTS), High Schools, secondary education level II (AHS), vocational school (BMHS, BS).

3.2 Data collection instruments

The group discussions were conducted based on a guideline which was derived from the theoretical framework (socioecological model) proposed by the LIU. In addition, the concept of integration factors developed by Ager and Strang (2004) fed into the guideline. The guideline included open-ended questions that should have been adapted to the participants of the actual group discussions with respect to content and it had to be taken care of that the language used was age group-specific and easy to follow. The guideline was a collection of questions to be covered during the discussion. The goal was to initiate a free-flowing discussion among the participants. The questions should allow the group to talk about and describe their own experience. Hence, the moderator's task was to facilitate a discussion between the participants. He or she had to take a more peripheral rather than a centre-stage role (O. Nyumba, 2018). If it was not possible to initiate a free-flowing discussion, the questions of the guideline could have been posed in a more group interview like style. The moderators and observers were teachers who are familiar with the setting and were trained in conducting group discussions.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

In the following, the research protocol for the Austrian study will be described.

3.3.1 Permission by the School Boards

Research projects in school context require a formal submission of a form including a project description and referring to questions such as: Who are the project partners? In which schools the interviews should be done? What is the timeframe of the interviews? What are draft questions? Is a letter to the parents asking for permission foreseen? What is the project about? How long would the interviews be? This information was submitted to the school board.

3.3.2 Informed Consent

To establish a trusting atmosphere and an open discussion, the participants were informed in advance about the method and the topics of the group discussion. If participants are minors, a declaration of consent of the legal guardian was provided. The legal guardians were informed about the project as well. In addition, at the beginning of the group discussion, the participants were informed about the aims, methods and recording of the group discussions, and about the use and processing of the data. An informed consent form was distributed and had to be signed by them. The participants could have withdrawn their consent at any time and leave the group discussion, if they had wished. It was taken care for that the data was processed in an ethically correct manner by the researchers and all other persons involved in the research process (moderators, observers, transcribers etc.) and that no harm had been caused to any participant at any stage of the research process.

3.3.3 Data collection

The group discussions in Austria were conducted from May to June 2018. They lasted for about two hours and were conducted in German. If feasible and necessary interpreters assisted during the group discussions. The discussions were audio recorded and transcribed and translated into English. The translated transcripts will be sent for analysis to LIU.

It was planned to hold four to nine group discussions. The participating schools and classes or groups were selected by project team of the school board in Lower Austria according to a sampling plan. One group discussion was held with alumni.

Since we aimed at real life settings (classes) the groups consist of up to 25 young people and comprised heterogeneous and homogenous migrant groups.

3.3.4 Short-questionnaire

After the group discussion, participants completed a short questionnaire to collect some socio-demographic data.

3.3.5 Reflection on the group discussion and research protocol

After the group discussions, the moderators and observers reflected on the group discussion and wrote down notes with reflection guideline. A research protocol was filled in.

3.4 Further steps in 2018 - 2019

3.4.1 Interviews

In addition to the group discussions, interviews with selected participants will be conducted. The aim of these interviews is to gain more details and in-depth data, also data that might be kept to oneself by participants due to various reasons may be disclosed in an interview. The respective candidates can be chosen by the moderators and observers. The selection can be discussed as part of the reflection after the group discussion.

3.4.2 Transcription, translation and analysis

The transcripts of the group discussions and interviews will be used for the purposes of the project exclusively. All data and information must be treated strictly confidentially. The gathered data will be processed anonymously. Raw data of group discussions or interviews will be translated into English. The LIU team will manage the data evaluation and interpretation.

3.4.3 Dissemination

An important part of the project are publications at the end of each research phase. Study results will be published in a form and in relevant media. The research team will communicate in English language - publications will be optional in both languages, English and German.

4 Concluding remarks

Migration has become a global phenomenon, so we felt it is appropriate to kick off a global journey to do both - to learn from and to contribute to the global move of migration, integration and social inclusion.

During the halftime of our journey we would like to thank all contributors and supporters of this bilateral project. Many thanks to the young people with and without migration and refugee history, thanks to the teachers and school inspectors who opened us the doors and our eyes and who are contributing massively to the quality our research project. We are confident that all together we are working on something which will hopefully successfully impact on the future pathways of children and youth with and without migration and refugee history in our educational systems and with that to strengthen social cohesion and peace in our societies.

Our team process is a great learning for all of us: We engaged in study groups in Austria and NYC. We met with key stakeholders: teachers, policy-makers, social workers, researchers, and advocates to enrich our work. Several field trips to schools, refugee centres, and policy experts informed us.

We are looking forward to continuing our interesting journey with all high energy, great enthusiasm and motivation.

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¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/overview/social-ecologicalmodel.html>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/vacs/methods.html>